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Political Empowerment of Women in Russia: Discourses and Strategies (Moterų politinės galios raiška Rusijos visuomenėje: diskursai ir strategijos)

Santrauka. Straipsnyje analizuojami viešieji politinio moterų vadovavimo diskursai postkomunistinėje Rusijoje. Autorė, remdamasi sociologiniu tyrimu, skiria dvi pagrindines – moterų politikų ir moterų organizatorių – strategijas. Pirmoji, „profesionali“, aktyvisčių grupė svarsto moterų interesus arba moterų teisių problemas, kaip šalutinius demokratinės darbotvarkės klausimus. Antroji, „maternalistinė“, strategija pabrėžia prigimtine moterų politinę „lėmtį“, kurios paskirtis – rūpintis socialine ir šeimos politika. Šių diskursų nagrinėjimas padeda suprasti Rusijos moterų politinės galios raiškos perspektyvas, susijusias su demokratiniais pertvarkymais.

Women's political activism and participation in the decision-making process may be considered as one of the controversial issues for the democratic transformations in the post-communist Russia. The political transition had allowed for women's rights activists' demand an end to merely declarative gender equality by state officials. It is necessary to evaluate the real effects and problems of women's political leadership and civic activism in contemporary Russia from the perspective of increasing women's involvement in political making decisions.

In this paper I am trying to explore the discourses on political activism and the identity of women politicians, their strategies of political participation, and perceptions of women's roles in the post-communism transition. It happened quite recently that the problems of Russian women's political self-organization,

women's social movements and also their strategy in the struggle for enlargement of women representation in power have become the subject of gender analysis.

Political representation of women both on federal and regional levels remains insufficient. As Russian researchers say, commonly accepted world barriers are in use here. First, they name gender differences in political socialization, which cause weak motivation of women in this activity. Then comes unevenness in the distribution of different resources, which may be used by men and women, and this unevenness limits political possibilities of women in politics. And the third essential factor includes particular features of women's course of life, demanding individual women's responsibility for raising children and housekeeping. To the above mentioned factors researchers add the existence of discrimination, displayed both through unwillingness to gi-

ve key positions in parties organizations and government bodies to women and through the predominance of traditional gender stereotypes, which cause distrust towards women in politics (Temkina 1997). Judging by world experience we may say that the extent of the development of women's movements is of specific importance in this situation. For that reason the weakness of independent women's movements in Russia in practice not only excludes recruiting women-politicians out of the sphere of social activism, but also doesn't give an opportunity to articulate the problem of women's rights in public discourse.

My research is based on interviews conducted with women politicians and NGO's activists in Samara region. The research raised principal questions: what are the political priorities of women politicians and what are the effective strategies of achieving gender equality in Russia. The study of political and social women's activities raises other a serious question: 1) what kinds of motivation and objectives of activity of women in politics can be traced?; 2) what are their political and social interests? The research was carried out on the basis of specially arranged focused interviews with women – leaders and participants of social organizations, deputies and candidate members of different legislative bodies, representatives of the regional administration elite. Besides, the analysis of some documents and public speeches was carried out as well.

Framing Women's Activism: Legacy of the Soviet Gender Order

In our analysis we should pay more attention to the subjective and discursive constrains of women political choices from a perspective of post-soviet cultural transition. In this context it is crucial to explore the influence of past norms of gender, culture. The Soviet state institutionalized a distinctive order in which the roles of men and women were defined according to the needs

of communist state. The state-prescribed Soviet gender order had a significant impact on the subjective perceptions of Soviet men and women. Many researchers show that gender identities even of the young generation are still strongly influenced by Soviet values. Nevertheless there is certain common them in their perceptions of women's roles. This is the acceptance of supposedly natural sexual difference followed by perceiving of a secondary position in all spheres as a natural.

Sociological researches show that despite negative assessment of their chances in the labor market in politics. Women rarely claim that they face discrimination. This is acceptance can be seen as a form of self-limitation on the part of women, which reinforces subordinate position. What is more important is that the most Russian women do not challenge the existing post-Soviet gender order. In the transition period there has no been any reflective period on gender relations in a way that could be compared to the process that took place in the Western Europe and the United States during second wave feminism. Instead of conscious reflection on gender, we could rather call post-Soviet ideological process the adaptation to the social and economic necessities (Ashwin 2000).

According to the concept of the political process transformation of conscience is a necessary condition for social and political activism. The important consequence of constructing of the political collective identity is the mechanism of group mobilization. Mobilization could play an effective role in group's involvement into political process participation. Some scholars stress the particular importance of mobilization in a society, experiencing transition to the democratic regime. Mobilization helps citizens to get access to new political roles and became new political agents.

Social and political activity require a critical mass of individual who recognize that the discrimination or oppression they are expe-

riencing is a systematic, or political, problem, not a personal one, and that the rectification of the injustice they experience is possible. This process is diversely referred to as “framing”, “cognitive liberation”, and the “transformation of consciousness” social movement activists, by definition, have begun such a transformation of consciousness. They regard the injustice or set of injustices by a given societal group or class, as a systematic problem. Social attitudes toward women help enforce sex-role stereotyping in Russia’s current transition period, thereby creating another set of attitudinal obstacles to the expansion of the contemporary women’s movement (Sperling 1999). It is important to recall that a person may perceive injustice as a shared, political phenomenon, yet doubt that any public actions to alter the situation would be effective or especially in the case of a repressive regime, even feasible.

According to the recent cross-cultural studies, women in Russia are less insensitive to male domination than in other post-Socialist countries. They deny any kind of gender conflict in their professional and private life. But at the same time they are much more critical and even hostile towards men in their interpersonal relations. This hidden and nonrealized gender conflict could be considered as one of the main obstacles to creating women’s rights activism and reforming the gender system (Zdravomyslova, Arutyunyn 1998).

In the low chamber of the Russian parliament, the Fourth State Duma, elected in 2003, there are women among the 450 elected deputies, i.e. 7.6%. The representation of women in party lists and the share of women among electoral candidates to the State Duma in single-ballot ridings are 12%. The dynamics of women’s political activity in the Samara region in late 1990s confirms a Russia-wide tendency of civic and political “demobilization” of the masses. In 2002 two out of the eleven candidates became deputies of the Samara Gubern-

skaya Duma (out of 25 members); in 2003 none out of the 7 Samara women candidates won at the federal elections to the State Duma. At the local authority level in the city of Samara official indices of women, participating in the decision-making process, are more impressive: out of 18 deputies of the City Duma, who were elected in 2004, eight were women. As far as the organized social activity is concerned here statistical data also give us some hope. Among 2000 non-government organizations registered in the region about 7 were referred to as women’s non-government organizations in 2004. The above mentioned numbers of organizations as well as 600 other women’s non-government organizations registered all over the country in the Russian Federation Ministry of Justice wouldn’t mislead a Russian reader. The thing is that some of these organizations existed only on paper from the very beginning, others were dismissed long ago, and some of regional organizations, being branches of other organizations, hadn’t ever pursued their own policies. In order to conduct the research on women’s political activity in the Samara region we managed to find only five actually existing and functioning women’s non-government organizations by the autumn of 1999.

The research on political and social activity of women was carried out in the context of the essential question of Russia’s post-socialist development. It considers the issue: what strategies of socio-political activities facilitate actual advancement of the country in the development of civil society and consolidation of democratic policies?

Political Participation: Gender-Neutral Strategy

Analysis of the interviews made it possible to distinguish between two groups of regional women politicians. The division into these groups is based upon their understanding of

the problem of women's representation in government structures as well as their attitude to decision-making processes in general. Subjective interpretation of one's own political participation reflects in many ways two possible approaches to women's political strategies and estimation of their effectiveness.

The first approach, which can be called the *gender-neutral* approach, is ideologically connected with the liberal direction in the worldwide women's movements. It is based on the recognition of principles that comprise gender equality of rights and absence of gender distinctions in the political sphere. Overcoming of structural and situational barriers leads (in its supporters' opinion) to overcoming of women's marginalization in politics and gives them the opportunities and rights to take part in governing processes on a par with men. For this reason political attention should be directed towards professionalism and the search for allies in party and politics. As women's movements were developing and political resources in government structures were growing the second – the *gender-sensitive* approach to political participation – was formed. It has the objective of finding out gender differences in preferences, values and priorities of electorate and politicians as well as that of determining a specific women's role and interests in decision-making processes.

It was the first group of politicians (those who uphold the neutral-gender approach towards understanding their own activity) which appeared to be the most numerous in our research. In their opinion in politics there can't and shouldn't be any specific women's interests or women's type of leadership (and correspondingly any specific role of women in politics):

“There are not any specific feminine or masculine interests, there are only problems common to all which should be solved. The differences between men and women in politics must be as little as possible. Just as there doesn't exist any feminine or masculine style in politics” (The Chairwoman of the Gubernskaya Duma Legislative Committee).

The denial of the necessity to pursue a specific policy with regard for gender distinctions is expressed in many cases as unwillingness to lower the level of one's own political pride. Since “specific” women's interests are associated in the public politics or consciousness either with the experience of Soviet State paternalism or with exceptionally women's responsibilities for “un-prestigious” social sphere, then a policy with “a woman's face” is considered in their opinion as rather weak, somewhat defective, inferior and secondary.

They explain that they wouldn't like to accentuate women's themes in political debates especially during election campaigns because of the fear of meeting condescending and skeptical attitudes towards their civic and professional standing. “We should always remember famous politician Galina Starovoitova's words: “neither her starting point nor her gender should restrict the advancement of a woman-politician in politics”.

The politicians of this group consider fundamental problems of democratic consolidating and organizing an effective economic system to be more urgent for Russia nowadays. Therefore they find the fields of common civic interests more important than that of group interests for their political career. They claim to be guided by catering for the educated, the progressive-minded, the advanced part of electorate, who expect power to be in the hands of professionals able to design both social and economic strategies. That is the reason they took part in the elections as independent candidates.

Due to the political position of this group the problem of women's political participation doesn't seem urgent to them. The advancement of Russia on the way to democratization and organizing a civic society is slow paced. This is caused in the opinion of “neutral” and “independent” women-politicians by the lack of “intelligently educated people of principle who would have a deliberate active civic stan-

ding". The increase of numerical representation of women doesn't change, according to their assumption, the nature of power since women themselves don't introduce any particular positive perception of problems and don't facilitate the process of making significant decisions:

"I consider that gender belonging initially doesn't include any positive or negative aspect. The City Duma of Samara is quite a rare phenomenon, where at its starting point half of the elected members were women. However quantity doesn't always turn into quality. It is important what it is guided by. When there were quotas for women, a woman often tended to mould her behaviour according to men's behaviour instead of introducing her own positive perception. Russian women are easily influenced after they have been elected, they feel thankful. Many of these women easily agree or are easily bought. There is another problem with politicians in our country – that is, having gained some definite political level they cease listening to anybody" (The Chairwoman of Samara City Budget Committee).

The fact that six women came to the Samara City Duma from traditionally women's spheres – health protection and education- may serve the proof of this statement, as this respondent herself sees it. In spite of this fact all of them except this deputy voted for the reduction of expenses on medical services and simultaneous increase of expenses on bureaucratic personnel offered by the Mayor. Actually for the whole period of the Duma's work only one of the eight tried to oppose the Head of the city who usurped both branches of power. The remaining obedient deputies of both sexes turned the local self-government institution into a kind of "pocket" organization attached to the body of executive power.

Political Participation: Gender-Sensitive Strategy

The representatives of the second group of politicians to counterbalance the first one, insist upon the assumption that women do have their specific interests and owing to their "nature" are supposed to change the character of political po-

wer in the country. The gender-sensitive interpretation of women's political leadership in this case is based on the essentialistic concept of specific, biologically determined female features. Key-expressions widely used by this group in an election campaign comprise such word combinations as "a mother-woman" and "a housekeeper-woman". Their political strategies are based on this ideology. Correspondingly a specific "mission" of women in politics is understood as traditional responsibility for women's sphere, specifically social and family politics. Assigning personal responsibility for the problems in this sphere only to women, "feminine -women" declare men to be unable to solve these problems because of their "nature:

"I'm sure if the city fell into the hands of women it would make it possible to start things going. Every home should have a housekeeper. The fact that we are not satisfied with our life nowadays, in the first place is our fault. Women haven't informed men that they don't feel comfortable in such a society and in such a city. The city and our country are parts of a big household and we should do exactly what we are used to doing in our home. Women can arrange life better. A woman will never send children to war to be killed by tanks, will not step over a helpless old man, will never pass by a crying child or a stray dog. The reason for it is the feeling of sensitivity and understanding of other people's sufferings which is inborn with us" (a State Duma deputy, former candidate for the Mayor).

The "housekeeper's" strategy functions rather successfully at regional and city elections. As sociological studies show, the type of "a firm manager and defender", "the chief of the city" regardless of the sex extensively meets the requirements of the structure of values found in the political culture of provincial Russia (Meleshkina 1997; 38).

The only woman-mayor in the Samara region in her interviews constantly stresses her managerial experience while being, in her words, "absolutely politically independent":

"I don't claim to be a member of the political elite in our region, because you have to do something of merit to deserve it".

As analysts say the fact that they were active in district social security bodies facilitated and determined the victory of women at elections to the Regional Duma.

One of the distinguishing features of “a woman-housekeeper’s” rhetoric is her readiness to accept “secondary nature” of both her sphere of influence and her role in the society:

“Let women put everything in order in a social sphere and let men, if they want, take up defense, space, oil and gas”(a State Duma deputy).

Social policy priorities political participation of women’s policy is proved by the experience of women’s representation in worldwide politics. Standing for this idea the politicians of this second group try to meet the traditional expectation and even insist on maintaining seniority relations; they don’t claim for more power than provided by any gender system. Their strategy of pre-election behavior is “a submissive style “not irritating” neither the male member of the electorate nor their party colleagues:

“A woman-politician shouldn’t be too proud. You needn’t dream of wide scale actions, you must do routine work. You can win the respect of all only doing specific deeds. We enter the realm of politics not to fight men but to help them to look at problems with our eyes. Can men really be disappointed if we put everything in order in our country?” (a Regional Duma deputy).

As these politicians see it, drawing public attention to their dependence makes pre-election strategy under traditional conditions of gender culture in Russia rather successful.

It is interesting to note that this second group recognizes a professional career of a politician for a woman as a “non-typical” one, and this feature is characteristic of their rhetoric. Popularizing a specific image and role of “a politician with a woman’s face” they find it necessary at the same time to confirm the stability of stereotyped gender norms for the rest of women. Since women’s political participation may be considered

rather an exception to the rule, then this model can hardly be suggested to other women:

“Joining the idea of women’s and men’s equality in political and economic spheres, I’m inclined to be perceive a woman as a mother. This is where her natural predestination is. I can’t imagine a woman on a post of the President of Russia or a post of Samara governor. Women are more emotional. They are prone to feel failures keenly, they are inclined to be subject to introspection. Such behaviour is unacceptable for a politician” (a representative of the regional administrative elite, the Chairwoman of Family, Maternity and Childhood Committee, a former State Duma deputy).

On the one hand it is hard to estimate to what degree should “limits” be applied to her own resources and perspectives. Most members of the regional elite have come into post-perestroika politics from former Communist-Komsomol nomenclature bodies. We dare say that double moral standards (one standard applied to common citizens and quite another – to themselves) are more characteristic of this people. On the other hand such claims which are repeated through a number of interviews prove the conclusion about particular complexities of gender identification and socialization of women in Russia.

Many Russian scholars show this specific Soviet-Russian lifestyle called for an “impossible mission” for women. It was necessary for women both “to suit” an untraditional model of behaviour (being professionally employed outside the home was considered to be a part of a typical lifestyle) and at the same time to “match” quite a patriarchal system which included specific ideas of femininity and women’s predestination (Zdravomyslova-Stoyunina 1999; 43). In many cases “successful women” try to use these patriarchal ideas to secure themselves against accusations of “non-femininity”. If the reality doesn’t correspond to a private-oriented model of women’s behaviour, a woman ought at least to justify her “invasion” to politics and government structures with the necessity to introduce “women’s care” of socially unsecured citizens.

Women-politicians from the first “professional” group deny the specific gender character of their own participation. In the end they call for a change of the existing gender system and reject traditional models of lifestyles assigned to women. According to their logic the effective strategy of political success excludes the emphasis on sex distinctions and the outlining of specific women’s problems. “Women” politicians from the second group hold the view of a biologically determined “natural” gender role. Leadership for women widely acknowledged as an exceptionally masculine quality should be either disguised in the public sphere or must be forgotten for good and one should surrender and take up the “defense” and patronage of stronger politicians.

None of the regional women-politicians, who won at the election, identified herself with any women’s social organization. The politicians of the first “professional” group won their seats in the local authority bodies as independent candidates. The political strategies of the second group with their traditional gender roles of “a mother” and “a housekeeper” appeared to be successful in using the resources of stronger parties. The rhetoric “I am as a woman and a mother” in addition to acknowledging her dependence on support the governor (“the governor offered my participating at the election and I agreed”) caused this candidate to be included in governor’s team to its advantage. The firm belief that a future deputy should be trustworthy, devoted and thankful became more important for the choice of a “suitable” candidate.

The fact, that women-candidates from the second group fully recognize their dependence and also emphasize their “destiny” to carry out routine “un-prestigious for men” work, makes this group a more convenient choice for stronger parties. The lack of electoral resources makes women weak competitors in the struggle for power. Taking this lack of support

into consideration women have to find an opportunity to be nominated by parties (to a larger extent than men). It will enhance their chances to win. On the other hand weak candidates are useful for strong parties because the latter in case of victory can count on their deputy’s discipline, loyalty and subordination. Moderation in political views, which actually means ideological indistinctiveness, becomes an inevitable part of the electoral strategy concerning women-politicians.

The identification of women is policy with social policy in general and family policy in particular becomes their only trump card. Underlying this interpretation there is the worldwide public opinion which is accepted in Russia as well; namely – the accession of women to power is proof of the success in strengthening federal social functions and forming “a welfare state”. The paradox of applying this rule to Russia is in the fact that though “housekeeper-deputies” aim at solving problems connected with the status of women in society, but they are not ready to extend the traditional range of issues, to raise questions concerning employment and professional career discrimination, women’s job insurance, violence at home, advancement of women into government structures and etc. Meanwhile “independent professionals” in their turn direct their attention toward general democratic and civic ideals and don’t single out “women’s” policy. However in the course of their political activity the latter become aware of gender discrimination problems and the need to stand for women’s rights in making decisions concerning fundamental problems.

Political Discourses of Women’s Movement

We can classify women’s organizations in the Samara Region as well as women’s movements in Russia in general according to a number of characteristics: the declared sphere and objectives of their activities, types of organi-

zational structures, ideology, political orientation, social base, etc. In studying the problem of women's social and political activities in post-Soviet Russia we feel it is important to note that besides classifying the organizations according to their ideological affiliation these groups can be divided into formal social institutions (officially established) and informal ones (grass-root institutions) (Temkina 1997).

Perhaps, the "oldest" and the most numerous (more than 300 active members) formal organization is the "Samara Union of Women", which was organized in 1987 on the basis of 'zhen-sovets' – former structural units of the Soviet Women's Committee. This organization doesn't have individual membership and is supported by the network of district committees of the "Samara Union of Women". Those district committees in early 1990s had to "invite for participation" (it was obligatory) women who were leaders in different professional spheres. They were "invited" because they could use their subordinates (the female fraction at least) to fulfill the obligatory "meropriyatie". By the end of 1990s the majority of these women-leaders had to resign and part of them was able to get engaged in social activities, working in the Committees willingly and not because they were obliged to. Though the "Samara Union of Women" has a juridical status of a regional social organization, they also consider themselves to be a part of the Russian socio-political movement "Women of Russia".

Women's organizations in Russia as well as the majority of non-government organizations don't have their written platforms and they define their ideological priorities mostly through interviews, newspaper publications and election campaign documents. In stating the ideological strategy of the "Samara Union of Women", its Chairwoman stressed the adherence to the general point of view on women's roles and sticking to the traditional gender roles:

"The Statutes of our organization states: our main priorities are – family, woman, and children. It's the preservation of our nation, which is our most important goal, i.e. the preservation of women's ability to give birth".

Women's interests are left to be determined exclusively within the family, the private sphere. In our opinion more important here is the fact that these interests depend on the demographic and state objectives and that they can be traced through the rhetoric of these organizations. Even the typical truism used by women's organizations – "unemployment has a women's face" – doesn't promulgate individual human rights but rather serves state's objectives:

"Full employment is our priority; we received some financial due to a decree at the gubernatorial level to solve the problem of women's unemployment. Women are specific category of the labour force, which is determined by their ability to give birth. We are now a nation, which is dying out; if we don't create proper working conditions for our women they will not give birth to children. The birth rate in our country dropped the moment the reforms started. Young girls are not ready to perform the functions of a mother; are not ready to sacrifice themselves to meet traditional requirements. To live like a great nation – that to a large extent depends on women" (the Chairwoman of the "Samara Union of Women").

Both ideological closeness of the "Samara Union of Women" to left opposition and its Soviet-nomenclature roots can explain that they are more concerned about the break-up of the Soviet Union than about current women's problems. They argue for the necessity to return to the main Soviet gender contract of "working mothers". The reason for this being that giving birth is not women's "natural predestination" (this is the point of view which is being revived by mass media nowadays) but a "civilly prescribed obligation and civic duty of women". There is women's citizenship understanding. A family has the burden of solving state's and nation's problems:

"Traditionally a Russian family was referred to as a productive, federal and military unit because it

was from the family sphere that children were recruited to participate in wars. And what now? Do we give soldiers to our Russia? Young people are not ready – physically and morally – to serve in the Army. And for this reason our task is to draw social attention to the change of family functions”(the Vice-Chairwoman of the Samara Women’s Union).

Individual rights of a woman, her autonomy and independence are supplanted by traditional concerns for the “collective good”, which is said to be equal to state interests.

An ideological postulate about subordination of women’s interests and family interests to the interests of the State underlies the activity of social organizations and facilitates interaction with the authorities who provide resources for non-government organizations. Close collaboration of the “Samara Union of Women” and the Regional Administration confuses the left-wing party allies of the “Union”. Some active members of the Union in their interviews complain of the “lack of understanding on the part of their Communist comrades”, who accuse them of “strengthening the existing power”. So to justify themselves the interviewed women put forward the idea of “unselfish” care for the good of the Motherland and personal disinterestedness in solving of those women’s problems, which they support:

“Personally we need nothing, we have everything – children, grandchildren, husbands; thank God our families have already been formed”(member of Samara Union).

So, the political plan of this organization appears to be based on the appeal to archaic layers of collective consciousness and to declare gender “moral” politics with a maternity face. The Samara branch of the “Union of Women” is oriented, as many contemporary Russian social movements are, towards the “negative social project”, which is formed under the influence of conservative motivation – “to preserve, to guard, to survive”.

For the Samara branch of the “Movement of Women of Russia” there is no necessity to justify

themselves before the left-wing opposition. This movement stands apart from both left- and right wing groups making moderation, centrism and compromise its priority. Functioning independently since 1996, the “Movements of Women of Russia” contrary to the “Women of Russia” declared a platform for the modernization of gender system in Russia. Their main political slogans are: demand for “parity democracy, the ensurance of women rights, state policy of equal opportunities for men and women”. At the same time this modernist rhetoric includes emphasis on archetype of “women’s mercy and motherly care”. The declaration of the specific “nature” of women-politicians and “women’s policy” is quite successful at the regional level. This is a basis for mobilization of women in Russia, a country which is going through a transformational period of a traditional gender system.

The political activity of the Samara branch of “Movement of Women of Russia”, unlike the “Union of Women”, is limited. On a regional level the Samara “Women’s Movement” abstain from public political activity. The leaders of the organization find it to be disadvantageous to publicly advance their own candidates and articulate “women’s questions” during election campaigns. At the same time the task to increase women’s representation in government structures is regarded as a priority. And to reach this goal one may use the great potential of the informal social network, which has been preserved from the Soviet era and could be used to advance women to legislative and executive bodies.

Grass-roots Women’s Social Activity

The second group of non-government organizations includes the ones, formed at the grass-roots level as a result of women’s initiative and self-organization. The most active in the Samara region since mid-1990 were the organizations whose aim was to ensure the rights of soldiers, young men due for enlistment and their parents.

All these organizations included mostly women members and leaders. From the very formation of the organizations in the first half of 90s they claimed and proved to be women's rights-ensuring organizations aiming at "teaching the basics of civic rules and democratic participation in country's life". The most numerous and influential organization, which is a part of the Association of Soldiers' Mothers Committees, has functioned in Samara since 1990 and has, as its leader states, 300 active workers. This organization has the name "Synovia" (Sons). Its aim, as their platform states, is "to teach mothers to defend their own civil rights and their son's rights". The main problem, except a financial one, as usual, in its functioning is socio-political passivity of women, as the leader of this organization sees it. Not only the total illiteracy of the population concerning legal matters hinders Russia's advancement to a democratic state and civil society but also (and perhaps to the greater extent) the belief that "we can do nothing, nothing depends on us":

"Nobody can help those who don't want to help themselves. We teach moms to defend their rights and to demand that authorities act according to the law and their promises. But those who are afraid of military registration offices, who are lazy and don't bring their cases to the court can hardly expect any success" (the leader of the "Synovia" [Sons]).

To gain resources and to raise the problem of human rights in public discourse the Samara Soldiers' Mothers Committee made good use of one of the sacred Russian maternity symbols. The appeal to defend mothers' rights provided for some collective actions committed to social change. These actions included addressing authorities, mass media, consulting parents on the rights of military man, organizing civil control over the armed services, and meetings of protest against the first war in Chechnia. Active volunteer members were mostly the mothers who were worried about the violation of their sons' rights during their

term in the Army. Gradually it happened so, that the nucleus of the organization consisted only of the members whose mission had been fulfilled as their sons finished up their military service. As a result in late 90s the "Sons" sticking to statistic righteous rhetoric was undergoing some considerable evolution in its strategic and ideological direction.

Being organized to defend citizen's interests in the face of state authorities, at the time when the second war campaign in Chechnia began in autumn 1999, "Synovia" declared a new objective – "to raise the prestige of our Army, to fight slander against it". So, in mid-1990s "Sons" collaborated mostly with the "Chechnia" organization, which included the mothers and widows of soldiers killed at First Chechnia war. In the late 1990s a new partner appeared and it was the Samara Oblast Administration and military officials. Antiwar appeals to stop the first Chechnia war were replaced with special "events" (meropriyatiye) organized together with the Volga Military Okrug Headquarters. The meetings and concerts for soldiers' mothers, distribution of gifts appealed to notions "civil service of mothers and their sons to their Motherland". All activity was provided according to popular Soviet song: "You should first think of your Motherland and only then of yourself". Stepping back to the traditional and state values has caused the decline and neglect of democratic principle to be critical of governmental structures. No wonder then that the "Synovia" didn't react to the beginning of a new campaign (by the Union of Right-Wing Forces) calling for a referendum about having a professional army in Russia.

The majority of organizations of the second type, which were created on the initiative of different women's groups, are aimed at solving a one problem. These organizations are: "Parents Against Drugs", "The Association of Mothers of Large Families", "Business Women Club". They are formed as the organizations for self-help and have the objective to compensate for the draw-

backs and deficiencies in the socio-economic policy of the State. Such notions as “discrimination, women’s rights, inequality” are not found in their rhetoric and platforms. They don’t strive to influence decision-making processes, therefore they stay away from any political participation.

Women’s Citizenship in Russia

The indistinctiveness and discrepancies of ideological principles among women’s non-government organizations prevent them from recruiting new members – young, educated women, capable of achieving their own goals, enhancing their personal growth, independent and opposing the traditional gender system. The leaders of these organizations often explain the lack of support by the passivity and “unrealization” of their own interests in power on the part of women. Partly agreeing to this explanation, we must take into consideration the slogans and ideas offered by the organizations and women-politicians themselves. They complain that the women’s fraction of electorate don’t vote for them, but their archaic idea of a woman’s “destination” in a new wrapping doesn’t seem attractive to Russian women. We would like to agree to other interpretation of women’s political indifference: “A Russian woman keeps silent not because she doesn’t know what she wants, but because she wavers between socially approved women’s mission and the desire to find her own niche in everyday routine”. The problem of self-determination, including socio-political self-determination, is the most complicated especially in the period of radical transformations.

Analyzing the forms of collective actions of non-government organizations one can find out that they are guided by the concept of the complementary Third sector to the state politics. They realize their objective is to help and support a client, improve his living conditions. According to the character of their activity the women’s organizations can be referred to as the so-called service organizations. The content of their work

includes, first, the accumulation and redistribution of resources and, second, the implementation of projects for social assistance. And here the leaders of formal organizations suppose that the so-called “meropriyatie” (once-only well-organized collective action) can be of greater importance than any routine work, raising means for helping women in their everyday life, which is the contrasting point of view of informal organizations.

One should mention that from all known actions of group influence (legal actions, lobbying, events of protest, formation of concurrent structures) women’s organizations are inclined to use lobbying and they prefer to act through informal contacts. The third sector in Russia, as it has been mentioned, doesn’t have the opportunity to legitimately represent group interests through any formal legislative mechanism. The existing “patron-client” relations offer more opportunities to be successful in making decisions through executive power structures, where there are more possibilities to use informal contacts. It is easier for women’s non-government organizations to take such steps because the post-perestroika leaders of all the levels are still connected with their Soviet nomenclature past.

Active citizenship means participation in democratic processes aiming at self-governance in society. In this way, the boundaries between the public sphere of society and the private life of individuals are intermingled. Women as citizens have tended to participate politics in localities, taking care of everyday activities and contributing togetherness in ways that can be seen as deeds of everyday heroism. If the system-like functioning of a welfare state leads to increasing passivism as far as political representations are considered, alternative strategies for everyday politics become necessary. Then the question is about the possibilities to improve conscious capacities to break the chains of victims and to contribute to the emergence of active citizens who can speak for themselves. Women’s self-definition and,

even more, their self-esteem is an important aspect of the active citizenship that can contribute to an identification as a political beings". Possibilities for more reflexive forms of political struggles against given social divisions can only be created in dialogues in which multiple identifications are produced instead of defending strongly fixed identities.

The terms and ideals for political mobilization are embedded in discourses that provide the ground on which they are understood and from which they gain their power to move people. Political solidarity can not be assumed on the basis of shared "womanhood". The cultural category of "women" as a practical, everyday form of subjectivity, called up by innumerable mundane activities and practices. It is not the same as the politically significant category of "women" as a mobilized identity, a self-conscious social collectivity. In order for social categories such as "women" to serve as the basis for mobilization, they must first be constituted as politically relevant. This is done through public discussion and by social movements. It follows that a commitment to advance women's interests – and the definition of such "interests" – is never merely the reflex of a politicians or a group's subjectivity as women, nor even their experience of discrimination and oppression. Politicized identities are themselves a result of public arguments and activities that allow individuals to redefine their own sense of self, and redefine events and social processes (Gal and Kligman 2000).

Many scholars see the main contradiction of the discourses on women's identities and women's interests in the fact that the most post-socialist women's organizations centers on women's collective interests – that is, on women as a "category" rather than as individuals entitled to basic rights. Women's claims may be framed either in terms of rights or in terms of entitlements and social benefits. The danger in not attending to these differences is that viewing women only as potential beneficiaries of welfare system may in

fact, and even unwittingly, reinforce traditional women's roles and perpetuate inequalities. Issues of women's identity, professional and personal self-realization are marginalized in the public discourse (Daskalova 2000; 360-361).

The women's electorate as an absence of independence, obedience and the inability to defend their political position has paradoxically perceived the image of gender-sensitive politicians as a non-aggressive, centric, moderate and eager to compromise. For example, the outcomes of Russian presidential elections of 2000 confirm such perceptions. The only one female candidate to the President among 9 candidates, famous politician, former minister and the State Duma deputy, Ella Panfilova during her campaign has accentuated instead of her professional experience and leadership skills the traditional female qualities and her devotion to the state social protection of "new poor Russians". But the role of "social motherhood" has transformed her into marginal political figure, received only 1% of electoral support.

As it was above observed another paradox of "feminine" politicians is their appeal to the restoration of Soviet gender contract "working mother" as the only one model gender role for women. On my mind, there is even more dangerous situation from the perspective of gender democracy in Russia. This is their essentialist understanding and the traditional Russian sacrificing women's rhetoric of individual interests and rights for the "benefit of the family" or the special women's moral predestination. In the context of the post-Soviet gender order it is more important basis for women's political activity is the individual-centered orientation to the democratic values.

The political activity of women both at regional and federal levels gives way to different interpretations of researchers. The "optimistic" point of view is based on the positive evaluation, given to any manifestation of women's activism including the theme concerning preserving tra-

ditional women's roles. Any "display" of women's theme and women's questions in public discourse is assumed as a basis for raising the question about gender system reorganization in the future. "Moderate" researchers, to which the author herself belongs, agree with this opinion. However at the same time they find the activity of women's organizations and women-politicians important in facilitating the advancement of our country on its way to democratization and the strengthening of civil society values and gender equality.

The agreement of interests and rights for different social groups at the decision-making level is a necessary condition for the stability of a democracy. Political representation of women at all levels of the Samara regional power reflects a Russia-wide gender pyramid: the higher the level of power, the fewer the number of women.

The study shows that the female proportion of elected officials may have only a loose correlating with advancement women's issues. My research explores that one of the reasons for women's exclusion the political discussion is the very problematical notion of women's and gender politics in post-communist Russia. I think this reasonable for Russian young educated women to be suspicious to all political "feminine" strategies that emphasize gender difference and women's special political and social obligations in a context where individual identities are submerged in the collective – whether that collective be the nuclear family or the nation state. The articulation of the real needs and interests of women in a radically changed economic, political and social situation in a complex, difficult and slow process.

The social change and the reorganization of public and private spheres has led to the contradictions and tensions between two agencies of women's empowerment. While in public sphere we can observe sexist practices and rhetoric, in private we see new and wider spaces and opportunities for pluralization of gender identities and

gender roles. In the mid 1990s some scholars came started to criticize the limiting effect of focusing only on the public sphere (media, legislative bodies, politics). Analyzing the interviews with the ordinary Russian women on different topics these scholars show more colorful and complex gender culture. My own research and thinking on political problems make me agree with Anna Rotkirch's conclusion. "Women's social and political agency often grows from tensions in the private. Greater personal autonomy and reflective space can serve as the first steps towards empowerment and public action" (Rotkirch 1999; 103-104).

In contemporary period the emerging women's movement is speculating if women lose their "protection". However partial it is they will have to fend for themselves and their families even more than they do at present. This reflects the dilemma of actually being both women (in need of some "specific" rights and politics) and an individual. When policies assist women as women (as mothers), they enforce the existing gender code. It is also true that these policies can lessen discrimination as they can potentially lessen women's sole responsibilities for children and domestic job. Russian women fear that new legislation will misrepresent the complicated reality of women's specific needs and their universal human rights.

In this situation, introducing feminist and civic consciousness discourse became the most influential tool for creating women's independent political activism both at the personal and at the political levels. So in transitional period gender studies centers and university programs emerged in Russia in 1990s in some sense are more important for promoting women's rights agenda than the quantitative increasing of women politicians in legislative and executive bodies. Since the beginning Gender Studies academic community has been involved in feminist education and training for women's activists. Without civic consciousness raising pro-

cess of perceiving their real interests and there is impossible on my view, to articulate women's group rights, create women's solidarity increase the political role in politic making decision at all levels of power.

Social and political views of the majority of women-politician as well as the ideology of non-government women's organizations in the Samara oblast, on the whole, stay within the traditional gender system. The task of actualization of personal, individual potential of Russian women and understanding their own political behavior seems to be the most important in socio-cultural

context of the post-Soviet Russia. The next task will be the designing of some common strategies for political activities and political participation in power structures. Gradual deliverance from the "full dependence on the state"-syndrome should be accompanied by the formation of a woman with an independent, active personality aware of her civil standing. Women's specific view on general problems in politics, economics and culture as well as new proposed decisions will be able to ensure the involvement of women in the process of gender system reorganization and democratic reformation of the Russian society.

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SUMMARY

The article analyzes public discourses on political leadership of women in the post-communist Russia. Based on her sociological research the author differentiates two main strategies of female politicians and women's organizations. The first "professional" group of activists considers women's interests or women's rights issues as margi-

nal for their democratic agenda. The second "maternalistic" strategy insists on the essentialist women's political "predestination" to be responsible only for social and family policy. The analysis of these discourses gives the understanding of the perspectives for political empowerment of Russian women in the context of democratic transition.

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