

New Pronatalism? Family Policy in Post-Soviet Russia

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This paper analyzes contemporary Russian family policy, focusing on the state's ideological orientation and the political measures it has taken with regard to the family as a social institution. Documents representing official and normative discourse of family policy in contemporary Russia serve here as data for the study. The paper identifies stages of the formation and realization of Russian family policy. Analysis of these stages shows that neither at the level of ideology nor in terms of specific tools of implementation is this policy coherent. A pronatalist strategy ensures that many real problems faced by families stay on the periphery of family policy. This paper maintains that Russian family policy should take into account the diversity of modern forms of family relationships and increase societal support for citizens with family responsibilities, not limited only to family financial support.

Introduction

In this article I will examine contemporary Russian family policy, focusing mainly on the ideological component of state actions in this sphere, and describe the trajectory of family policy development. I will briefly review the differences between Soviet and post-Soviet family policy and then attempt to identify the latter's stages of formation. I assume that Soviet family policy was paternalistic in nature, supporting women as paid workers and mothers, as well as fulfilling paternal functions toward children.¹ In this model the social care of children was divided between the mothers and the state, while biological fathers were excluded from their family and parental role.² The ob-

¹ N. Lovtsova, "Zdorovaia, blagopoluchnaia sem'ia—opora gosudarstva? Gendernyi analiz semeinoi sotsial'noi politiki," *Zhurnal issledovaniia sotsial'noi politiki* 1, no. 3–4 (2003): 323–40. M. Rabzhaeva, "Istoriko-sotsial'nyi analiz semeinoi politiki v Rossii XX veka," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 6 (2004): 89–97.

² Zh. Chernova "Model' 'sovetskogo' otsovstva: Diskursivnye predpisanii," in *Rossiiskii gendernyi poriadok: Sotsiologicheskii podkhod*, ed. E. Zdravomyslova and A. Temkina (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2007), 138–68; S. Kukhterin, "Fathers and Patriarchs in Communist

jective of the family policy was that only mothers and children would be provided with state monetary support and services. The programs of social and family policy were aimed at creating conditions for combining professional, family, and maternal responsibilities, in other words, to achieve a balance between professional employment and motherhood.³ The question is how such a combination of roles led to the imposition of a double burden on women and how the formation of gender asymmetry in the private sphere was implemented in practice. This outcome of Soviet family policy is currently regarded negatively since it led to a pattern of reduced individual lifetime fertility and the reduction of total national fertility in general.

The period of post-Soviet transition brought significant changes to the structure of Russian society and had a distinct impact on the formation of a new, non-Soviet stratification matrix. A variety of different forms of family life associated with class affiliation and economic and social status have appeared.

The state socialist economic model was replaced by market mechanisms. Marketization of childcare occurred through the development of a private educational services sector and the formation of a strong demand for, and insufficient supply of, babysitting, nursing, and other services. Changes occurred in the normative discourse of family. The legal system governing marriage and family relationships became more gender-balanced. Motherhood and childhood as the primary objects of state concern were replaced by a concept of parenthood that included fathers. Universal provision of support was replaced by a system providing minimal social assistance to families. While in the Soviet period all families with children were provided with a certain and approximately equal set of material and service support, in the 1990s and early 2000s only the most needy citizens with family responsibilities could formally count on the help of the state.⁴ The quality and means of family welfare provision became dependent on the socio-economic status of adult members. In addition, the number of actors engaged in childcare increased. In general, at this time the family acquired greater autonomy from state interference. The formation of a “vertical social contract,”⁵ in which the state and society co-existed, minimized the state’s ability and desire to interfere in citizens’ private lives. All these political, economic, and social changes

and Post-Communist Russia,” in *Gender, State, and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. S. Ashwin (London: Routledge, 2000), 71–89.

³ B. Clements, B. Engel, and C. Worobec, *Russia’s Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴ T. Teplova, “Welfare State Transformation, Childcare, and Women’s Work in Russia,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State, and Society* 14, no. 3 (2007): 284–22.

⁵ A. Auzan, *Tri publichnye lektzii o grazhdanskom obshchestve* (Moscow: OGI, 2006).

have determined specifics of the family policy that has developed and been implemented in the post-Soviet period.

National Family Policy

In Russia, the concept of national family policy was introduced in 1991 in connection with the development of the concept of the family policy by the Committee on Family, Family and Demographic Policy at the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR. This concept acquired official status in 1996 in the presidential decree "On the Main Directions of State Family Policy," where state family policy was defined as an integral part of the Russian Federation's social policy (part 2).⁶ This new concept included such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Vienna Declaration, the Program of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as the documents of the International Labor Organization, World Health Organization, UN Children's Fund, and other international organizations.⁷ The use of these documents during the work on the concept suggests that authors tried to insert their new model of family policy into a global context, using the developments that had already been made by the international community on the problems of family, women, and children. However, the new family policy model represented has certain characteristics that distinguish it from both Soviet and Western versions of family policy.

Analysis of this document suggests that the very concept of family policy is incoherent. It includes elements of different models of family policy implemented in the West and its mechanical combination of those elements leads to a sort of eclecticism and internal inconsistency at both the level of ideology and the level of its actual implementation. The fact that support should be provided mainly to the families in need in order to help them overcome the burden and that at the federal level families are provided with the minimum of social guarantees and benefits refers to the liberal model of family policy. At the same time the principle of gender equality in family life and employment is typical of the social-democratic model.⁸ The social-demo-

⁶ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on 14 May 1996, No. 712, "Ob osnovnykh napravleniiakh gosudarstvennoi semeinoi politiki," <http://base.garant.ru/1548725/> (last accessed 30 September 2011).

⁷ Ibid, paragraph 7.

⁸ Zh. Chernova, *Semeinaia politika v Evrope i Rossii gendernyi analiz* (St. Petersburg: Norma, 2008).

cratic model's declared focus on gender balance makes this concept of family policy more advanced and distinguishes it from the Soviet model. The latter was aimed at creating a set of optimum conditions for women to combine professional and parental roles, and did not consider men's familial responsibilities, except alimony payments. In contrast to the Soviet Union's paternalistic family policy, where private marital and reproductive decisions were subordinated to the interests of the state—depriving the family of autonomy in exchange for protection and support provision—the new concept of family policy reflects an “ideology of universal values, priority for the interests of families and individuals, [and] partnership of family and state. In this case, state institutions do not replace family but share with it the responsibility for creating conditions in which it may function.”⁹

Thus, in the post-Soviet period relations between the state and family have changed. The principle of maximum participation and intervention was replaced by an orientation toward partnership where both the state and the family become the subjects of family policy and participate jointly in the implementation of social care for children. Additionally, the number of actors operating in the field of family policy has increased. Apart from the family and state employers, voluntary associations, political parties, trade unions, religious groups, charity foundations, foreign organizations, individuals, and legal entities are included in this sphere.¹⁰ This document can be regarded as a “framework” concept, establishing family policy as a separate area of state social policy. The contradictory nature of the declared provisions concerning its objects, reasons, and aims, as well as the amount of state aid, predetermined to a large extent the model's incoherence and gave the possibility of its reformation in accordance with the state's pragmatic goals. The resultant mix of liberal ideas (e.g., state non-interference in family life, minimum support for the most needy citizens, an expanding number of family policy actors) and the ideology of gender equality reflects an uncertainty in the state's position on this issue. This concept represents an attempt to identify some possible areas of state action toward the family rather than a coherent program.

Family Policy of the Early 2000s: “The Principle of Minimalism”

The concept of family policy was introduced during a period of painful economic and social transformation for Russian society: the transition to a market economy, changes in the structure of employment, inability of the Russian state to fully perform its social obligations, and rapid social welfare stratification. In addition to these structural conditions, family policy devel-

⁹ Lovtsova, “Zdorovaia, blagopoluchnaia sem'ia—opora gosudarstva?” 332.

¹⁰ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, No. 712, paragraph 4, <http://base.garant.ru/1548725/> (last accessed 30 September 2011).

opment was affected by public and academic discourse concerning the family issues, demographic crisis, and the ways of overcoming it. An alarmist mood, with description of the current situation in terms of a “national catastrophe” and a “dying nation,” was typical not only among specialists dealing with family (e.g., A. Antonov and V. Medkov),¹¹ but also for a wider circle of political and public figures and public opinion in general. This position toward family problems was not new; the diagnosis of the crisis of family and family values in Russian society was already made in the late Soviet period when the traditionalist discourse, linked with calls for the return to traditional gender roles became popular again. As it was noted by N. Lovtsova, “the concept of family policy in Russia has emerged as a reaction to a sharp degradation of the welfare of many families, a decline of fertility, as well as a deterioration of moral standards, the growth of children and youth homelessness, neglect, crime, and a growing number of social orphans.”¹² The concept of family policy demonstrated the government’s awareness of the need to take special steps to support families under the conditions of overcoming the economic and social crisis in Russia.

At the same time the proclamation of “family independence and autonomy in decisions about its development”¹³ led to the predominance of the idea of minimalism in family policy. Foremost, state interference in family matters had to be limited in scale and exercised in extreme cases only. The incoherence of the family policy, the duality of the state’s position concerning the objectives and the size of assistance, and the shortage of resources to fulfill state obligations in full led to the early 2000s gap between the state’s declared universalist principles (i.e., support for families with children regardless of economic and social status) and the real support provided to needy families. This minimalist principle received a discursive and legislative manifestation. It was formulated in the President’s Address to the Federal Assembly in 2000, when Vladimir Putin formulated the state’s position in the social sphere as follows:

Social policy will be carried out on the principles of accessibility and acceptable quality of basic social benefits. Assistance will be provided primarily to those citizens whose incomes are seriously below sub-

¹¹ See, e.g., A. Antonov, ed., *Familisticheskie issledovaniia*, 2 Vols. (Moscow: Knizhnyi dom “Universitet,” 2009); A. Sinel’nikov, V. Medkov, and A. Antonov, *Sem’ia i vera v sotsiologicheskom izmerenii* (Moscow: Knizhnyi dom “Universitet,” 2009).

¹² Lovtsova, “Zdorovaia, blagopoluchnaia sem’ia—opora gosudarstva?” 235.

¹³ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, No. 712, paragraph 9, <http://base.garant.ru/1548725/> (last accessed 30 September 2011).

sistence level. The children of ministers can do without any child allowance, and wives of bankers without the unemployment benefit.¹⁴

In practice, the minimalist principle in family policy was implemented by changing the order of childcare benefits payments. In the early 1990s a monthly allowance to families with children was paid for every child under 18 years of age regardless of the family's level of income. According to Federal Law No. 66, dated May 30, 2001, only those families whose per capita income did not exceed 100 percent of the subsistence level in the region of the Russian Federation would have the right to a monthly child allowance.¹⁵ Thus, at this stage of family policy implementation there was a rejection of the universalist direct monetary support provision for families with children in favor of aid limited in amount and number of recipients. The liberalization of social and family policy was reflected by the fact that the benefits were provided under the principle of need (i.e., support was determined by the economic and social situation of the family).

Family Policy after 2006: "The Fifth National Project"

While the family and social policy of the previous period could be considered a reaction to negative economic and social phenomena as well as an attempt to minimize their impact, a shortage of state financial resources, stabilization and improvement of the economic situation, and changes in the political discourse created structural conditions for family policy to become a state priority. Its main goal was to solve Russian demographic problems, enhance fertility, and strengthen the family in general.

In the early 2000s, demographic problems—falling birth rates and population decline—became the object of close state attention. According to the experts, the economic and social crises the country faced in the 1990s served as leading factors of the country's increasing depopulation. Stabilization and improvement in the economic situation allowed the state to turn to the problem of low fertility and consider ways to overcome it. In the presidential decree "On the Concept of the National Security" issued on January 10, 2000, it was noted that:

the consequences of the deep social crisis are the sharp decline of fertility and life expectancy in the country, the deformation of the demo-

¹⁴ President Vladimir Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly of the Federation, 2000, http://www.intelros.ru/2007/01/17/poslanie_prezidenta_rossii_vladimira_putina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rf_2000_god.html (last accessed 30 September 2011).

¹⁵ G. Klimantova, *Gosudarstvennaia semeinaia politika sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Dashkov i K, 2004), 53.

graphic and social composition of society, and the undermining of labor resources as the basis for the development of production, [thereby] weakening families as the fundamental unit of the society, reducing the spiritual, moral, and creative potential of the population.¹⁶

In the President's Address to the Federal Assembly in 2000, the demographic situation in the country was referred to as a most severe problem requiring an immediate solution:

We, the citizens of Russia, are becoming fewer and fewer from year to year. For several years, the population of the country has decreased by 750 thousand people annually. And according to forecasts—forecasts based on real research, the real research of people who are deeply involved in this and who have devoted all their lives to research into such problems—in 15 years Russians could number 22 million fewer. I ask you to think about this figure: it is one-seventh of the country's population. If the current trends continue, the nation's survival is under threat. We are in danger of becoming a decrepit nation. Today, the demographic situation is one of the issues of anxiety.¹⁷

In political discourse, the demographic problem is defined in terms of crisis and national survival, and is associated with a threat to national security as a whole.¹⁸ A rationale for the implementation of special government programs is that strengthening Russian statehood is promoted not only by the growth of economic indicators, but also by the growth of the population, including an increase in fertility.

In the President's Address to the Russian Federal Assembly in 2006, the demographic issue and the ways to overcome it were the key topics. In it, the problem of low fertility was no longer represented in terms of "saving the nation," but acquired a more personal and specific meaning. According to the President, the main reason why a woman chooses not to have a second or third child is her financially dependent position in the family, because by "giving birth to her second child she drops out the workplace for a long time

¹⁶ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, "O kontseptsii natsional'noi bezopasnosti," 10 January 2000, <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=25677> (last accessed 30 September 2011).

¹⁷ President Vladimir Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly of the Federation, 2000.

¹⁸ A. Rozenkhol'm and I. Savkina "Rodi patriota—spasi Rossiuu! (Natsiia i gender v demograficheskom diskurse rossiiskikh pechatnykh SMI, kommentirovavshikh 'demograficheskoe poslanie' V. V. Putina)," *Gendernye issledovaniia* 18 (2009): 262–82.

and loses her qualification.”¹⁹ A woman’s uncertainty about the future, the need to make a choice between work and family, and the ability to provide an acceptable way of life for her children—all of these mainly material circumstances—determine the low birth rate and reduced family sizes. In order to improve the financial situation of mothers, the following steps were taken: child care benefits were increased up to 1.51 thousand rubles per month for the first child up to 18 months old and 3 thousand rubles for the second child of the same age; working women were granted benefits for pregnancy, childbirth, and child care in an amount not less than 40 percent of their previous earnings; and pre-school education subsidies were introduced (20, 50, and 70 percent for the first, second, and third children, respectively). An increase in the cost of birth certificates was announced, as well as an increase in what authorities called the most effective form of support: “maternity capital,” a monetary payment available for mothers of two or more children in the amount of 250 thousand rubles.²⁰

“Maternity capital” as a tool of family policy aims at providing economic support for women who give birth to a second or subsequent child to compensate for their financial loss from withdrawing from the labor market and to increase their “social status” as mothers. This state initiative effectively characterizes contemporary Russian family policy. First, the state’s position in the regulation of reproduction was clearly marked. The state has articulated its interest in an increased birth rate and has set the “reproductive norm” for family (two and three children). Second, material causes were recognized as leading women to choose whether or not to have additional children. Therefore, the government should provide economic incentives to motivate women to have more children and to raise the social prestige of motherhood. Third, the government has committed itself to material support of women directly related to the number and sequence of children. This allows us to identify modern family policy in Russia, beginning in 2007, as pronatalist, directed at demographic challenges primarily through material support and encouragement of childbirth.

This concern for family and childhood problems was newly echoed in the President’s Address to the Federal Assembly in 2010. It should be noted that the child issue was not the cross-cutting topic of the previous messages, where family issues were raised only in the context of the education and healthcare of schoolchildren. That serious attention was given in the address

¹⁹ President Vladimir Putin’s Address to the Federal Assembly of the Federation, 2006.

²⁰ The payment amounts mentioned are taken from the President’s Address to the Federal Assembly as of 2006; every year the payment amounts are indexed. The benefit amount is not fixed; it is calculated with inflation taken into account. In 2011 the amount of the minimal monthly paid childcare benefits for a child up to 18 months was 2,195 rubles (approximately \$73), and the amount of “maternity capital” was 365,696 rubles (approximately \$12,190).

to the policy toward childhood allows us to consider this document as the next step in the formation of family policy in contemporary Russia. What is the difference between the new discussions of the demographic issue and the already existing policies? As in the President's Address in 2006, the population problem is designated as a priority, as a challenge to the nation. The key areas of the formulated public policy—relating not so much to the institution of family but to the problems of childhood—are the following: child care and maternal health; child medicine development; support of young families with many children; promotion of philanthropy in family and child welfare; increasing the number of childcare facilities and the development of various forms of preschool education; care of street children and children with disabilities; the fight against violence toward children. To solve the demographic problem, in the President's Address to the Federal Assembly in 2010, a number of actions were inscribed into the logic of the already declared pronatalist policy. Introduction of the maternity capital funded by regional authorities, allocation of land for large families, and imposition of additional tax incentives to parents in large families were offered.²¹

The President's Address presents a new conception of the demographic question. Its novelty lies neither in the set of measures nor in its determination on the continued focus of family policy on raising fertility through direct material support from the government. Its novelty lies in a change of semantic emphasis. Whereas in the early 2000s the struggle against the demographic crisis was presented in terms of "saving the nation" and "national security" (rather abstract concepts), in the President's Address to the Federal Assembly in 2010, the proposed actions were presented in support of the desire of all parents to ensure the welfare of their children:

And, by and large, everything we do, we do for those we love, most of all for our children, because we want them to live better than us, so that they may be better than we are, and that they may be able to do that which we will not manage to do. All we want is that their success will provide a way toward a successful future for our great Russia.²²

In this case, we can see the change in the construction of the semantic structure of family policy. Individual parental desire to make a child happy becomes a condition of the country's prosperity. Moreover, in this document, the three-child family is regarded as "the main way to overcome the demographic crisis." In other words, it is proposed as a desirable pattern of reproductive behavior for citizens. The two-child family that ensures simple population maintenance is supplanted by the three-child family that yields the

²¹ President Vladimir Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly of the Federation, 2010, <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/9637> (last accessed 30 September 2011).

²² Ibid.

population growth desired by the state. To maintain and increase the number of such families the state plans to assist them with both direct support (e.g., provision of land, tax incentives) and ideological support of promoting the image of such families in social advertisement. A successful example of such an action is a public awareness campaign held in the Altai Territory reporting about the famous people in Russia who were the third child in a family. Nikolai Nekrasov, Anton Chekhov, Yuri Gagarin, and Anna Akhmatova were mentioned in this ad.

Thus, the President's Address in 2006 was a landmark for the formation of a modern model for family policy in Russia.²³ In the early 2000s, a transition to an explicitly pronatalist orientation of state action was only beginning, and social policy in general had features of the liberal model with a focus on support of the neediest categories of citizens. After the President's Address in 2006, it became evident that overcoming the demographic crisis was necessary and that the state was ready to mobilize both economic and ideological resources to do so. Total public expenditure on support for families with children in 2007 amounted to 200 billion rubles. This is comparable to total expenditure on the implementation of the four other national projects—healthcare, education, agriculture, and housing—which were implemented in 2006 (206.3 billion rubles).²⁴

An example of an ideological campaign aimed at promoting “the fifth national project” is the proclamation of “The Year of the Family” in Russia in 2008, during which several actions aimed at strengthening the authority of the family and basic family values were carried out. The most illustrative event was “Give Birth to a Patriot on Russia Day,” which took place in Ulianovsk. The event was announced 9 months before Russia Day. Under the terms of the event, all the participants—those planning to have a baby—should be registered as participants. Accordingly, September 12th was declared as the “Day of Family Communication,” which was called the “Day of Conception” by the city's inhabitants.²⁵ On this day, the governor recommended that employers establish a shorter workday, and retail sale of alcoholic beverages was prohibited. The winner was the family that not only gave birth to a baby on June 12th, but that also met the following require-

²³ E. Iarskaia-Smirnova, “‘Da-da, ia vas pomniu, vy zhe u nas neblagopoluchnaia sem'ia!’ Diskursivnoe oformlenie sovremennoi rossiiskoi semeinoi politiki,” *Zhenshchina v rossiiskom obshchestve* 2 (2010): 14–25.

²⁴ A. Burdiak, I. Korchagina, L. Ovcharova, L. Prokof'eva, and O. Siniavskaia, “Novye mery semeinoi politiki i ikh vliianie na material'no-imushchestvennoe polozhenie semei s det'mi,” *Sem'ia v tsentre sotsial'no-demograficheskoi politiki? Sbornik analiticheskikh statei*, ed. O. Sinyavskaia (Moscow: Nezavisimyi institut sotsial'noi politiki, 2009), 136.

²⁵ S. Titov, “Den' zachatiia stal dnem trezvosti: Ul'ianovskii gubernator vystupil s novym pochinom,” *Kommersant* 185 (2008) <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1017156> (last accessed 6 October 2011).

ments: an officially registered marriage between the parents, the presence of other children in the family, and social and financial well-being. The Special Commission selected the most worthy family and gave them the grand prize: an all-terrain vehicle called "UAZ-Patriot." Also, on June 12th the parade of strollers "Grow a Patriot, Kid!" was held in Ulyanovsk, which was attended by young mothers with children. Thus, support for the policy was rhetorically linked with motherhood as an act of women's patriotism.

Since 2006, a distinct direction for government family support has been apparent. There has been a shift in emphasis from assistance to poor and needy families (which had been characteristic of policy during the 1990s and early 2000s) to particular care for, and attention on, the "happy family."²⁶ Family policy aimed at "an abstract family" was no longer considered effective as it did not lead to the anticipated results (i.e., stable high birth rates, a lower divorce rate, and strengthening of family values). State programs have begun to diversify; the "object of state care" is becoming more fractional. It includes not only needy families and large families, but also young families in which spouses are not more than 30 years old. At the same time, no significant changes in ideology and policy actions have occurred. Pronatalist policy still involved minimum monetary compensation for the risks associated with childbirth and child rearing. The incoherence of state family policy is expressed in the contradiction between declared family support and concrete actions taken by the state. The most striking example of the mismatch between official discourse and the specific mechanisms of family policy implementation is Federal Law No. 343, adopted in the late 2010, which significantly decreased payments for sick benefits and childcare. The redefinition of gender roles and the problem of discrimination (against both men and women) in professional and private spheres are still not on the state's agenda for Russian family policy. The issue of gender inequality in the domestic sphere is directly related to the problem of discrimination against women in general—as women must necessarily combine the roles of wife and mother—which imposes significant limitations on their professional opportunities, leads to a lower economic status for women (relative to men), and makes them the objects of care and support from the state.

Gender analysis of family policy allows reconstruction of state ideology in the family sphere and the family model which is constituted as a normative model. Several researchers have noted that the "healthy, prosperous, and traditional family" is represented as the goal of the family policy.²⁷ The minimalist principle of the 1990s and early 2000s family policy, along with the liberal ideas of self-reliance, made precisely this type of family the most attrac-

²⁶ This category is presented in detail in the "Conception of State Policy for the Young Family," approved on 8 May 2007 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

²⁷ Lovtsova, "Zdorovaia, blagopoluchnaia sem'ia—opora gosudarstva?" 327.

tive from the state point of view. Health and material well-being of members in such a family excluded them from the state aid circle of beneficiaries, and this paved the way for a reduction of state support to just a set of symbolic acts (e.g., the establishment of such holidays as Mother's Day in 1998 and the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity in 2008, and naming 2008 as the Year of Family).

The rhetoric of contemporary official documents is now similar to that of the Soviet period; attention is focused primarily on women, mothers, and children, while the role of husbands and fathers in providing for the welfare of their families is not explicitly promoted. At the same time, and in contrast to the Soviet period, the state, in materially supporting mothers with two or more children, takes the lead in formulating the principles of family policy. In official discourse the "happy family" is the normative family model promoted by the state in the implementation of its policies.²⁸ The "happy family" model requires a legally registered relationship between husband and wife: "a family whose members live in a registered marriage is considered to be a happy one."²⁹ In addition, it must be a complete family: "a happy family should be complete and consist of a married couple (parents) and children."³⁰ It also includes a "reproductive rate": "a happy family should have so many children that the expanded reproduction of the population in the region is provided."³¹ In the rhetoric of earlier documents, terms like a "Russian family"³² and "a family with two or more children"³³ were mainly used. The introduction of the "happy family" category refers to the emergence of the neo-traditional trend in the contemporary Russian family policy, normalizing registered marriages and not taking into account the diversity of other families types (e.g., partnership, single parent, social parenthood).

The state has made its choice in favor of a pronatalist version of family policy that does not take into consideration a number of problems faced by parents, either in the time of birth or in the course of raising children. The state policy which is proclaimed today in fact covers the period "from the conception to the infancy." At the same time a large number of specific

²⁸ The Concept of Public Policy for Young Families, adopted 8 May 2007, Ministry of Education and Science of Russia, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/knigi/koncepciya25.html> (last accessed 30 September 2011).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Zh. Chernova, "Demograficheskii rezerv': Molodaia sem'ia kak ob'ekt gosudarstvennoi politiki," *Zhenshchina v rossiiskom obshchestve* 1 (2010): 123–42; 2 (2010): 26–38.

³² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, "O kontseptsii natsional'noi bezopasnosti."

³³ The Concept of Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025, approved by Presidential Decree on 9 October 2007, No. 1351, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/knigi/koncepciya/koncepciya25.html> (last accessed 30 September 2011).

problems faced by parents in their daily lives stay on the periphery of family policy. A high level of the real family expenses associated with childbirth and child rearing can be primarily attributed to these problems. In Russia the benefits for a child form 1–2 percent of family income and do not guarantee a minimally acceptable level of child welfare. The European experience shows that a 25 percent increase in benefits leads to an increase in fertility of 0.07 percent.³⁴ The insignificant role of the benefits in the composition of family income exposes that many measures of the contemporary family policy can “work” only in situations of social disadvantage. Planning for the birth of a second and subsequent child by highly professional qualified women may be questionable, because “the educated mothers who do not work during maternity leave lose their skills and opportunities for career advancement.”³⁵ In this case the development of a policy oriented to families with two working parents seems to be necessary and more likely effective. It is also necessary to provide special support for women to help them with the implementation of both their maternal and professional responsibilities.

Another problem, which still persists in spite of attempts to remedy the situation, is the severe shortage of openings in state childcare institutions.³⁶ According to the Federal State Statistics Service, the number of children waiting for a place in kindergarten increased by more than 600 percent—from 192,900 people in 1999 to 1,237,900 people in 2006.³⁷ A significant reduction in the number of preschool educational institutions in the 1990s during a period marked by a sharp decline in fertility and lack of opportunity to rely on support from older relatives created a serious problem for parents. This was especially critical in the case of young parents, whose own parents (i.e., the grandparents of a child) were of working age and could not devote much time to their grandchildren. The solution to this problem lies in turning government attention not only to increasing the number of kindergartens, but also to improving the quality of their services.

Along with the housing question—which is relevant for many families, as it was in the Soviet period—the most important issue for family policy is, in my opinion, the imperfection of alimony legislation and the lack of legally binding options for child custody upon divorce. The high divorce rate characteristic of modern Russia should also be considered when developing state

³⁴ Burdiak, Korchagina, Ovcharova, Prokof'eva, and Siniavskaia, “Novye mery semeinoi politiki i ikh vliianie na material'no-imushchestvennoe polozhenie semei s det'mi,” 141.

³⁵ T. Gurko, “Rossiia: Sotsial'naia politika v otnoshenii molodykh roditelei,” *Vlast'* 6 (2008): 11.

³⁶ O. Siniavskaia and A. Sukhova, “Institutsional'nye uslugi po ukhodu za det'mi: Neravenstvo v dostupe,” in Siniavskaia, ed., *Sem'ia v tsentre sotsial'no-demograficheskoi politiki?*, 73–96.

³⁷ *Sotsial'noe polozhenie i uroven' zhizni naseleniia Rossii 2007: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Rosstat, 2007), 364.

actions to support the family. Future parents, mostly mothers, should be sure that in the case of divorce, both they and their children will receive necessary support and attention from the absent father. In addition, the state should be interested in the fact that men/fathers become more involved with their children and attempt to promote a more active role for men in childcare.

Additionally, the government should show a real interest in creating gender equality in the family sphere, where both mother and father have a strong financial and emotional involvement in childcare, both in marriage and in divorce. In its modern version, Russian family policy is aimed at creating and supporting only a traditional concept of the family, while it should be designed to meet the needs of all families, recognize the diversity of family forms, and be more flexibly implemented.

New Pronatalism? The Discourse of Overcoming the Demographic Crisis

In Soviet society, the family and demographic policies were, in fact, synonyms. The Soviet state was consistently concerned about the steady decline in the number of children per family and was interested in increasing the birth rate. Since the 1930s, the main task of the state was to increase fertility levels. The pronatalist nature of Soviet family policy has been noted by many scholars.³⁸ Moreover, an obvious progression in the government's views on these issues can now be discerned. Family and demographic policies are aimed at strengthening the family institution and increasing fertility levels. The differences between the Soviet and modern Russian family policies are found in the actions taken to address the problems. The Soviet state, to a greater extent, focused on the ideological support for traditional motherhood defined in terms of women's civic duty or destiny, as well as on the regulation of reproduction. Today in Russia the focus is on the financial incentives. The latter is aimed at convincing women who would otherwise choose to delay motherhood to choose to have more than one child. Additionally, some significant changes in the content and tone of public debate over reproduction and family relationships have occurred.

³⁸ See, e.g., D. Hoffman, "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Social History* 34 (2000): 35–54; M. Nakachi, "N. S. Khrushchev and the 1944 Soviet Family Law: Politics, Reproduction, and Language," *East European Politics and Societies* 20, no. 1 (2006): 40–68; M. Rivkin-Fish, "From 'Demographic Crisis' to 'Dying Nation': The Politics of Language and Reproduction in Russia," in *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*, ed. H. Gosילו and A. Lanoux (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 151–73; T. Zhurzhenko, "Staraiia ideologiia novoi sem'i: demograficheskii natsionalizm Rossii i Ukrainy," *Semeinye uzy: Modeli dlia sborki*, Vol. 2, ed. S. Ushakin (Moscow: NLO, 2004), 268–97.

M. Rivkin-Fish shows how in the early 2000s the idea of the “national catastrophe” caused by the “anti-people economic reforms of the Russian government” was established in the public mind through the mass media and speeches of the Communist Party and Liberal Democratic Party leaders.³⁹ The “genocide of the Russian people” was presented in quantitative terms, showing declining fertility, increasing mortality, and a dwindling population. Also it is described in terms associated with the deterioration of the nation’s “gene pool” such as the poor health of women and men as potential or actual parents and the ill health of newborns. The rhetoric of the nation’s extinction is actively used in nationalist discourse, linking the size and racial purity of the population with an economic, political, and cultural renaissance in Russia. The nationalist discourse constructs the social panic on demography. It attempts to frame the public concept of the Russian nation in terms of a community that is on the verge of death and linked by a common biological essence and the experience of suffering. This position coincides with the “alarmist” view of the family, which has been presented in academic work.⁴⁰ Scholars, politicians, and other well-known people who share this view of birth rates support the family policy, advocate restrictions on abortion and the introduction of sexual education for school students, attributing them as the cause of deterioration of the demographic situation in Russia.⁴¹

The “alarmist” approach negatively assesses all changes to the family that have arisen since the transition to a market economy and democracy.⁴² This point of view is based on the need of changing the state policy in favor of the complete (two parents and children) and large family; it offers a variety of activities aimed at strengthening and developing a family life to ensure that family interests have priority over the interests of the state and individuals.

³⁹ M. Rivkin-Fish, “From ‘Demographic Crisis’ to ‘Dying Nation,’” 162.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., A. Antonov, ed., *Familisticheskie issledovaniia*, 2 Vols. (Moscow: Knizhnyi dom “Universitet”, 2009); A. Sinel’nikov, V. Medkov, and A. Antonov, *Sem’ia i vera v sotsiologicheskoi izmerenii* (Moscow: Knizhnyi dom “Universitet”, 2009).

⁴¹ The antiabortion campaign has recently gained considerable momentum. In the spring of 2011 the deputies V. Draganov and E. Mizulina amended the draft law “On the Basics of Health Protection of the Citizens of the Russian Federation.” The deputies’ propositions concern: to leave only one social cause abortion, if the pregnancy is a result of sexual abuse; to ban abortion earlier than 7 days from the moment of the referral to the medical institution; to oblige a woman to take a psychologist’s and/or social worker consultation where she will explain the right to refuse abortion; to organize for a woman the visualization of the fetus and listening to its heartbeat. If the amendments are adopted, women’s reproductive rights will be significantly limited. Even the fact that such initiatives have been publicly proposed and supported by ROC representatives points to the increasingly pronatalist orientation of state family policy.

⁴² A. Antonova, ed., *Sotsiologiya sem’i* (Moscow: INFRA-M, 2005), 579.

This conception of family policy existed within academia but was not dominant until the beginning of the 2000s when the “alarmist” approach began to gain increasing popularity and received a complete formulation in policy statements and state public programs.

Those scholars who criticize the discourse of the demographic crisis and oppose pronatalist family policy, calling it undemocratic and inefficient, seem an important exception to this trend.⁴³ They do not agree with the alarmist view of the state of the modern Russian family and seek to expose the “demographic myth” that is widespread in nationalist discourse. These researchers argue that every family has the right to plan its own reproduction. They promote arguments against state pronatalist intervention into family life, which was characteristic of the Soviet family policy.⁴⁴ Comparing Russian and global demographic trends they note that Russia, like other countries, is experiencing a second demographic transition, expressed particularly by fertility decline. Additionally, the authors lay emphasis on the specific causes of morbidity and mortality, including alcohol abuse, cardiovascular diseases, and injuries (though these are more prominent for the male population).⁴⁵ They point out that these challenges require specific government actions aimed at the treatment and prevention of these and other diseases. Improvement of demographic trends will come with the development of social welfare, childcare, and healthcare.⁴⁶ These researchers emphasize the importance of population dynamics for the development of public welfare, such as pension funds, health, and housing, since adequate social support systems will allow Russia to become a competitive player in the global market. All these arguments, however, are not able to fully overcome the nationalist discourse that is (re)produced in the mass media and shapes public opinion.

⁴³ See, e.g., A. Vishnevskii, *Serp i rubl': Konservativnaia modernizatsiia v SSSR* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo dom Gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1998); E. Pain and O. Volkogonova, eds., *Rossiiskaia modernizatsiia: Razmyshleniia o samobytnosti* (Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2008); S. Zakharov, “Russian Federation: From the First to Second Demographic Transition,” *Demographic Research* 19 (2008): 907–72.

⁴⁴ S. Zakharov, “Rost chisla rozhdenii v Rossii zakonchilsia?,” *Demoskop.Weekly*, Feb. 7–20, 2011, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0453/tema06.php> (last accessed 7 October 2011).

⁴⁵ I. Tartakovskaia, “Smertel'naia nosha maskulinnosti,” *Demoskop.Weekly*, June 7–20, 2010, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0425/analit02.php> (last accessed 7 October 2011).

⁴⁶ L. Ovcharova and A. Pushnyak, “Novye mery podderzhki semei s det'mi,” *Demoskop.Weekly*, Nov. 12–25, 2007, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2007/0309/tema01.php> (last accessed 7 October 2011).

Conclusion

A tendency toward neo-traditionalism in modern Russian gender relations has been noted by many researchers since the late 1990s.⁴⁷ Today this trend is perceived as dominant and the institutionalization of traditionalist discourse in family policy has become a *fait accompli*. What does it mean? First of all, ideology of state policy creates patriarchal gender relations, idealizes traditional family model and ascribes it the highest value. For example, according to Dmitrii Medvedev, the main objective of 2008 as the “Year of the Family in Russia” was to “restore the authority of the Russian family that it had at the beginning of the last century.”⁴⁸ Second, Russian neo-traditionalists are characterized by an obvious hostility towards the state policies previously implemented. Soviet family policy is perceived as seeking to destroy the traditional family structure. Third, the variety of functions traditionally performed by the family have been reduced exclusively to reproduction. In the frames of the traditionalist discourse, single-child families are negatively perceived. A family consisting of two parents and three or four children is declared normative. Within this discourse the promotion of multi-child families is given special attention. Fourth, the crisis of the traditional family model is associated with other problems in society, so the need to strengthen family values is proclaimed. Fifth, contemporary Russian family policy is intended to support only one socially desirable type of family (i.e., a family with two parents and three or more children). Increased fertility and population are considered to be the ultimate goals of family policy, making it virtually synonymous with population policy. Pluralization of gender relations, variety of family types, worldwide trends in the demographic, and family behavior stand outside the scope of this discourse.

Thus, the state pays serious attention to family policy, which has acquired particular significance in recent years. Confirmation of this fact can be found in state ideological documents, as well as in the programs prioritizing demographic policy implemented by the state. This is due to both the political and economic situation that creates new—compared to the previous period—conditions for the formation and the implementation of pronatalist state family policies. It is necessary to emphasize again that family policy is still considered to be a demographic one. It is a state’s response to low fertility—the trend established in the late Soviet period. The Russian Government’s in-

⁴⁷ See, e.g., A. Rotkirkh and A. Temkina, “Sovetskie gendernye kontrakty i ikh transformatsiia v sovremennoi Rossii,” in E. Zdravomyslova and A. Temkina, eds., *Rossiiskii gendernyi poriadok*, 169–200; O. Zdravomyslova, *Sem’ia i obshchestvo: Gendernoe izmerenie rossiiskoi transformatsii* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2003).

⁴⁸ Excerpts from transcripts of speeches by the First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitrii Medvedev at a meeting of the organizing committee for the 2008 Year of the Family in Russia, http://rost.ru/official/2007/09/040000_10690.shtml (last accessed 1 November 2011).

creased attention toward family policy shows a number of clearly defined expectations associated primarily with the realization of the reproductive function and suggests that the “patriarchal renaissance,” a hallmark of gender relations in modern Russia, is taking quite an obvious and institutionalized form.

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