

Putin's Glamour Deemed Threat to National Security

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In 2009, during his stint as prime minister, President Vladimir Putin flirted with being a columnist at literary magazine *Russky Pioner*, famous for its ostentatious parties. A vehicle for the literary ambition of the Russian elite, its contributors have also included presidential aide Vladislav Surkov and Alfa Group chairman Mikhail Fridman. Back then, it seemed, glossy magazines were fashionable.

On Wednesday, Putin signed into law a bill that will limit foreign ownership of all Russian media assets to 20 percent, meaning most major publishing houses that publish fashion and style magazines, as well as the country's leading independent newspapers, will have to change their ownership structure.

While the law was criticized as being aimed at tackling Russia's remaining independent

business news outlets, above all Vedomosti and Forbes, State Duma deputies put forward the case that glossy magazines present a greater danger to Russia's national security than newspapers covering politics and society, sparking a discussion over whether the culture of glamour is a threat to Russia.

In his column in government newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta, Pyotr Orlov warned that fashion magazines and the world of glamour could pose a threat to Russia's security by making national pride and patriotism appear unfashionable.

"If respecting your own country becomes unfashionable, what will happen to us?" he despaired in an article titled "Glamorous Misery," published at the beginning of this month.

Orlov accused Russian fashion designers Ulyana Sergeyenko and Vika Gazinskaya, former Harper's Bazaar Russia editor Miroslava Duma and other celebrities and style bloggers of a lack of patriotism, and claimed they were working to please the Western public.

The column caused an uproar, with prominent opposition-minded socialite Ksenia Sobchak publishing a response in the lifestyle magazine Snob, founded by oligarch-turned-politician Mikhail Prokhorov.

"If you make the country fashionable and advanced, absolutely everybody will respect it. In contrast to love, respect has to be earned," Sobchak wrote.

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Sobchak and Orlov embody the two camps that Russian society has divided itself into: one arguing for self-imposed isolation in order to retain what is true and traditional to Russian culture, and the other looking for ways to make Russia relevant and attractive internationally.

Nikolai Uskov, editor-in-chief at Snob and one of the originators of the term "Putin's Glamour" — used to describe the glitzy, upwardly mobile section of society that emerged under Putin — said the culture of glamour and glossy magazines translates "important civilizational values."

"Glossy magazines carry a system of values, I would not underestimate their importance," he told The Moscow Times.

In defiance of the rhetoric coming out of the State Duma, Russian Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week will launch next Wednesday.

"What has happened is that Russia has become more interesting to people — press and buyers — in the outside world, we have seen a surge of interest since last season," Alexander Shumsky, head of the fashion week, told The Moscow Times.

According to Shumsky, a surge of patriotism in fashion has also been evident.

"What is made in Russia is perceived unambiguously well by consumers today," he said.

Tony Ward, a Lebanese-Italian fashion designer who has worked for Dior, Karl Lagerfeld

and Chloe, will present his collection in Moscow this year.

"Russians, unlike very traditional European consumers, are adventurous," Ward, who claimed he has many clients among the Russian elite, told The Moscow Times.

"It is a traditionalist country, but Russians know how to follow the trend. This is the paradox of the situation," he said.

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