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## “Western degeneration” versus “native normality”: moral panic in the Russian media regarding homosexuality

Panic in the Russian media is marked by the limited pluralism of the content providers and opinions, which is a direct result of the media ownership structure. The most popular news channels<sup>1</sup> are directly controlled by bodies of the authorities or their subsidiaries. The situation is slightly more diversified in the printed media. However, their owners, guided by concern for business success, often resign from discussing uncomfortable topics or adjust their description of reality to the narration determined by the national channels. What is more, incomplete transparency makes it difficult to follow behind-the-scenes associations between the oligarchs who control the media and the authorities. The few exceptions to this rule include the opinion-forming television *Dozhd* and the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, which despite a relatively low number of recipients have a high citation index (Medialogia 2014).

The media seriously influence the formation of the public opinion, in particular by directing the viewers' attention to the most important events and evaluating them in a specific way. As shown by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's research, the process of the media agenda setting is accompanied by the transfer of importance also to the public agenda and the personal hierarchy individually established by readers/viewers (McCombs 2008). This phenomenon is especially strongly observable in relation to unobtrusive issues, i.e. ones with which the reader does not have any daily contact. An example of an unobtrusive issue in Russian reality can be the phenomenon of homosexuality, since only 7% of respondents declare that they have a gay or a lesbian individual among their acquaintances

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<sup>1</sup> At the turn of December 2014, the most frequently watched channels in Russia were Russia-1 and Channel One, which were each watched by 14.3% of viewers, and NTV with a market share of 9.9% (TNS 2014a). The first of these is entirely controlled by the government, the share of the state in the second one is 51%, and the third one belongs to the Gazprom-Media holding, a subsidiary of a state-owned gas extraction company.

(Lewada 2014). Taking the above into account, it seems justified to undertake an analysis of the way in which the Russian media present the issue of homosexuality in their content.

The analysis covered one hundred textual, audio and audiovisual materials from the period between 30 October and 10 December 2014, which focused on Tim Cook's statement on his homosexual orientation and the consequences this information had in Russia. The content under analysis originated from 16 content providers, including three news agencies (*RIA Novosti*, *TASS*, *Interfax*), three TV channels (*Russia*, *NTV*, *Dozhd*), two radio stations (*Ekho Moskvy* and *Russkaya Sluzhba Novostej*) as well as eight newspapers (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*, *Izvestia*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Moskovskij Komsomolets*, and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*). The selection of the content providers was based on the criteria of the readership and citation index prepared by the research companies TNS (2014) and Medialogia (2014).

Tim Cook has been Chief Executive Officer of Apple Inc. since 24 August 2011. In an article published in the *Bloomberg Businessweek* magazine on 30 October 2014, he publicly admitted to his homosexuality. Referring to the idea of gay pride, he wrote that he was proud of his orientation. He also called it one of God's greatest gifts and showed many advantages resulting from belonging to a sexual minority. Cook also referred to the situation of LGBT persons in the USA and in the world, and announced his intention to assist in the fight against discrimination of non-heterosexual people (Cook 2014).

### Judgement in news content

As many as 12 of the analysed media considered it important to promptly inform their readers/viewers of Tim Cook's statement. Only *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Vedomosti*, *Izvestia* and *Novaya Gazeta* did not provide the news to their readers on 30 October. The significance of this issue in the eyes of Russian journalists was also testified to by the fact that Tim Cook took the ninth place among the most often cited persons in the Russian media ranking. In October, the media provided information on Apple's head 506 times (*Dozhd* 2014a). This may be a sign of the breaking of the taboo concerning the description of homosexuality. However, it is worth pointing out that journalists did not attempt to localise the event. Only in two cases, was a representative of the Russian homosexual movements asked for a comment. Firstly, the broadcast material of the *Ekho Moskvy* station featured Igor Kochetkov, head of the Petersburg-based organisation Russian LGBT Network, who declared that Tim Cook's coming out should not affect Apple's position in Russia, but may help the local homosexuals (*Ekho* 2014a) who perceived his move as "an important step for gays confronted with the problem of identity" (*Ekho* 2014b). The second person commenting on the situation was a Moscow activist, Nikolay Alexeyev. Announced as the leader of the LGBT community, the head of

the organisation GayRussia did not, however, refer in his comment to the situation in Russia (or this part of his statement was not cited), but only described Apple’s attitude to sexual minorities (RSN 2014a). Therefore, we can presume that there is still a rather strong taboo in the Russian media concerning the news regarding the situation of the Russian LGBT community.

A hypothesis that could explain the breaking of the taboo, to which I shall return further on, would be describing Tim Cook’s statement as an element of narration on the evil West. It could be justified by a noticeable disproportion of the number of articles on the topic in the media dependent on the authorities and in the independent media. *Kommersant* devoted only a two-sentence-long note to the issue, while *Vedomosti* and *Novaya Gazeta* did not inform about it at all, referring only to the later Russian reactions. At the same time, the topic was covered twelve times by the Russian News Service<sup>2</sup>, nine times by the NTV channel, and seven times by the national TASS agency. We cannot exclude either that such a broad coverage of Tim Cook’s actions was to be a red herring covering problems of the Russian economy. If we assume that the anti-Westernism hypothesis was right, then the breaking of the taboo by the media close to the authorities could have been an implementation of the principle, noticed by Foucault, under which a description of a subject may be aimed at its masking by pushing narration into a framework comfortable for the bodies of power/knowledge (Foucault 2002).

Although the Russian media gave a considerably broad coverage to Tim Cook’s coming out, the very English phrase – “coming out” – was used by only three content providers<sup>3</sup>. This testifies to either a poor dissemination of the phrase in the Russian language or the journalists’ belief that it has a non-official feel to it. The information much more often included the word “confessed” (признал) or, more rarely, “declared” (объявил), or “announced” (заявил).

As far as the absence of an English-language phrase can be understood, the almost total lack of the word “gay” that was used by only three content providers<sup>4</sup> in their descriptions, is more puzzling. The word “homosexual” is just as unpopular. In exchange, almost all the analyzed media used a euphemistic phrase “non-traditional sexual orientation” (нетрадиционная сексуальная ориентация). The only exception here is the *Dozhd* TV, which did not use it in its coverage, as well as, to a smaller extent, the *Ekho Moskvy* radio station, which more or less consistently avoided the phrase in some of its later information. Language is not neutral or transparent and the very choice of vocabulary may bring about specific connotations and interpretations. It is not difficult to notice a discriminating judgement in

<sup>2</sup> Being a part of the National Media Group, the shareholders of which are state-owned companies and companies which are close to authorities.

<sup>3</sup> *Dozhd*, *Ekho Moskvy* and NTV. In the last case, the “so-called coming out” was mentioned, while *Dozhd* TV placed a Russified version of the phrase “coming out” in its news title.

<sup>4</sup> In a further five media, the word gay was used as a citation from Tim Cook’s statement.

the word “non-traditional”, which, regardless of the content providers’ intentions, is transmitted to their readers/viewers. Such a frequent use of this phrase in the media, independently of their worldview line and degree of independence, leads to a conclusion that the phrase is considered neutral by the majority of journalists. However, it does not change at all its discriminatory feel or the judgement contained in the language that implies, even if subconsciously, an association of homosexuality with something different, improper, and inconsistent with tradition. It is, however, worthwhile to note that there are some journalists who are better acquainted with the discourse of equality, such as Olga Bychkova, who instructed a co-host of the *Skaner* programme that the form homosexuality is inappropriate due to its connotations dating to the period of penalization, and that it should be replaced with the neutral word “homosexuality”, (*Ekho* 2014c), and who consistently avoided the phrase “non-traditional orientation” in all her programmes.

Almost as frequently as the form “non-traditional sexual orientation”, the media content included a reference to Tim Cook’s words concerning his pride of being a homosexual. This is in particular interesting, as the subversive idea of gay pride that developed in the US is little known in Russia. In my opinion, such frequent citations concerning the pride, even in titles, should be treated as the taking of the most unusual and controversial elements from Cook’s article with a view to attracting the readers. The effectiveness of this strategy can be testified to by the fact that the information went from the media to the public and political agenda, as shown by the frequent references to the “pride” in opinions under articles, and in comments made by public personages.

Cook’s potentially equally controversial words that homosexuality is for him one of God’s greatest gifts were cited surprisingly rarely though. Such citations appeared in the media content of only seven of the media under analysis.

### Milonov – critic on duty

The person who frequently appears in the media whenever morality-related questions are discussed, is a local deputy from Petersburg – Vitaly Milonov<sup>5</sup>. He was one of the initiators of the adoption of a regional ban on homosexual propaganda among minors in 2012. He also protested against Madonna’s and Conchita Wurst’s shows in Russia, and stood up against hookahs due to the apparent easiness of replacing their use with drugs.

It was not any different in the case of the information on the Apple head’s statement. It is an exception worthy of mention, since normally such pieces of news were not accompanied by experts’ comments. Market analysts were several

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<sup>5</sup> In 2016, he was elected deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation.

times asked for their opinion concerning the potential impact of the coming out on the sale of electronic products branded with an apple, and so were the above-mentioned LGBT activists.

Milonov granted himself a presence in almost all the media under analysis owing to the controversial interview he gave to the Russian News Service in the programme *Всё главное сейчас* (*The Current Most Important News*) broadcast on 30 October, just after 3:00 a.m., while the first information on the coming out had been provided in the Russian media barely half an hour earlier.

The statements of the MP are rich in colourful metaphors permeated with homophobia. We learn from them that Cook should have left his worldview to the Americans. This is because for Cook “there is something good in running without his trousers on, but for Russians this only underlines the absurdity of his statements, because no person in their right mind would do something like that. One more mental case in the business”. Milonov simultaneously tried to discredit the importance of the event, explaining that against the background of the “degeneration” that flourishes in the US and that of Barack Obama, he feared no Cooks (*RSN* 2014b).

However, the statement that granted Milonov the greatest presence in the media was his postulate of the establishment of a ban on Cook’s entry to Russia, since in his statement, he lowered the level of “aversion to sin”, which is an intended strategy of the gay lobby that managed to convince him to come out (*RSN* 2014b).

Even stronger words can be found in Milonov’s statement for the *FlashNord* agency, in which he continued his homophobic narration, asking: “what can he [Tim Cook] bring us? The Ebola virus, AIDS, gonorrhoea? Over there, everyone engages in chaotic intercourses. Ban his visits for ever” (*FlashNord* 2014).

What is noteworthy is the attitude of the media staff who in no way countered the homophobic statements in the interview, and when citing them in articles, did not place them next to other beliefs. Thus, Vitaly Milonov’s homophobic beliefs seem to be the only correct opinions of an external commentator, since a more tolerant narration is almost entirely absent.

The politician is described as “an avid fighter for morality and Orthodox values, known for eccentric initiatives and famous for scandals”. However, the form in which his words are cited makes it doubtful whether these words are ironically tinted. Only a couple of times did journalists demonstrate their distance to Milonov, writing that “he could not miss such a high-profile statement and he used it as a pretext for self-promotion” (*MK* 2014a), or stating that “Milonov would not be Milonov if he had not said so” (*Ekho* 2014d).

## Differing opinions

As far as differences between the particular media at the level of the news texts were quantitative rather than qualitative, there is a clear difference between the

content providers in terms of their commentaries. The manner of commenting on topics related to homosexuality is correlated with the degree of independence from the authorities. The more independent the medium, the closer it is to the standards set by the Western discourse of equality.

A particularly positive approach was presented by journalists from *Dozhd* TV and *Ekho Moskvy* radio<sup>6</sup>. As mentioned above, *Dozhd* was the only medium avoiding the use of the phrase “non-traditional sexual orientation” in their information, while a journalist from *Ekho* instructed her co-host about the negative connotations of the word “homosexuality”. This discourse of correctness was also presented in the programme *Гананольское. Имоги* in which the journalist asked everyone not to confuse sexual orientation with paedophilia (*Ekho* 2014e). This is particularly important as these two phenomena are often combined in Russian discourse and legislation, so as to subsequently build the atmosphere of fear for children on these grounds. In other programmes, journalists tried to distance themselves from homophobic activists and their statements. In *Ekho Moskvy*'s programmes, one could also feel an ironical tone with reference to the ban on the propaganda of non-traditional sexual intercourse adopted in 2013, and LGBT activists were given a chance to speak. Worth a mention too is also the strategy of the *Vedomosti* newspaper, which, as a part of a commentary, only published Michael Skapiner's text from the *Financial Times* on tolerance in company management. Thus, the editors entirely ignored all manner of the Russian discussions on the topic and distanced themselves from them, devoting only one article to the local situation, which was published as late as on 1 December on the basis of the *TASS* coverage.

The media dependent on the authorities and tabloids, approached the topic of Tim Cook's coming out in an entirely different way. In contrast to the liberal media, the blade of irony was aimed at Tim Cook himself and his statement. In her column published in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper, Olga Tukhanina compared persons who come out to a child saying “mum, I did a poo”. She called one's revealing of one's homosexual orientation infantile and vile, and suggested that it resulted from an overindulgence with life and boredom caused by the lack of attention from others. Tukhanina ironically pointed out that there must be no problems left on earth other than the disadvantageous situation of gay people – “Ebola has been dealt with, hunger has been beaten”, and asked “not to place anyone's drawers under her nose” (*KP* 2014a).

The ironical tone can also be found in TV programmes. In the *Anatomia Dna* show on *NTV*, jokes that were supposed to flood the internet in reaction to Tom Cook's statement were given priority. The viewers heard that Steve Jobs turned in his grave, and that the Internet users joked about being willing to sell their

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<sup>6</sup> Although formally the radio's majority shareholder is the state-dependent Gazprom-Media holding, heads of the broadcasting station managed to achieve a far-fetched autonomy, as expressed in its programme policy. For this reason I consider it justified to classify *Ekho Moskvy* as an independent broadcasting station, although there is a hypothetical possibility of the owner's pressure.

Apple products. Although the host of the programme each time denied responsibility – presenting mocking comments solely as citations of Internet users’ statements – she in no way distanced herself from the irreverent tone. We might also learn from the programme that “according to many, the loud coming out is just another promotional move aimed at the increase in the sale of fashionable gadgets” (NTV 2014a).

### From words to actions

Broad discussions on Tim Cook’s coming out and the fact that the tone of the media narration was dominated by conservative circles resulted in a fast reaction in the extra-media space. The radical statements of Vitaly Milonov, who from the very beginning appropriated the role of the chief critic of homosexuality, were followed by the appearance of further persons announcing that words shall be changed into actions.

The Orthodox blogger Dmitry Enteo called for a boycott of Apple products and informed about an action of destroying them by members of his movement *Gods’ Will*. “Since the head of the Apple company admitted homosexuality, we call upon everyone to boycott their products, so as not to promote sin. Our movement calls upon the citizens of Russia to protect themselves from Apple products, burn them and upload videos undersigned #AppleGo2Hell to the internet”, Enteo wrote in his microblog (Enteo 2014).

A very bizarre reaction to Tim Cook’s words was a Twitter entry by the Russian businessman Oleg Tinkov: “Ok, it is my turn to come out after my friend Tim. I am gay and I am proud of it” (Tinkov 2014a). The information was immediately disseminated in many media under analysis; however, very soon the spokesman for the bank belonging to the businessman, and then Tinkov himself, explained that it was only a joke. In the following days, Tinkov presented his dubious sense of humour a number of times, e.g. joking that he became gay after colonoscopy or demanding that Tim Cook displays full transparency and declares whether he is “a gay she or a gay he” (Tinkov 2014b).

However, it was the reaction of Maxim Dolgoplov, head of the West European Financial Union company, which was followed by the broadest reaction in media. It was out of his initiative that on 3 November Steve Jobs’s monument that his company put up a year and a half earlier in the courtyard of the State University of Information Technology, Mechanics, and Optics in Petersburg, was dismantled. The majority of media under analysis began to broadly discuss whether or not the removal of the monument was justified. As many as several pieces of news a day were devoted to the subsequent events and comments on its fate. First, the rector explained that the monument in the shape of a two-metre high iPhone was dismantled to be repaired. However, the company’s press service argued that the reason was Tim Cook’s words. Dolgoplov himself admitted that he personally

took the decision to dismantle the monument in reaction to the head of Apple's statement. "I think that this is sheer promotion of sodomy, which is against the law in Russia. I have children, you have children, and I do not want it all to be so paraded about", the businessman told the journalist of TV Russia (*Vesti* 2014a). Additionally, some media informed that one of the elements which contributed to the dismantling of the monument was Edward Snowden's information that Apple allegedly provided data of their users to US special services.

In the days that followed, the readers/viewers were informed that the further fate of the monument would be decided by a vote on the internet, although the company itself was prone to opt for a public destruction of the monument being a symbol of "blind faith in the legend of Steve Job's genius" (*NTV* 2014d). Finally, it was decided that the monument be put up for an internet auction. According to Dolgopolov, 60% of respondents voted for this solution, although some media noticed that 54% of respondents participating in the internet voting opted in favour of bringing the monument back to its original place (*TASS* 2014a). The starting price was established at 5 million roubles, and one of the conditions was taking the monument outside Russia. Profits from the sale were to be used as grants for young computer scientists and the purchase of 100 Russian smartphones to be given to persons deciding to resign from Apple products. Dolgopolov's actions were negatively assessed by liberal commentators, and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev also expressed his opinion on the issue, calling the dismantling of the monument "complete stupidity" (*NTV* 2014b).

## Evil West

I have already indicated that the explanation of the disproportion in the amount of texts concerning Tim Cook's coming out and the differences in the comments concerning the related events in the media marked by a different degree of dependence on the authorities may be sought in the national anti-Westernism.

Its echoes can be found in many of the materials under analysis. Examples include the programme *Без вопросов* (*Without Questions*) in the authorities-dependent broadcasting station *Russian News Service*. Invited to the studio, Alexandr Prokhanov complained that the West "does not offer Russia Shakespeare, Hemingway, or Steinbeck. The West offers her filth – everything you can find below the bellybutton [is] for us, barbarians from Russia, and they will savour exquisite and refined music in Covent Garden. This is worse than any sanctions. They are pouring hogwash on us". Commenting on Tim Cook's coming out, he added: "I think that they will soon understand what Sodom is and how God dealt with it, pouring his chalice of wrath over it" (*RSN* 2014c).

Along with Tim Cook's words, in the period under analysis, a similar statement by Edgars Rinkēvičs played an important role in the anti-Western and anti-gay narration of the Russian media. Latvia's Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted



being gay a week after Apple’s head, when the dismantling of the Petersburg monument was still being vividly discussed in the Russian media. As far as the comments concerning Cook might be considered restrained, we witnessed a veritable festival of homophobic statements in the case of the news on the orientation of the Latvian politician. Such a strong reaction was caused by a combination of factors, including the geographical and sentimental proximity of Latvia, as expressed in numerous media publications concerning the Baltic States. The mentions very often concerned negative events, since the public discourse was filled with a bitterness resulting from the non-acceptation and non-understanding of the way the former Russian republics chose their futures in the 1990s. All the above elements are correlated with highly tense political relations, in which Rinkēvičs plays an important part. The Russian public opinion cannot forgive him the ban he imposed on concerts of Russian artists actively supporting the annexation of Crimea.

It was perhaps due to their dislike of Rinkēvičs himself that also high-ranking politicians contributed their comments. A lot of publicity in the media was earned by a short comment published on Twitter by the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, Dmitry Rogozin: “so he has found something to be proud of. Although if you have nothing to be proud of, then you come to take pride in such things”. In turn, Vitaly Milonov shared an opinion that “in Russia there can be no question of officials’ come outs, since no decent, normal, adequate and mentally sound person would write about it on Twitter while holding such a position” (NTV 2014b).

The most glaring example of anti-Western narration in the period under analysis was possibly the programme *Бести недели* (*News of the Week*) broadcast on 9 November by the Russia-1 channel. This weekly programme is a subjective summary of the most important events from the previous recent days, and is hosted by Dmitry Kiselyov – one of the Kremlin’s most trusted people in the media space and the head of the *Rossiya Segodnya* state-owned news agency that was established by the authorities in December 2013 to promote the Russian version of events internationally.

The said programme focused on the West’s alleged intention to “recode” the consciousness of the societies of many countries of the world. The very title of the film available on the channel’s website speaks volumes about the narration present in the material: *The West will Recode the World: Gays, Porn, and Hatred*. The process is to involve the “rewriting of history” and adjusting it to “geopolitical interests”. “Recoding is tantamount to changing the cultural code and reversing people’s understanding of goodness and evil, beauty and horror, the due and the banned, noble and vicious, heroic deed and treason”. As the narration progresses, the references to coming outs and homosexuality as such become increasingly stronger. “Whatever we were ashamed of, will now be highlighted and will become a reason to be proud. There was sin earlier – there will be no more sin – either such or any other”. Kiselyov not only reconstructed the alleged way in which the West acts, but also clearly determined the purpose of such behaviours. “Recoding social values – this is the load of the new programme that will allow to rule people,

countries, and the world. This is not a tale from horrors or anti-utopias. This process has already begun" (*Vesti* 2014b).

An antidote to the evil actions of the West is to be Russia and the precious few politicians who are her friends, such as Viktor Orbán and Miloš Zeman. They continue to rely on the classical European culture "based on honesty and respect for Christian values" that have become less fashionable due to recoding. According to Kiselyov, examples of unfavourable changes include the statement by Latvia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, which the employee of the most popular TV channel in Russia commented on with a rhetorical question: "who needs your intimate orientation? All in all, you offer the society your services as a politician, not as a gay. Or did you want to advertise your intimate services?" (*Vesti* 2014b).

Such comments concerning one of the most prominent politicians of a neighbouring country are not only Kiselyov's specialty. A similar narration can be found for instance in Elena Kriwyakina's column in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The tabloid journalist called upon the ministers of foreign affairs of Latvia and Germany<sup>7</sup>, as well as the mayor of Berlin, to button up their short trousers. She called openness about one's sexual orientation "a peculiar side-effect of democracy and transparency" and she shared her homophobic association of coming outs with "an exhibitionist jumping out of the bushes". She then concluded: "nobody asked to come to minister Rinkēvičs's bedroom, so he invited witnesses himself. And the witnesses very much want a shower after that" (*KP* 2014b).

## Word of conclusion

On the basis of the analysis, we can divide the Russian media on the basis of the way in which they describe homosexual persons. Certain differences are noticeable already at the stage of the short news texts. They are primarily quantitative differences – slightly paradoxically, the more tolerant media devoted less attention to the topic, while the content providers presenting a more conservative worldview line explored the issues related to non-normative homosexuality very strongly. In my opinion, this can be explained by the anti-West narration observed in the media dependent on the state authorities and in the tabloids. The need to present evidence of the deprivation of Western societies is stronger than the homosexuality-related taboo.

However, it seems that a certain taboo is still present and covers comments concerning the Russian LGBT movement. Although this hypothesis requires further analyses of other cases, it is a fact that in the case of Tim Cooks' coming out, the Russian context was showed solely in the materials broadcast by the *Ekho Moskvy* radio.

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<sup>7</sup> The columnist seems not to be aware of the fact that as of December 2013, Guido Westerwelle was no longer a minister.

The analysis also showed far-fetched correlations between the ownership structure of the media and their attitude to the topic of homosexuality. The narration of the state-owned media and media dependent on state-owned companies was marked by a much smaller degree of correctness (and many a time an entire absence of correctness) than that of the independent media. The only exception to the above rule was radio *Ekho Moskvy*, which despite its formal dependence on the Gazprom-Media concern holding its majority shares, is marked by a pluralism of opinion and high journalism standards. The Moscow broadcasting station should, however, be treated as a rarity resulting from its position which was won in the 1990's and has been skilfully maintained by its staff, headed by Alexei Venediktov.

It should, however, be pointed out that also some media with a more liberal attitude to homosexuality-related topics failed to avoid stumbles in the form of the broadly used judgemental phrase “non-traditional sexual orientation”. The terseness of informing and commenting on the events makes one wonder whether it does not result from the unwillingness to discuss controversial topics for fear of sanctions under the law on the “ban of homosexual propaganda among minors”. Since the performed analysis does not provide grounds for a clear diagnosis, it seems justified to leave the issue as a research question for further analyses.

The greatest differences in the way of describing homosexuality-related topics can be observed in the area of the commentaries. Some materials published and broadcast in state-dependent media should be considered clearly and extremely homophobic. Homosexuality is presented in them as the object of exhibitionist propaganda. Abnormal inclinations are imposed on the society, which believes in traditional values. Additionally, the discriminating statements are not in any way countered, since the materials are not aimed at the presentation of the standpoints of both sides. Only very few media, headed by *Dozhd* TV and *Ekho Moskvy* radio, aim to stick to the standards determined by the equality media discourse in their content.

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## Summary

### *“Western degeneration” versus “native normality”: moral panic in the Russian media regarding homosexuality*

The article explores sexual and gender discourses that circulate in the Russian media and their relationship to the sexual politics of the country. It explores what sexual deviation means, what sexual politics are and why the idea of moral panic provides a critical analytical tool for looking at the current Russian debates around normality, nation, gender and sexuality.

## Keywords

normality, homosexuality, the media, Russia

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