Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

‘Better to be a dictator than gay' homophobic discourses in Belarusian politics

Frear, M.J.

Citation

Frear, M. J. (2021). ‘Better to be a dictator than gay': homophobic discourses in Belarusian politics. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *73*(8), 1467-1486. doi:10.1080/09668136.2021.1970721

Version: Publisher's Version
License: Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license
Downloaded from: https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3238861

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Europe-Asia Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ceas20

‘Better to be a Dictator than Gay’: Homophobic Discourses in Belarusian Politics

Matthew Frear

To cite this article: Matthew Frear (2021) ‘Better to be a Dictator than Gay’: Homophobic Discourses in Belarusian Politics, Europe-Asia Studies, 73:8, 1467-1486, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2021.1970721

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1970721

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 06 Sep 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 507

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ceas20

EUROPE-ASIA STUDIES, 2021
Vol. 73, No. 8, October 2021, 1467–1486

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

'Better to be a Dictator than Gay': Homophobic Discourses in Belarusian Politics

MATTHEW FREAR

Abstract

This essay analyses the political discourses employed by both the Belarusian authorities and the opposition with regard to homophobia and the LGBT community. It explores the anti-LGBT rhetoric and political homophobia that has been identified in the literature on Russian and Ukrainian politics as a baseline for examining neighbouring Belarus. It identifies which homophobic discourses are present in Belarus and how political homophobia is wielded by different actors on the domestic political scene.

THE FIRST, AND SO FAR ONLY, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC of Belarus, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, has been notorious for his colourful quotes during over a quarter of a century in office, and these have included a number of homophobic statements. Most famously, he proclaimed that it was 'better to be a dictator than gay' in 2012, in reference to meeting Germany's openly gay Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle (Matveev 2012). Nevertheless, homosexuality was decriminalised in the country in 1994, four months before Lukashenka was elected president. The first attempt to hold a gay pride event in any post-Soviet republic took place in the Belarusian capital Minsk in 1999 (Mantsevich 2015, p. 26). Belarusians themselves cite tolerance as being a key attribute of their national identity (Kaspe 2017, pp. 37–9). This essay explores political homophobia in Belarus, beyond individual prejudices and societal attitudes alone. Political homophobia in this context can be viewed as a purposeful strategy pursued by state actors and political movements (Bosia & Weiss 2013, p. 15). More specifically, this essay examines the political discourses present in the homophobia that has been employed on the Belarusian political scene, both by the incumbent authorities and their political opponents. For the purposes of this research, discourses can be defined as 'public articulations and

Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.
https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1970721

narrative codifications … used by politicians' (O'Loughlin *et al*. 2005, p. 324). In doing so it engages with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)[1] dimension of the wider 'culture wars' that make up the focus of this special issue.

The question of gender and sexuality in international politics has attracted increasing academic attention in recent years (Rao 2018; Richter-Montpetit 2018). At the turn of the century, for example, scholars were already suggesting that a 'sexual clash of civilisations' over gender equality and sexual liberalisation was emerging as a pertinent fault line (Inglehart & Norris 2003, p. 65). This front in the culture wars has been variously described as pitching a universal, progressive, liberal and tolerant modernity that is on the right side of history against traditional, conservative and religious values that perpetuate an outdated intolerance both within countries and between countries (Stella & Nartova 2015, p. 18; Altman & Symons 2016, p. 15; Hooper 2016; Edenborg 2018, pp. 69–70; Shapovalova 2018, p. 33). While this rhetoric of conflict over such social values and self-expression is sometimes portrayed as differentiating the West and 'the rest', it should be remembered that opposition to gender equality and sexual liberalisation can exist in the West as well (Fassin 2006; Thomson 2010, pp. 65–75; Paternotte 2018, pp. 61–2). Indeed, the modern use of the expression 'culture war' comes from Hunter's (1991) study of the polarisation within US politics and culture. Much of the focus on 'the rest' has traditionally been towards the Muslim world in particular (Puar 2013; Dalacoura 2014). While postcommunist countries in Europe may be closer to the West when it comes to gender equality, in terms of tolerance towards sexual minorities there is a much clearer divide (Inglehart & Norris 2003, p. 68). Hopes that Central and Eastern European countries were simply lagging behind because of their communist past and would inevitably catch up with the West on LGBT-related matters have not been realised in many cases (Mole 2016; Szulc 2018, pp. 2–3).

Over the past decade, increasing attention has been paid to homophobia, political discourses and the treatment of sexual minorities in the post-Soviet space, particularly in the wake of the introduction of Russia's so-called 'anti-gay propaganda' laws under President Vladimir Putin in 2013 and the waves of homophobic violence against gays and lesbians sanctioned by the authorities in Chechnya since 2017 (Edenborg 2018, pp. 67–71; Eristavi 2019; Im 2019). During this period, it has been suggested, for example, that in Russia 'homosexuality emerged as a possible theme of a cultural Cold War' (Altman & Symons 2016, p. 11). Homophobic discourses or narratives are not limited to a defence of Mother Russia against an encroaching, decadent West on the international stage, however. Homophobic discourses or narratives can also be employed as a tool in domestic political rhetoric as a dimension of culture wars over certain values that can be exploited to pit 'them' against 'us' within the country (Healey 2017, pp. 7–8).

It would be easy to presume that a predominantly Orthodox, Russophone, eastern Slavic Belarus must be pursuing a similar path to that of Russia, or indeed that Russia is actively exporting to Belarus its discourses and practices with regards to sexual minorities. In reality this is a very simplistic understanding of the actual situation in contemporary Belarus, which

[1]For the sake of simplicity, the standard abbreviation LGBT is employed in this essay rather than one of the many possible alternative designations. This does not embrace all possible sexual orientations and gender identities, and there is a lively debate about terminology in this area (see Wilkinson & Langlois 2014, pp. 252–55; Picq & Thiel 2015, pp. 5–6).

should not be understood as just Russia writ small. There is a gap in the extant literature with regard to what has actually been taking place in Belarus in terms of political homophobia, which this research addresses. Any scholarly references to culture wars in Belarus have usually focused on national discourses and identity debates—see, for example, Ioffe (2007)—rather than perspectives around social values such as any internal or external ‘sexual clash of civilisations’.

This essay starts by providing a short overview of the legal environment and societal attitudes regarding LGBT matters in Belarus since independence in 1991, to provide a background context for the exploration of homophobic political discourses in more detail later. It then identifies the trends that have been highlighted by scholars examining the situation in Belarus’ eastern Slavic neighbours, namely Russia and Ukraine. It will show how homophobic discourses in the politics of the new Eastern Europe usually focus on issues around family and traditional values, nationalism and discrediting opponents as somehow unpatriotic by linking them to LGBT issues, and geopolitical othering of the EU and, in some contexts, Russia. It will then explore whether similar discourses can in fact be observed in the case of Belarus, and if so, how they are employed. To do this, a systematic search was carried out using independent Belarusian news portals such as *Naviny*, *TUT.by* and *Radio Svaboda*, as well as the official websites of government bodies and political organisations. In analysing appropriate articles and statements, the discourses identified in the extant literature were used as the starting point to look for the narratives employed in Belarusian politics. The trends in how narratives around the LGBT community have been constructed in the Belarusian political context, through the political discourse of the incumbent authorities and the opposition, are identified. Political homophobia will be shown to be present in the rhetoric and actions of politicians who support Lukashenka, as well as those who oppose the regime. It tends to be instrumentalised in different ways on both sides of the political divide, depending on what is politically expedient at any given time.

The lie of the land: treatment of and attitudes towards the LGBT community in Belarus

Before exploring in more depth how homophobic discourses are framed on the Belarusian political scene, it is necessary first to outline the main trends in official policies towards the LGBT community, as well as the public attitudes that have emerged over the past 30 years since independence.

Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the emergence of a newly independent Belarus, homosexuality was decriminalised in the country in March 1994, 60 years after it had been criminalised in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (Healey 2001, pp. 185–86). This came after similar measures in Russia, Ukraine and the Baltics states. These steps were not linked to progressive policies or support for minority rights *per se*, but rather with ambitions to join the Council of Europe (CoE) during the 1990s (Noble 2013, p. 126). Article 22 of the 1994 Constitution states that ‘All shall be equal before the law and have the right to equal protection of their rights and legitimate interests without any discrimination’.[2]

[2]‘Konstitutsiya Respubliki Belarus’ 1994 goda’, available at: http://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/normativnye-dokumenty/konstitutsiya-respubliki-belarus/, accessed 22 August 2018.

Legally proscribed forms of discrimination are not listed, however. The 1994 Constitution also makes it explicit that marriage is permitted between a woman and a man in Article 32. In the current Criminal Code, homosexuals and lesbians are only mentioned in Chapter 20, covering crimes against sexual freedom using force or coercion.[3] The age of consent is equal for heterosexuals and homosexuals. The official Belarusian state ideology, implemented since 2003, does not make any explicit reference to LGBT matters in either a positive or negative light when it addresses the traditional ideals and values of the Belarusian people (Meln'ik 2013, pp. 187–228).

The decriminalisation of homosexuality in Belarus has not resulted in the end of homophobic public attitudes, nor did it in Ukraine and Russia (Bortnik 2007, p. 363; Martsenyuk 2012, p. 51; Buyantueva 2018, p. 456). A possible measure for societal homophobia is the opinion polling regularly conducted by the World Values Survey (WVS), a cross-national survey based on a common questionnaire that compares attitudes across almost 100 countries.[4] One of the questions posed that has been used as an indicator of homophobia in other studies, such as in O'Dwyer (2013, p. 113), asks respondents to place themselves on a 10-point scale, where 1 meant 'homosexuality can never be justified' and 10 meant 'homosexuality can always be justified'. Among those respondents from Belarus who expressed an opinion in 2018, the majority, 64.4%, stated that it was never justifiable, while 4% believed that it was always justifiable and only 11.8% chose a score that was 6 or above. This is an improvement upon the survey conducted in 1996, when 68.3% of Belarusian respondents who expressed an opinion stated that homosexuality was never justified and just 7.5% opted for a score of 6 or above. In other polls on LGBT issues, 70% of Belarusians surveyed would not welcome a member of a sexual minority living next door to them,[5] while 70.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with homosexual couples being allowed to adopt children[6] and 81% opposed same-sex marriage.[7]

It is in this context of ambivalence or outright hostility to the LGBT community in society as a whole that official laws have been developed and implemented. While Belarusian legislation does not explicitly target the LGBT community for the most part, the annual reports produced by the NGO ILGA-Europe since 2011 have constantly placed Belarus near the bottom of their 'Rainbow Europe' rankings for equality laws and the human rights of LGBT people across 49 European countries.[8] Nevertheless, Belarus has usually

[3]'Ugolovnyi Kodeks Respubliki Belarus'. Glava 20', Etalon-online, available at: http://etalonline.by/?type=text®num=HK9900275#&Chapter=20, accessed 22 August 2018.

[4]The WVS results are available at: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org, accessed 5 February 2021.

[5]'Belorusskoe obshchestvo: test na grazhdanstvennost'. Tablitsy s resul'tatami oprosa', *Pact*, 15 February 2017, pp. 13–4, available at: http://www.pactworld.org/sites/default/files/Tables_Civic_Literacy_Test.pdf, accessed 28 August 2020.

[6]*European Values Study 2008: Belarus (EVS 2008)*, GESIS Data Archive, Cologne, Study ZA4782, EVS 2010, Data file version 1.1.0, available at: https://doi.org/10.4232/1.10175, accessed 5 February 2021.

[7]It is interesting to note that, according to the Pew survey, in Belarus more young adults aged 18–34 accept same-sex marriage (22%) than their counterparts in either Russia (9%) or Ukraine (11%). 'Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe', *Pew Research Center*, 10 May 2017, available at: http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/, accessed 28 August 2020.

[8]Full details of past and present Rainbow Europe packages are available at: https://www.ilga-europe.org/rainboweurope, accessed 5 February 2021.

outperformed its eastern Slavic neighbours, Russia and Ukraine, mainly thanks to better legislation regarding legal gender recognition and bodily integrity (ILGA-Europe 2012, p. 44). Belarus lacks anti-discrimination laws that expressly protect the LGBT community or policies designed to tackle hate crime or hate speech directed at LGBT people. More recently, Belarus has fallen behind Ukraine in the Rainbow Europe rankings, as new legislation on equality and non-discrimination has been introduced by Kyiv since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 (ILGA-Europe 2016, pp. 170–71).

The LGBT community in Belarus has to function within the confines of the so-called 'last dictatorship in Europe', which in reality imposes restrictions on the rights and freedoms of all groups that are not already subordinate to the incumbent authorities. Civil society organisations (CSOs) or public associations have to register with the Ministry of Justice to be allowed to operate, and the decision to grant registration is often politicised and arbitrary (UN 2018; Frear 2019, pp. 98–104). Even if an independent organisation does succeed in obtaining registration it can still face harassment and political pressure, while the activities of unregistered associations are effectively criminalised. The right to assemble peacefully and to demonstrate is also restricted by the need to receive permission from the authorities. Freedom of expression is limited by the requirement for media outlets to be officially registered and the existence of laws on the so-called 'misuse of freedom of speech' that are open to abuse. In short, anything that is not officially registered or expressly permitted in legislation is prohibited (Amnesty International 2013; UN 2014).

In practice this means that in spite of the repeated efforts by activists, most CSOs dedicated to LGBT issues have not succeeded in their attempts to register with the Belarusian authorities, often on minor technicalities (Bortnik 2007, p. 363; ILGA-Europe 2014, p. 43; 2017, p. 54). One of the rare exceptions is the public association *Vstrechi*, registered in 2004, which works to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among men who have sex with men (MSM). It is this focus on health issues that has allowed it to retain its registration. Activists who attempt to register LGBT CSOs often face harassment from the authorities; some have opted to simply leave the country owing to the pressures that they faced (Ivanou 2013).[9] This can take the form of intimidation by the Belarusian KGB inviting activists to informal interviews, police raids on events or meetings, threats of blackmail or public outing to employers, opening investigations into trumped-up charges and the confiscation of passports, for example. Attempts by one of the most well-known and visible groups, *Gay Belarus*, to register as an organisation only saw increasing repression of its activists, and the movement effectively disbanded in 2016 (Mantsevich 2021). The smaller projects that survive today do not attempt to register with the authorities and are limited almost exclusively to online activities and campaigns. These include the anti-discrimination *MAKEOUT* project, the anti-homophobia campaign *Delo-Pi*, the DOTYK queer project and the regional LGBT initiative *Noviye Regiony* based in the eastern city of Mahileu.

[9]See also, 'Siahei Androsenka: Ya baiusia viartatstsa u Belarus', *Radio Svaboda*, 6 July 2015, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/27112989.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Regular attempts have been made to hold pride parades in Minsk since the turn of the century, almost all of which have been refused official permission by the local authorities (Amnesty International 2013, pp. 42–3). In most cases small demonstrations still took place regardless, but the organisation and location were kept secret until the last minute. In 2011 plans for a march in the suburbs of Minsk were rejected; however, a small picket against homophobia was permitted (Mantsevich 2015, p. 27). Subsequent attempts to organise such events faced more and more serious repression. The last attempt to hold a pride march, in 2013, was abandoned and there have been no subsequent attempts (Švaraitė 2017). Similarly, efforts to get permission to hold public events to mark International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHO) have also been consistently rejected (ILGA-Europe 2013, p. 57).

Freedom of expression in the media had also been limited. A variety of LGBT magazines and news websites were launched in the late 1990s. None of the print media, such as the magazine *Forum Lambda*, still exist and many of their creators have left the country (Volodin 2016, p. 63). A leading online news portal in the first decade of the century was *Apagay/Gay.by*, but by 2010 this too had become defunct. Some Belarusian journalists still collaborate on more *ad hoc* online platforms such as *Gaypress.eu*. Homophobia can be found in the wider Belarusian press, in particular, state-run news organisations. Monitoring of state television news in 2020 during the protests against Lukashenka after his disputed election victory noted the negative portrayal of any participation by the LGBT community in the demonstrations.[10] Since 2015 the state-run regional newspaper *Vecherniy Mogilev*, based in eastern Belarus, has become particularly notorious for its homophobic and transphobic reports, which create a negative image of LGBT issues and actively call for discrimination (Burakov 2019). Independent news sites are often more even-handed, but still tend to shy away from LGBT issues in the main, based on monitoring conducted by local NGOs.[11]

The LGBT community labours under many of the same restrictions as other groups in Belarus that are not explicitly supported by or loyal to the regime. As noted above, there are no explicitly anti-LGBT laws on the statute books, and the broader legal system does not defend their rights or ensure equality. The police do not keep a record of homophobic hate crimes. High-profile cases, such as that of Mikhail Pishchevsky, who died in 2015 after spending a year in a coma following an attack outside a gay party, were initially only treated as misdemeanours, and it was only at retrials that homophobic motives were considered (Amnesty International 2017, p. 26; Levitskaya & Mancewicz 2017). The Pishchevsky case led to the creation of the anti-homophobia initiative *Delo-Pi* mentioned above. Nevertheless, a call by a Belarusian MP in 2005 to re-criminalise homosexuality was not supported by parliament nor the Interior Ministry (Bortnik 2007, p. 364). There is no explicit anti-gay propaganda law that could be described as having been 'exported' to Belarus or 'imposed' by Russia. The closest thing is the law 'On the Protection of

[10]'Three-Pronged Attack. State-run TV Builds Up the Narratives in the Information Warfare', *MediaIQ*, 15 September 2020, available at: https://mediaiq.by/article/three-pronged-attack-state-run-tv-builds-narratives-information-warfare, accessed 5 February 2021.

[11]For details see, Journalists for Tolerance, available at: https://j4t.by/category/issledovaniya/, accessed 5 February 2021.

Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development'; while this does not explicitly discriminate against LGBT people, concerns have been raised that it could be used in such a way (Bortnik 2016; ILGA-Europe 2017, p. 55). Groups such as the Catholic Church, some members of the Orthodox Church and smaller evangelical churches in Belarus as well as parents' organisations believe a specific anti-gay propaganda law is necessary and continue to make written requests to the Presidential Administration and the Prosecutor General's Office (Gushtyn 2019; ILGA-Europe 2020, p. 30; Vikhrov 2020). To date such efforts have not resulted in new legislation.

Homosexuality may have been decriminalised in 1994, but the authorities are not quick to promote or defend LGBT rights. On the other hand, they have not tried to re-criminalise homosexuality or introduce a Russian-style anti-gay propaganda law. Homophobia is not prominent in the state ideology, but discrimination and persecution at the hands of the state can occur in practice. While tolerance is widely claimed as a national characteristic, for the most part, it does not extend to the LGBT community (Kasmach 2017).

Common features of political homophobia in Eastern Europe

Before analysing homophobic narratives and discourses employed on the Belarusian political scene, this essay will engage with what has been identified in the extant scholarly literature on the region, in particular with regard to neighbouring Russia and Ukraine. Since the turn of the century, there has been a burgeoning literature examining homosexuality in the Soviet and post-Soviet context, with an emphasis on Russia. Some are rooted in history (Healey 2001) or sociology (Baer 2009), while more recently there has been a growing scholarship on the political dimension of homophobia (Kon 2009; O'Dwyer 2013; Healey 2017; Khlusova 2017; Buyantueva 2018). In Russia this has become even more prominent in the wake of what has often been dubbed the 'anti-gay law' signed by Putin in 2013, a federal bill that outlawed the dissemination of what is ambiguously termed 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations' to minors (Wilkinson 2014; Hooper 2016; Healey 2017, pp. 6–17). Meanwhile, in neighbouring Ukraine, the aftermath of the Euromaidan protests and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014 has seen new research emerge on how homosexuality and LGBT rights have been invoked by various political and societal actors (Martsenyuk 2016; Teteriuk 2016; Shapovalova 2018; Verpoest 2018). In both countries a number of common factors emerge from this recent scholarship that link discourses around political homophobia to issues such as family and traditional values, nationalism and discrediting opponents as unpatriotic, and geopolitics othering.

A common argument employed against the LGBT community in both Russia and Ukraine is their shared demographic crisis. Homosexual relationships that do not replicate 'normal' family units are portrayed as having a negative effect on birth rates and as such, threaten the very survival of the nation (Kon 2009, p. 46; Martsenyuk 2012, p. 59; Khlusova 2017, p. 104; Suchland 2018, p. 1081). This has been highlighted as part of a wider biopolitical turn in Russian political discourses (Makarychev & Medvedev 2015, pp. 46–7; Stella & Nartova 2015, pp. 27–9). Some CSOs in Ukraine frame their anti-LGBT views in a 'pro-family' rhetoric (Shapovalova 2018, p. 34). Such pro-family sentiments in Russia

and Ukraine sit under the umbrella of 'traditional values', which extend beyond issues of reproduction (Wilkinson 2014, pp. 365–8; Shadrina 2015; Hooper 2016; Khlusova 2017, pp. 103–4). In Ukraine, certain parties, churches and CSOs warn against a 'homo-dictatorship' that is seeking to prohibit defending such traditional values (Martsenyuk 2016, p. 50). However, there is no unified understanding of what these traditional values actually are (Buyantueva 2018, p. 470). They are often linked to the Orthodox Church (Sharafutdinova 2014, pp. 618–20; Horvath 2016, pp. 876–77; Agadjanian 2017, pp. 44–6), but socially conservative attitudes are by no means restricted to churchgoers in the region.[12]

Political homophobia has also been embraced by politicians across Central and Eastern Europe to defend national values (Mole 2016, pp. 110–16). Russia under Putin has seen a renewed focus on the idea of a distinct Russian civilisational identity (Verkhovskii & Pain 2012; Horvath 2016; Tsygankov 2016; Robinson 2017; Hale & Laruelle 2020). LGBT rights are perceived to be incompatible with so-called Russian values, which can include spiritual and moral values rooted in Orthodoxy (Østbø 2017) as well as a broader Eurasian system of absolute values that contrast to those of the permissive West (Lukin 2014). In doing so the Russian authorities promote an implicit heteronormativity (Kondakov 2012, pp. 252–57; Chaney 2018, pp. 649–51). Within this civilisational identity, some of these values may be shared by elites and social groups in Ukraine and, indeed, Belarus. It is important to note however, that just because certain actors in Russia and Ukraine invoke similar conservative values to justify their homophobic attitudes, this does not mean that those same Ukrainian actors also believe that they belong to a greater Russian civilisational identity (Hudson 2015, pp. 340–41). The right-wing nationalist *Svoboda* party in Ukraine, for example, is openly homophobic, but this does not mean that it embraces the inclusion of Ukraine in a 'Russian World' (Teteriuk 2016). Rather by being inspired or guided in any way by Moscow, it draws on a strain of right-wing Ukrainian nationalism.

On the domestic political scene in both Russia and Ukraine, homophobia has been employed in an attempt to discredit or undermine political opponents. In doing so, being linked to homosexuality is always cast in a negative light. Both pro-Kremlin and anti-Kremlin movements in Russia have sought to tarnish male opponents' masculinity by alluding to homosexuality or 'sexual deviancy' (Sperling 2012, pp. 247–51). Meanwhile Putin has been described as constructing a narrative that 'masculinises' the presidency and, by extension, the country (Foxall 2013, p. 151; Healey 2017, p. 139). In Ukraine, Euromaidan was dubbed 'Gayromaidan' by some of its detractors (Hooper 2016; Verpoest 2018, p. 140). Provocations were staged during the protests at which fake LGBT activists flew rainbow flags during Euromaidan (Martsenyuk 2016, pp. 63–4). Some LGBT activists did indeed join the protests early on, but under Ukrainian or European flags rather than LGBT symbols (Martsenyuk 2016, pp. 61–2; Teteriuk 2016; Verpoest

[12]'Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe', *Pew Research Center*, 10 May 2017, available at: http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/, accessed 28 August 2020.

2018, p. 153). At the same time, however, genuine events held by the LGBT community were broken up by the authorities in western Ukraine, who claimed that they must have been orchestrated by Russian provocateurs (Verpoest 2018, p. 155).

Furthermore, the rift between Ukraine and Russia since the Revolution of Dignity and the annexation of Crimea has seen LGBT references instrumentalised by all parties to further their geopolitical goals. On the one hand, this othering can be seen in the use of the term 'Gayropa' by Russia and its supporters in the region (Riabov & Riabova 2014; Suchland 2018, pp. 1073–74; Foxall 2019, pp. 11–2). Gayropa became a symbol of a deviant Europe that supported 'unnatural', non-traditional LGBT rights, suggesting that postsocialist countries faced a 'putative civilizational choice between Europe and Russia' (Martsenyuk 2016, p. 50). Russian lawmakers claimed that Victory Day parades in Kyiv would be replaced by Gay Pride marches (Hooper 2016). On the other hand, this Russian discourse has generated a backlash from some quarters in Ukraine. Homophobia and condemnation of LGBT people has become associated with the 'Russian World' linked to Putin (Teteriuk 2016). Some Ukrainian politicians begrudgingly claimed that permitting gay parades was preferable to Russian tanks on the streets (Martsenyuk 2016, p. 67). Gay pride events have, in fact, taken place in Kyiv since 2015, albeit under heavy police protection, while a 100-year ban was enacted in 2012 on similar events taking place in Moscow (Verpoest 2018, p. 153).

To a degree, the Ukrainian LGBT community finds itself caught up in a form of homonationalist discourse of East *versus* West, taking an avowedly pro-European position. In doing so they attempt to create a 'correct', acceptable LGBT identity as part of a newly emerged Ukrainian nation project (Martsenyuk 2016, p. 66; Teteriuk 2016). There remains the risk, however, that any signs of tolerance towards the LGBT community by the Ukrainian authorities is only granted in the context of trying to differentiate Ukraine from Russia (Martsenyuk 2016, p. 67). In 2015 the Ukrainian parliament did pass anti-discrimination amendments that included sexual orientation and gender identity in the Labour Code as a step towards visa liberalisation with the EU; however, this was done to burnish the authorities' pro-European credentials rather than to improve the situation for LGBT people (Teteriuk 2016; Verpoest 2018, p. 154).

What can be observed in both Russia and Ukraine is a political instrumentality in how homophobia is utilised in discourses, as part of wider 'ideational improvisation' in politics (Hale *et al*. 2019, pp. 185–89). Invoking traditional, conservative values in general became more prominent as economic growth faded as a source of legitimation in Russia (Robinson 2017; Feldmann & Mazepus 2018). Meanwhile, in Ukraine some politicians have found it politically expedient to be less homophobic, to differentiate political discourses in Ukraine from those in Russia. This overview of the existing discussions in the scholarly literature on homophobic discourses serves as the basis for this essay to now examine whether similar trends or techniques—defence of the family and traditional values, nationalism and attacks on political opponents domestically, and geopolitical othering internationally—can be observed in the discourses used by senior figures in the Belarusian government and opposition.

Mapping how political homophobia is employed in Belarus

The use of homophobic political rhetoric by Belarusian political entities was not particularly prevalent in the 1990s (Bratochkin 2012). Through a systematic search through independent Belarusian news portals such as *Naviny*, *TUT.by* and *Radio Svaboda*, as well as the official websites of government bodies and political organisations, it is possible to identify trends in the occurrences of homophobia in political rhetoric since the turn of the century. While attention has usually focussed on the attitudes of the Lukashenka regime, it is important to note that elements of the political opposition also deploy homophobic political discourses (Studzinskaia 2012; Mel'nichuk 2017).

State authorities

Explicit use of political homophobia by the authorities emerged towards the end of Lukashenka's second term as president in the early 2000s. Lukashenka claimed in 2004 that Western countries were trying to spread 'homosexual perversion' in Belarus during an address to the Belarusian Security Council (Bortnik 2007, p. 364). An opposition Congress of Democratic Forces, held in 2005 to choose an opponent to stand against Lukashenka in elections the following year, was interrupted by a group who claimed to represent sexual minorities and hoped that the opposition would legalise same-sex marriage. Activists from the LGBT community at the time insisted that the people who turned up had nothing to do with them; curiously, Belarusian state television was on hand to film the entire event (Corwin 2005). In all likelihood this was a provocation by the authorities to insinuate that the opposition was linked to gay groups, which would be viewed by many in society in a negative light. LGBT community leaders who were active around this time state that they were frequently approached by the authorities and the local KGB in an attempt to get them to identify any members of the opposition who might have a non-traditional sexual orientation (Biran 2017). In an era of colour revolutions sweeping through the region, it is no coincidence that Lukashenka dismissed the attempt at a 'Denim Revolution' around his re-election in 2006 as a 'Blue Revolution', exploiting the double meaning of 'blue' (*goluboy*) as gay (Shadrina 2013, p. 130).

Following the re-election of Lukashenka for a third term in 2006, homophobic statements faded from official rhetoric. This did not mean, however, that everyday life was improving for the LGBT community, simply that political homophobia was not prominent at this stage. This coincided with a thaw in relations with the EU from 2008. It was not until the beginning of Lukashenka's fourth term, after his re-election in 2010 and the ensuing violent crackdown against independent political movements and civil society (Frear 2019, pp. 88–92), that there was a real return to public homophobic rhetoric. These years produced the most-oft quoted homophobic statements by Lukashenka, such as his comments about Guido Westerwelle during interviews in 2011 and 2012, including telling him to lead a 'normal life' (ILGA-Europe 2012, p. 45). These may have also been related to the fact that Westerwelle had put his name to an article in the *New York Times* that dismissed Lukashenka as a 'loser' (Bildt *et al*. 2010). Lukashenka openly expressed his disdain towards gay men, describing them as 'abnormal' and a 'disgrace' (Sereda 2012; Ioffe 2014, p. 197). Around this time,

the president also stated that he 'pities' lesbians, who, he believes, have to resort to same-sex relationships because of the 'inadequacies' of men (Spasyuk 2017). Lukashenka also appears to demonstrate a basic lack of understanding about terminology, apparently confusing heterosexual and bisexual in one interview conducted around this time (Ioffe 2014, p. 197).

When asked if he would follow Moscow's example of banning all gay pride marches in 2011, Lukashenka remarked that he probably would not, but would only allow them on the outskirts of Minsk, not in the city centre.[13] In reality, the authorities in Minsk did not grant permission to any request to hold a gay pride parade in Minsk between 2008 and 2013, even one proposed on the outskirts of Minsk in 2011, shortly after Lukashenka's comments. During his 2013 State of the Nation address to parliament, he vowed that there would never be same-sex marriage while he was president.[14] Interestingly, as international attention to matters of homophobia turned to Russia from 2013 onwards, Lukashenka made fewer provocative statements. At the same time, a tentative normalisation in relations with the EU was beginning. Since the Westerwelle incident, Belarusian officials have made no comparable public statements about the sexuality of openly gay minsters who have visited Minsk, such as the Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs or the British Europe Minister Sir Alan Duncan. The authorities have demonstrated that they are prepared to refrain from homophobic statements and discourses while courting the West.

On the international stage in recent years, the emphasis appears to have shifted somewhat from homophobic rhetoric that demonstrated that Belarus was different from the West to more of a focus by the Belarusian authorities on promoting 'traditional family values'. In a speech to the United Nations (UN) in 2015, Lukashenka referred to the 'moral values and good traditions … that our people accept as natural'. Gays and lesbians were not mentioned directly, with the president noting that he did not want to go into the problems of 'social innovation' for fear of being subjected to 'undue criticism'.[15] Belarus was one of the initiators of the 'Group of Friends of the Family' at the UN, alongside Egypt and Qatar, in 2015 (Gubarevich 2016). This group protested the launch of UN stamps promoting LGBT rights in 2016. The Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has continued to call for the protection of 'conventional' or 'natural' families.[16] LGBT people and families are not mentioned explicitly, but the language implies a critique of so-called 'non-traditional' families.

Homophobic rhetoric returned to the domestic political scene with a vengeance in 2018, thanks to the then Interior Minister Ihar Shunevich. Since the early 2010s, the British

[13]'Gomofobmetr Lukashenko', *Gaypress.eu*, 10 October 2015, available at: http://gaypress.eu/2015/10/10/gomofobmetr-lukashenko-80lvl-gomofob-s-mezhdunarodny-m-priznaniem/, accessed 26 September 2019.

[14]'Poslanie k belorusskomu narodu i Natsional'nomu sobraniyu', 13 April 2013, available at: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poslanie-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-8567/, accessed 29 May 2019.

[15]'Vystuplenie v obshchei diskussii 70 sessii General'noi assamblei OON', 28 September 2015, available at: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vystuplenie-v-obschej-diskussii-70-j-sessii-generalnoj-assamblei-oon-12219/, accessed 1 December 2018.

[16]See for example the press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus 'Ob initsiative po podderzhke traditsionnykh semeinykh tsennostei', 1 June 2017, available at: http://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/edd7f553d83148cc.html, accessed 29 May 2019.

Embassy had regularly flown a rainbow flag on its building, located close to the Presidential Administration, to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHO) in May. Until 2018, this had drawn no comment from the Belarusian authorities, even though the authorities did not grant permission for events organised by the Belarusian LGBT community to mark the day. In 2018, the Interior Ministry website published an anonymous statement claiming that the UK was stirring up trouble, that the duty of the ministry was to defend traditional family values, and that the struggle for LGBT rights was fake. Shunevich personally defended the statement (Spasyuk 2018). There was further scandal later in the year, when Shunevich made even more controversial homophobic comments in December 2018, using prison slang to refer to gay men as '*dyryavyye*' or 'those with a hole', suggesting that they were used in the wrong way.[17] He added that he hoped this description would catch on. Shunevich was asked to tender his resignation in June 2019, but not in direct response to any of the complaints about the offensive nature of these statements (Korovenkova 2019).

Developments in summer 2019 demonstrated some of the challenges or contradictions generated by the use of homophobic rhetoric by officials. As noted above, the regional newspaper *Vecherniy Mogilev* has had a history of publishing transphobic and homophobic articles that target specific individuals. When an LGBT activist submitted a complaint to the local authorities, both the Ministry of Information and the police agreed that there was evidence of 'extremism' in the articles, and the case went to court (Vasilevskaya 2019). The newspaper's editors argued that state officials such as Lukashenka and Shunevich have used far harsher rhetoric and called on their supporters to appeal to Lukashenka directly to protect them from the 'blue [gay] lobby'.[18] Thus, while local authorities took complaints of homophobia seriously on this occasion, the newspaper accused of publishing extremist material used the homophobic statements of state officials to justify its stance.

Political homophobia has been present in official discourse for nearly two decades, usually in the background but sometimes taking on more prominence. During the era of colour revolutions in the first decade of the century, it was mostly employed in attacks on the opposition. At other times it has been used to distance Belarus from the Western 'Other'; however, this is not explicitly linked to aligning with Russian civilisational values *per se*. The authorities may present Belarus as having close ties to an Orthodox Russian civilisation, but state ideology also makes it clear that Belarus is distinct from Russia. This state ideology can be vague and at times contradictory, but it has also cast aspersions against the idea of a 'Russian World' (Rudkouski 2017, p. 4; Frear 2019, pp. 82–4). The emphasis on traditional, 'natural' family values has come more to the fore in the rhetoric directed at both domestic and international audiences over the past decade. High-profile figures such as Shunevich and Lukashenka himself have made highly homophobic statements, but such comments are not endemic across the government.

[17] Full interview from ONT TV, 27 December 2018, available at: https://youtu.be/MYdnbLQZQ8A, accessed 22 January 2019.

[18] 'Mahilioskaia militsyia padala u sud na hamafobnuiu hazetu. "U Lukashenki bol'sh zhorstkaia rytoryka"', *Radio Svaboda*, 8 July 2019, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/30044204.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Instead, political homophobia has been used in an instrumental manner when it is politically expedient. There is potential therefore for homophobic discourses to be employed by the regime leadership itself against movements that have emerged in opposition to Lukashenka since his contested election in 2020 in a bid to discredit them, as has already been seen in some of the state media, as mentioned above.

Opposition

Political opposition to the Lukashenka regime is not homogenous, and it has long faced harassment and repression from the authorities that has often left it marginalised and hampered in reaching out to the wider public (Frear 2019, pp. 112–16). Since the turn of the century, a number of leaders of political opposition movements—various small parties and groups on the more right-wing conservative and nationalist end of the political spectrum—have been accused of making homophobic statements. These include the leadership of the youth organisation 'Young Front' (*Malady Front*) under Paval Sieviaryniec and his successor Zmister Dashkevich, the party Belarusian Christian Democracy (*Belaruskaia Khrystsiianskaia Demakratyia*—BCD) that was later founded by Sieviaryniec and, more recently, some of the leaders of the youth wing of the Belarusian People's Front (*Belaruski Narodny Front*—BPF) such as Hanna Smilevich. Some of these figures have been high-profile prisoners of conscience, gaining international attention for their opposition to Lukashenka. Nevertheless, Dashkevich once notoriously stated that it was better to have a dictator than a gay president in a 2013 interview (Sherstneva 2013), later clarifying that in fact he meant that both would be as bad as each other, and he opposed gay parades that would 'demand the right to rape children' (Zhivolovich 2017). These opposition figures often claim that homosexuality is sinful and immoral and emphasise the importance of Christian values (Znatkevich 2008; Dynko 2016). It should not be assumed that these claims are solely linked to Orthodox values, as many of their proponents are from Protestant denominations. Homophobic discourses are, of course, not unique to conservative or nationalist forces in Belarus and are voiced by right-wing forces elsewhere in Europe.

Various opposition figures have condemned attempts by the LGBT community to agitate for their rights and have criticised gay pride parades, campaigns against homophobia and attempts to commemorate IDAHO (Mitskevich 2009; Bratochkin 2012; Sous 2018; Smilevich 2018). In turn, there have been attempts to exclude LGBT activists from joining pro-democracy or human rights marches, notably the Chernobyl Way rally in 2012, at which members of the nationalist BPF grabbed rainbow flags out of the hands of activists.[19] In recent years, there have been public complaints from opposition figures such as Dashkevich and the former political prisoner and presidential candidate Mikola Statkevich that the EU and foreign donors were paying too much attention to LGBT rights and similar issues in Belarus, at the expense of backing the political opposition in their bid to oust Lukashenka (Germanovich 2019). A handful of LGBT activists did

[19]'U LGBT-aktivistov zabrali flag vo vremya "Chernobylskogo shlyakha"', *TUT.by*, 26 April 2012, available at: https://news.tut.by/society/286285.html, accessed 22 August 2018.

openly participate at a handful of events during the wave of public protests that erupted against Lukashenka's rule in 2020, emphasising a respect for basic human and civil rights in Belarus (Rust 2020). Some participants noted that their desire to protest against the dictatorship outweighed concerns about possible homophobic reactions from other demonstrators (Russu 2020). Like many of their fellow protesters, several LGBT participants were detained by the authorities, beaten and threatened with sexual violence (Vikhrov 2020). At the same time, there were some instances of homophobic insults being directed at Lukashenka and the police by other demonstrators, calling them 'faggots' (*pidor*) (Zavalei 2020).

When opposition leaders are not openly homophobic, they tend to studiously avoid making any comments on LGBT rights.[20] In 2015, the main opposition candidate standing against Lukashenka, Tatsiana Karatkevich, gave a very similar response to that of Lukashenka in 2011 when asked about permitting a gay pride march to take place. She suggested, as he had, that it would be better for any parade not to be too visible nor held in the city centre.[21] Initial attempts in 2020 to hold primaries for a potential opposition candidate in the 2020 presidential election saw a right-centre coalition of political forces demand that all candidates declare themselves defenders of traditional values and refuse offers to cooperate on initiatives proposed by LGBT groups (Rust 2020). Plans to question all the candidates on their stance on LGBT matters were stymied by the increasing crackdown by the authorities on any campaigning during the election.[22]

For a certain section of the opposition forces in Belarus, political homophobia has been employed in defence of religious values in a sustained and consistent manner for nearly 20 years. In these cases, proponents are not simply instrumentalising homophobia for political gain when it is expedient. They often embrace the sanctity of marriage and the importance of having children. To date, however, figures from the Belarusian opposition have not had any high-profile engagement with transnational groups backed by US conservatives, such as the International Organisation for the Family, which previously held the World Congress of Families in locations including Georgia and Moldova (Stoeckl 2020). Attempts have been made to actively exclude LGBT people from the wider opposition movement. Most of the opposition leadership do not engage in open homophobia but steer clear of LGBT rights or any overt support for the LGBT community. Even those in the opposition who reject Russia as an influence in their country are, for the most part, not yet ready to embrace LGBT rights as a sign of European identity. While protests since the summer of 2020 have seen many disenfranchised Belarusians experience first-hand some of the hatred and violence at the hands of the authorities that the Belarusian LGBT community has experienced for many years (Rust 2020), it remains to be seen if more progressive forces

[20]See, for example, 'Liabiedzka: "Hei-praid?! A my pry chym ?!"', *Radio Svaboda*, 2 October 2012, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/24727005.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

[21]'Gei-parady, "zagovor poliakov" i pomoshch' ATO. Top-5 ostrykh voprosov Tatiane Korotkevich ot brestchan', *TUT.by*, 1 October 2015, available at: https://news.tut.by/society/466789.html, accessed 22 August 2018.

[22]Details of initial initiative at 'Nastalo vremya sprosit' u kandidatok i kandidatov v presidenty, chto oni dumayut o ravenstve', *Makeout*, 4 June 2020, available at: https://makeout.by/2020/06/04/nastalo-vremja-sprosit-u-kandidatok-i-kandidatov-v-prezidenty-chto-oni-dumajut-o-ravenstve.html, accessed 29 August 2020.

in the opposition will actively embrace LGBT rights as human rights and criticise homophobic discourses, both from the regime itself and from within the ranks of the opposition.

Conclusions

This essay has examined political homophobia as one dimension of the so-called culture wars, focusing on homophobic political discourses. It does not argue that it is unique to the post-Soviet space or the Muslim world, nor that it is absent in the West. Three ways in which homophobic discourse has usually been employed by politicians in Eastern Europe have been identified in the extant scholarly literature on neighbouring Russia and Ukraine: family and traditional values, nationalism and the discrediting of opponents, and geopolitical othering. This research has examined if and how these have been employed specifically in the case of Belarus, by both the authorities around Lukashenka as well as the opposition to his regime. The political rights and freedoms of the LGBT community in Belarus are restricted in the same way as those of many other independent groups not linked to the regime. In practice, gays, lesbians and transgender people have frequently suffered discrimination, intimidation and even violence at the hands of the state when they attempt to become more politically active. Nevertheless, to date no explicit anti-gay propaganda law has been introduced in Belarus, despite requests from some pro-family and religious groups.

The use of homophobia to attack individual members of the opposition and attempt to discredit them was more prevalent in the early 2000s, when Lukashenka styled himself a ‘macho man’ (Mel’nichuk 2017). Since the outbreak of anti-regime protests in summer 2020, some opposition protesters have resorted to homophobic statements to attack Lukashenka, which is a newer development. ‘Natural’ family values have been invoked by both the regime and certain sections of the opposition to justify homophobia. The national democrats and the Christian democrats on the right flank of the opposition, such as the BCD and BPF, have invoked traditional, conservative, religious values in their discourse against LGBT issues. Any religious dimension can cover not only the Orthodox Church, but also the Catholic Church and some evangelicals in Belarus. Neither the regime nor the opposition link their homophobic rhetoric to a wider Russian civilisational identity. The regime positions its nationalism as being close to, but distinct from Russia, while certain opposition forces draw on a strain of right-wing Belarusian nationalism rather by being inspired or guided in any way by Moscow. Political forces in Belarus employ homophobic rhetoric on their own terms, rather than having it imposed on them by Russia or simply imitating whatever Moscow implements. Homophobic discourses emerge in Belarus for their own reasons and Belarusian politicians of various stripes have their own rationale for deploying them.

Both the regime and some elements of the opposition remain vocally critical of any perceived attempts by the West to impose non-traditional, external values on the country. It appears that political homophobia is instrumentalised in different ways depending on the context, which is also the case in Russia and Ukraine. When relations between the West and the Belarusian authorities deteriorate, the regime is happy to employ homophobic rhetoric, which then fades during periods of normalisation in relations. As

the case of Russia since 2013 has illustrated, support for LGBT rights has become more prominent in the international politics of many Western countries—whether for the sake of LGBT advocacy itself or exploited as a tool to achieve foreign policy goals (Rivkin-Fish & Hartblay 2014). For the Belarusian opposition, this could mean that international supporters who previously might have turned a blind eye to evidence of homophobia for the greater goal of defeating Lukashenka are less likely to do so today. While some in the opposition criticise the West for no longer turning a blind eye to homophobia, others simply avoid addressing LGBT issues at all. To date, no opposition movement in Belarus has openly condemned homophobia to demonstrate that Belarus is more pro-European and therefore distinct from Russia.

In conclusion, political forces in Belarus use discourses of political homophobia in ways that are similar to those mentioned in the scholarly literature on neighbouring Russia and Ukraine but which are not simply direct copies. Instead, these discourses are used in ways that are expedient for either the authorities or the opposition at any given time. Thus, it remains important to research Belarus on its own terms rather than assume that understanding political homophobia in Russia is enough to know what is happening in Belarus. If Lukashenka were removed from power and replaced by domestic opposition forces, this would not necessarily guarantee an end to homophobic discourses on the Belarusian political scene; in some cases, the authorities and certain elements of the opposition are on the same side in any broader culture war, albeit for different reasons.

MATTHEW FREAR, Institute for History, Leiden University, Doelensteeg 16, 2311 VL Leiden, The Netherlands. *Email*: m.j.frear@hum.leidenuniv.nl

http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7334-649X

References

Agadjanian, A. (2017) 'Tradition, Morality and Community: Elaborating Orthodox Identity in Putin's Russia', *Religion, State & Society*, 45, 1.

Altman, D. & Symons, J. (2016) *Queer Wars* (Cambridge, Polity Press).

Amnesty International (2013) *What is not Permitted is Prohibited: Silencing Civil Society in Belarus* (London, Amnesty International Publications).

Amnesty International (2017) *Less Equal: LGBTI Human Rights Defenders in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan* (London, Amnesty International Publications).

Baer, B. (2009) *Other Russias: Homosexuality and the Crisis of Post-Soviet Identity* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).

Bildt, C., Schwarzenberg, K., Sikorski, R. & Westerwelle, G. (2010) 'Lukashenka the Loser', *New York Times*, 24 December, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/24/opinion/24iht-edbildt24.html, accessed 29 August 2020.

Biran, V. (2017) 'Every Gay Rights Movement Mirrors the General Picture of what's Happening in Society', *Makeout*, 1 November, available at: https://makeout.by/2017/11/01/every-gay-rights-movement-mirrors-the-general-picture-of-whats-happening-in-society.html, accessed 29 August 2020.

Bortnik, V. (2007) 'Hate Crimes Against Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Belarus', in Kuhar, R. & Takács, J. (eds) *Beyond the Pink Curtain. Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe* (Ljubljana, Peace Institute).

Bortnik, V. (2016) 'Gomofobiya. Pod Shumok?', *Naviny*, 25 January, available at: https://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2016/01/25/ic_articles_410_190804, accessed on 22 August 2018.

Bosia, M. J. & Weiss, M. L. (2013) 'Political Homophobia in Comparative Perspective', in Bosia, M. J. & Weiss, M. L. (eds) *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression* (Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press).

Bratochkin, A. (2012) 'LGBT-aktivizm i belarusskoe obshchestvo', *Novaya Europa*, 23 October, available at: http://n-europe.eu/article/2012/10/23/lgbt_aktivizm_i_belarusskoe_obshchestvo, accessed 28 August 2020.

Burakov, A. (2019) 'Kak provintsial'naya belorusskaya gazeta stala flagmanom gomofobii v strane', *DW.com*, 20 August, available at: https://p.dw.com/p/3O9An, accessed 6 September 2019.

Buyantueva, R. (2018) 'LGBT Rights Activism and Homophobia in Russia', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65, 4.

Chaney, P. (2018) 'Civil Society, "Traditional Values" and LGBT Resistance to Heteronormative Rights Hegemony: Analysis of the UN Universal Periodic Review in the Russian Federation', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70, 4.

Corwin, J. (2005) 'CIS: A Dirty Trick That Has Proved Exportable', *RFE/RL*, 11 October, available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/1062036.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Dalacoura, K. (2014) 'Homosexuality as Cultural Battleground in the Middle East: Culture and Postcolonial International Theory', *Third World Quarterly*, 35, 7.

Dynko, A. (2016) 'Paval Sieviaryniec: Vel'mi shkada lyudzei, iakiiakhvareiuts' na homaseksualism, zaimaiutstsa feminizmam', *Radio Svaboda*, 11 June, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/paval-sieviaryniec/27782779.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Edenborg, E. (2018) 'Homophobia as Geopolitics: "Traditional Values" and the Negotiation of Russia's Place in the World', in Mulholland, J., Montagna, N. & Sanders-McDonagh, E. (eds) *Gendering Nationalism: Intersections of Nation, Gender and Sexuality* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan).

Eristavi, M. (2019) 'Time to Shame Putin Again', *Atlantic Council*, 29 January, available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/time-to-shame-putin-again, accessed 28 August 2020.

Fassin, E. (2006) 'The Rise and Fall of Sexual Politics in the Public Sphere: A Transatlantic Contrast', *Public Culture*, 18, 1.

Feldmann, M. & Mazepus, H. (2018) 'State–Society Relations and the Sources of Support for the Putin Regime: Bridging Political Culture and Social Contract Theory', *East European Politics*, 34, 1.

Foxall, A. (2013) 'Photographing Vladimir Putin: Masculinity, Nationalism and Visuality in Russian Political Culture', *Geopolitics*, 18, 1.

Foxall, A. (2019) 'From Evropa to Gayropa: A Critical Geopolitics of the European Union as Seen from Russia', *Geopolitics*, 24, 1.

Frear, M. (2019) *Belarus Under Lukashenka: Adaptive Authoritarianism* (London, Routledge).

Germanovich, A. (2019) 'Statkevich dal Avtukhovichu sovet—"byt' ostorozhnym i razumnym"', *Naviny*, 17 May, available at: https://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/10/25/ic_articles_112_179679, accessed 23 May 2019.

Gubarevich, I. (2016) 'Fighting for the Traditional Family: Values over Pragmatism', *Belarus Digest*, 8 June, available at: https://belarusdigest.com/story/fighting-for-the-traditional-family-values-over-pragmatism-belarus-foreign-policy-digest/, accessed 28 August 2020.

Gushtyn, A. (2019) 'Nekotoye belorusy prosyat vvesti otvestvennost' za "LGBT-propagandu". Chto otbechaet gosudarstvo?', *TUT.by*, 18 September, available at: https://news.tut.by/society/654056.html, accessed 19 September 2019.

Hale, H. E. & Laruelle, M. (2020) 'Rethinking Civilizational Identity from the Bottom Up: A Case Study of Russia and a Research Agenda', *Nationalities Papers*, 48, 3.

Hale, H. E., Lipman, M. & Petrov, N. (2019) 'Russia's Regime-on-the-Move', *Russian Politics*, 4, 2.

Healey, D. (2001) *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press).

Healey, D. (2017) *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi* (New York, NY, Bloomsbury Academic).

Hooper, M. (2016) 'Russia's Traditional Value's Leadership', *Foreign Policy Centre*, 24 May, available at: https://fpc.org.uk/russias-traditional-values-leadership/, accessed 28 August 2020.

Horvath, R. (2016) 'The Reinvention of "Traditional Values": Nataliya Narochnitskaya and Russia's Assault on Universal Human Rights', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68, 5.

Hudson, V. (2015) '"Forced to Friendship"? Russian (Mis-)Understandings of Soft Power and the Implications for Audience Attraction in Ukraine', *Politics,* 35, 3–4.

Hunter, J. D. (1991) *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York, NY, Basic Books).

ILGA-Europe (2012) *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe 2011* (Brussels, ILGA-Europe).

ILGA-Europe (2013) *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe 2013* (Brussels, ILGA-Europe).

ILGA-Europe (2014) *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe 2014* (Brussels, ILGA-Europe).

ILGA-Europe (2016) *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe 2016* (Brussels, ILGA-Europe).

ILGA-Europe (2017) *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe 2017* (Brussels, ILGA-Europe).

ILGA-Europe (2020) *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe 2020* (Brussels, ILGA-Europe).

Im, R. (2019) 'The Unbearable Silence of Chechnya's Lesbians', *openDemocracy*, 29 May, available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/the-unbearable-silence-of-chechnyas-lesbians, accessed 28 August 2020.

Inglehart, R. & Norris, P. (2003) 'The True Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Policy*, 135.

Ioffe, G. (2007) 'Culture Wars, Soul-Searching, and Belarusian Identity', *East European Politics and Societies*, 21, 2.

Ioffe, G. (2014) *Reassessing Lukashenka: Belarus in Cultural and Geopolitical Context* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).

Ivanou, I. (2013) 'Attempt to Register a LGBT Organisation in Belarus Provokes Police Raids', *Belarus Digest*, 6 February, available at: https://belarusdigest.com/story/attempt-to-register-a-lgbt-organisation-in-belarus-provokes-police-raids/, accessed 28 August 2020.

Kasmach, L. (2017) 'Dougi shliakh da talerantnas'tsi: hamafobiia u belaruskim hramadztve', *Radio Svaboda*, 6 October, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/28778134.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Kaspe, S. (ed.) (2017) *Politicheskaya Kul'tura Postsovetskikh Stran: Ekspertnaya Refleksiya* (Moscow, Adapt).

Khlusova, A. (2017) 'Legitimising Political Homophobia: Sexual Minorities and Russian Television News', in Sanz Sabido, R. (ed.) *Representing Communities: Discourse and Contexts* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan).

Kon, I. (2009) 'Homophobia as a Litmus Test of Russian Democracy', *Sociological Research*, 48, 2.

Kondakov, A. (2012) 'Chelovek i grazhdanin: seksual'nost' kak sposob konstruirovaniya grazhdanstvennosti v Rossii', *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 5.

Korovenkova, T. (2019) 'Otstavka Shunevicha. "Na 99.9% ushel po sostoyaniyu zdorov'ya"', *Naviny*, 10 June, available at: https://naviny.by/article/20190610/1560170483-otstavka-shunevicha-na-9999-ushel-po-sostoyaniyu-zdorovya, accessed 28 August 2020.

Levitskaya, M. & Mancewicz, N. (2017) 'Why Violence Against LGBT People is not just "Misdemeanours"', *Makeout*, 8 August, available at: https://makeout.by/2017/08/08/why-violence-against-lgbt-people-is-not-just-misdemeanours.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Lukin, A. (2014) 'Eurasian Integration and the Clash of Values', *Survival*, 56, 3.

Makarychev, A. & Medvedev, S. (2015) 'Biopolitics and Power in Putin's Russia', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62, 1.

Mantsevich, N. (2015) 'V poeske mesta: retrospektiva gei-praida v Minske', *Gorodskie Taktiki*, 3.

Mantsevich, N. (2021) '"Eto byli ochen' slozhnye vremena": Repressii protiv LGBK-aktivizma v Belarusi v 2012–2013', *Makeout*, 8 April, available at: https://makeout.by/2021/04/08/repressions-lgbtq-belarus-2012-2013.html, accessed 8 April 2021.

Martsenyuk, T. (2012) 'The State of the LGBT Community and Homophobia in Ukraine', *Problems of Post-Communism,* 59, 2.

Martsenyuk, T. (2016) 'Sexuality and Revolution in Post-Soviet Ukraine: LGBT Rights and the Euromaidan Protests of 2013–2014', *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society,* 2, 1.

Matveev, V. (2012) 'Lukashenko: Belarus' budet zhestko reagirovat' na sanktionnye mery', *BELTA*, 4 March, available at: https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-belarus-budet-zhestko-reagirovat-na-sanktsionnye-mery-video-93742-2012/, accessed 28 August 2020.

Mel'nichuk, T. (2017) 'Zhizn' geev v Belorussii: ili valit', ili ne vysovyvat'sya', *BBC Russian Service*, 17 May, available at: https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-39954700, accessed 28 August 2020.

Meln'ik, V. (2013) *Osnovy ideologii belorusskogo gosudarstvo* (Minsk, Vysh. Shk.).

Mitskevich, Y. (2009) 'GOMO-SOVETIKUS. Gomofobiya kak simvol yedineneniya oppozitsii i vlasti', *Naviny*, 7 February, available at: https://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2009/02/07/ic_articles_410_161129, accessed 22 August 2018.

Mole, R. (2016) 'Nationalism and Homophobia in Central and Eastern Europe', in Slootmaeckers, K., Touquet, H. & Vermeersch, P. (eds) *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics: The Impact of Eastern Enlargement on Rights, Activism and Prejudice* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan).

Noble, B. (2013) 'Decriminalising Sex Between Men in the Former Soviet Union, 1991–2003: Conditionality and the Council of Europe', in Goodall, K., Malloch, M. & Munro, B. (eds) *Building Justice in Post-Transition Europe* (London, Routledge).

O'Dwyer, C. (2013) 'Gay Rights and Political Homophobia in Postcommunist Europe: is there an "EU Effect"?', in Bosia, M. J. & Weiss, M. L. (eds) *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression* (Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press).

O'Loughlin, J., Tuathail, G. Ó. & Kolossov, V. (2005) 'Russian Geopolitical Culture and Public Opinion: The Masks of Proteus Revisited', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30, 3.

Østbø, J. (2017) 'Securitizing "Spiritual-Moral Values" in Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 33, 3.

Paternotte, D. (2018) 'Coming Out of the Political Science Closet: The Study of LGBT Politics in Europe', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 1, 1–2.

Picq, M. L. & Thiel, M. (2015) 'Introduction: Sexualities in World Politics', in Picq, M. L. & Thiel, M. (eds) *Sexualities in World Politics: How LGBTQ Claims Shape International Relations* (London, Routledge).

Puar, J. (2013) 'Rethinking Homonationalism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 45, 1.

Rao, R. (2018) 'The State of "Queer IR"', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 24, 1.

Riabov, O. & Riabova, T. (2014) 'The Decline of Gayropa', *Eurozine*, 5 February, available at: http://www.eurozine.com/the-decline-of-gayropa/, accessed 28 August 2020.

Richter-Montpetit, M. (2018) 'Everything you Always Wanted to Know about Sex (in IR) but were Afraid to Ask: The "Queer Turn" in International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 46, 2.

Rivkin-Fish, M. & Hartblay, C. (2014) 'When Global LGBTQ Advocacy Became Entangled with New Cold War Sentiment: A Call for Examining Russian Queer Experience', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 21, 1.

Robinson, N. (2017) 'Russian Neo-Patrimonialism and Putin's "Cultural Turn"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69, 2.

Rudkouski, P. (2017) 'Soft Belarusianisation. The Ideology of Belarus in the Era of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict', *OSW Commentary*, 3 November, available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_253-tv.pdf, accessed 28 August 2020.

Russu, D. (2020) 'Dictatura strashnee gomofobii. V Minske LGBT-kolonna vyshla na protesta s plakatami i radushnymi flagami', *Hrodna.life*, 7 September, available at: https://hrodna.life/2020/09/07/diktatura-huzhe-gomofobii-v-minske-lgbt-kolonna-vyshla-na-protest-s-plakatami-i-raduzhnymi-flagami/, accessed 5 February 2021.

Rust, M. (2020) 'The Rainbow Colours Flying Together with the White–Red–White Flags. The Belarusian LGBT Community at Protests', *New Eastern Europe*, 10 November, available at: https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/11/10/the-rainbow-colours-flying-together-with-the-white-red-white-flags-the-belarusian-lgbt-community-at-protests/, accessed 11 November 2020.

Sereda, A. (2012) 'Lukashenko ne znaet, pochemu on stal prezidentom', *Naviny*, 25 October, available at: https://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/10/25/ic_articles_112_179679, accessed 22 August 2018.

Shadrina, A. (2013) 'Sovmestimy li demokratiya i gomofobiya?', in Minchenya, E. & Sasunkevich, O. (eds) *Gendernii Likbaz* (Vilnius, Belorusskii Dom Prav Cheloveka).

Shadrina, A. (2015) 'What is Threatening "Traditional Family Values" in Russia Today?', *openDemocracy*, 5 May, available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/anna-shadrina/what-is-threatening-%E2%80%98traditional-family-values%E2%80%99-in-russia-today, accessed 28 August 2020.

Shapovalova, N. (2018) 'The Two Faces of Conservative Civil Society in Ukraine', in Youngs, R. (ed.) *The Mobilization of Conservative Civil Society* (Washington, DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace).

Sharafutdinova, G. (2014) 'The Pussy Riot Affair and Putin's Démarche from Sovereign Democracy to Sovereign Morality', *Nationalities Papers*, 42, 4.

Sherstneva, A. (2013) 'Dmitrii Dashkevich: "Svou tyuremnye sroki ya vosprinimal estestvenno"', *Russkii Reporter*, 8 November, available at: http://rusrep.ru/dashkevich, accessed 28 August 2020.

Smilevich, H. (2018) 'Hanna Smilevich pra feminism, LGBT, perahiby i prazmernuiu palitkarektnasts'', *Budz'ma Belarusami*, 30 May, available at: https://budzma.by/news/hanna-smilyevich-pra-fyeminizm-lhbt-pyerahiby-i-prazmyernuyu-palitkarektnasc.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Sous, H. (2018) 'Khto z belaruskau apazytsyi vyvesic' viasiolkavy s'tsiah', *Radio Svaboda*, 24 June, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/29273205.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Spasyuk, Y. (2017) '"U nas zhe materi—eta rabyni". Lukashenko zastupilsya za zhenshchin', *Naviny*, 25 August, available at: https://naviny.by/article/20170825/1503670933-u-nas-zhe-materi-eto-rabyni-lukashenko-zastupilsya-za-zhenshchin, accessed 22 August 2018.

Spasyuk, Y. (2018) 'MVD pobedelo by v konkurse na samoe gomofobnoe ministerstvo', *Naviny*, 21 May, available at: https://naviny.by/article/20180521/1526908729-mvd-pobedilo-v-konkurse-na-samoe-gomofobnoe-ministerstvo, accessed 29 May 2019.

Sperling, V. (2012) 'Nashi Devushki: Gender and Political Youth Activism in Putin's and Medvedev's Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 28, 2.

Stella, F. & Nartova, N. (2015) 'Sexual Citizenship, Nationalism and Biopolitics in Putin's Russia', in Stella, F., Taylor, Y., Reynolds, T. & Rogers, A. (eds) *Sexuality, Citizenship and Belonging: Trans-National and Intersectional Perspectives* (London, Routledge).

Stoeckl, K. (2020) 'The Rise of the Russian Christian Right: The Case of the World Congress of Families', *Religion, State and Society*, 48, 4.

Studzinskaia, I. (2012) 'Androsenka: Hamafobiia—heta toe, shto iadnae apazytstyiu i uladu', *Radio Svaboda*, 17 May, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/24584370.html, accessed 28 August 2020.

Suchland, J. (2018) 'The LGBT Specter in Russia: Refusing Queerness, Claiming "Whiteness"', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25, 7.

Švaraitė, I. (2017) 'Minsk Replaced its Pride Parade with a Festival—and it Worked', *LGL*, 20 December, available at: https://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=19308, accessed 28 August 2020.

Szulc, L. (2018) *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan).

Teteriuk, M. (2016) 'Between "the Russian World" and "the Ukrainian Nation": Kyiv Pride Before and After Euromaidan', *Eurozine*, 19 April, available at: http://www.iwm.at/transit/transit-online/between-the-russian-world-and-the-ukrainian-nation-kyiv-pride-before-and-after-euromaidan/, accessed 28 August 2020.

Thomson, I. (2010) *Culture Wars and Enduring American Dilemmas* (Ann Arbour, MI, University of Michigan Press).

Tsygankov, A. (2016) 'Crafting the State-Civilization Vladimir Putin's Turn to Distinct Values', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 63, 3.

UN (2014) 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus', A/69/307, 12 August (New York, NY, United Nations General Assembly).

UN (2018) 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus', A/73/380, 13 September (New York, NY, United Nations General Assembly).

Vasilevskaya, A. (2019) 'Gazeta "Vecherniy Mogilev", kotoruyu sudyat za ekstremistskie materialy, trebuet privlech' ekspertov', *TUT.by*, 18 September, available at: https://news.tut.by/society/653980.html, accessed on 19 September 2019.

Verkhovskii, A. & Pain, E. (2012) 'Civilizational Nationalism: The Russian Version of the "Special Path"', *Russian Politics & Law*, 50, 5.

Verpoest, L. (2018) 'Geopolitical Othering Versus Normative Isomorphism? LGBTI Rights in Russia and Ukraine', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 23, 1.

Vikhrov, N. (2020) 'Hope is Thin as LGBT+ Activists Join Belarus Protests for Change', *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 22 September, available at: https://news.trust.org/item/20200924135700-632mz, accessed 5 February 2021.

Volodin, V. (2016) *Kvir-istoriya Belarysi vtoroi poloviny XX veka: popytka priblizheniya* (Minsk, Belarusian Queer History).

Wilkinson, C. (2014) 'Putting "Traditional Values" into Practice: The Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia', *Journal of Human Rights*, 13, 3.

Wilkinson, C. & Langlois, A. J. (2014) 'Special Issue: Not such an International Human Rights Norm? Local Resistance to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights—Preliminary Comments', *Journal of Human Rights*, 13, 3.

Zavalei, E. (2020) 'In Belarus, Fighting for Democracy—and LGBTQ Rights', *Politico*, 18 August, available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/in-belarus-fighting-for-democracy-and-lgbtq-rights/, accessed 28 August 2020.

Zhivolovich, K. (2017) 'Dmitrii Dashkevich: "Lyudyam nadoeli ponty v oppozitsii"', *BelGazeta*, 20 July, available at: http://www.belgazeta.by/ru/1006/society/31397/, accessed 1 December 2018.

Znatkevich, A. (2008) 'Udzel homaseksualistau pazhadany tolk'ki dlia aperatarau BT', *Radio Svaboda*, 24 April, available at: https://www.svaboda.org/a/1108121.html, accessed 28 August 2020.