

Is Putin Beating Up Women?

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Global Research, February 27, 2017

[Defend Democracy Press](#) 26 February 2017

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

This is the last episode of the Russophobic series steadily unfolding in the Western World, which is caught in the middle of a crisis of values. It regards the news that the Duma (the lower Chamber of the Russian Parliament) approved a draft legislation changing article 116 of the penal Code, briefly described as "law on domestic violence".

In simple terms the news has been broadcasted as *if* the Duma had stopped domestic violence being punishable according to the penal Code. On the contrary, it will be regarded as an administrative infringement. That meant to trigger a hurricane of anti-Russia propaganda. From here to anti-Russia hysteria it was a short road: from now on in Russia beating up women (and children) will be legal. It won't have any legal consequence.

I will get into more details. I will show that things are rather different from the way they were presented. But first, it is worthy to add some more data. 380 members of parliament voted in favor, only 3 against. Have they all gone mad? It is unlikely. As a matter of fact, this is the last of the series in which the majority of the votes in the Duma has repeatedly changed on the subject.

The reason of all this, is that currently in Russia there is a broad debate on these subjects: on the role of the family in the upbringing of young generations, on human rights and on civil rights. Like in any other parts of the world, there is a set of moral and social issues, which raises different and conflicting answers. Just think of how many discussions, inside and outside the Italian Parliament, were raised about gender-related topics. Or we may think about the debates that took place on abortion and divorce in the past decades.

In Italy it's considered natural. But if that happens in Russia, then it is considered a scandal. Instead of spotting the similarities – more than we can imagine – we get outraged. This is what, for instance, *La Repubblica* did. And *La Repubblica* may be considered the flagship newspaper of the Italian mainstream – naturally, in the name of progress.

Made up figures were shot. It was said, for instance, that every year in Russia *forty-thousand* women die a violent death. Whereas, this is the overall number of murders, which includes men and women. All done in the name of a cheap feminism. They didn't even bother to compare these figures with the murders in the United States, which are significantly more shocking, in absolute and percentage terms.

Moreover, in Russia this debate gave rise to strong contrasts not only between different political groups – such as liberals and conservatives, or pro-Western and orthodox – but also within the ranks of each group. Notwithstanding those journalists that still describe political life in Russia as univocal, where debate is lacking due to a dictatorship which allows no dissent.

One might disagree with opinions such as the one expressed by the Duma's President, Viaceslav Volodin, (United Russia Party) who defined the decriminalization of violence within the family as a "condition to create strong families"; to which Elena Mizulina's answered by saying that the crime of domestic violence is a crime against the family. It is worthy to remember that a recent Russian Supreme Court judgment decriminalized violent crimes which do not have physical harm as a consequence. It didn't regard the domestic violence though, so family members remained punishable even in this last case.

Naturally at this point anyone might object that, in any case, violence is not a good way to raise children. Besides, those sensitive to individual rights object that in most of the cases women and kids are more vulnerable and will be more exposed to violence.

People sensitive to the topic of human rights point out the fact that such a law might convey a wrong message to the entire society, such as: from now on you are allowed to beat up your women because you will not be punished. Others affirm that it could give way to wrong conclusions, like that domestic violence is no longer a crime. Indeed, others remembered that article 21 of the Constitution prohibits any form of violence on the citizens. Those who support the law have reasonable arguments, which have nothing to do with ideological arguments aiming to strengthening the role of the family.

Many legal experts noticed that henceforth victims of domestic violence will be better protected than in the past. First of all, the previous version of article 116 worked little or badly. According to statistics coming even from liberal sources, 70-78% of the cases weren't even reported to the police. Of these reports, 90-97% does not reach the trial stage and ends up with an amicable arrangement between the parties. In the end, we have very low rates of Court rulings regarding domestic violence. Hence, the law is altogether ineffective.

Both public opinion and the Parliament have been divided for months, debating on a broad range of different and contrasting drafts. A survey from Vtsiom showed that 59% of Russians is in favour of the just approved draft legislation, 33% are against. Finally: 79% of those interviewed is against domestic violence of any kind.

In conclusion, once Putin has signed the draft suggested by the Duma, only beatings related to criminal acts or due to ethnic and religious hatred will be considered as crimes. For these crimes the maximum penalty will be up to two years of imprisonment according to article 115 of the Penal Code. Whoever slaps his husband or wife, kicks his son in the butt without subsequent injuries could be subjected to a fine from 5 to 30,000 rubles, or arrested for 10 to 15 days in case of relapse, or sent to mandatory social service for an amount of 60 hours up to 120 hours. This is very different from being allowed to beat up relatives. This is the law that was voted almost unanimously by the Duma.

So, here we have the overall picture of the Russian society. Like it or not, this is an undeniable starting point. To this, it is worthy to add that every society has its own history and pace of evolution (or involution) and that no one should be authorized to establish that "our" civilization is the measuring stick for others. The Duma's resolution is not definitive: it will have to be submitted to the High Chamber (the Council of the Federation) and finally to the President Putin, who will have to sign it.

This is the issue. It is naturally open to different opinions, yet this does not authorize anybody to brand it as a scandal. Russia is a country like any other, which legislates according to its history, sensibility and experience. In reality, we know nothing about how in

China, in Kerala or in Chile – just to mention a few – these problems are addressed. Why would we become supreme judges then, when they regard Russia? “Fake news” means also to stack the deck and make uneducated people believe that we are always right and that Russian are uneducated and violent.

Translated from Italian by Defend Democracy Press

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