

Between being Witty and being Pretty: The Female Body in Political Calendars in Contemporary Russia and Belarus

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***Abstract:** This article examines the ways in which the female body functions and operates in female political participation in contemporary Russia and Belarus, via an exploration of one prominent genre of visual political representations of women: political calendars featuring depictions of women. A range of such calendars produced in Russia and Belarus in 2010-11 are analyzed and compared to examples produced elsewhere at around the same time. All of the calendars examined in this article rely heavily on images of the female body to convey their particular message, achieve their purpose, and attract an audience. This may involve explicitly sexualizing or intentionally de-sexualizing the women depicted in the calendars; either way, however, the body remains key in defining women's relationship to politics and the public space. The article sets out to investigate how these calendars can illuminate, and also how they may serve to deepen, paradoxes of female political participation linked to the (in)compatibility of female embodiment and political agency. To understand these paradoxes, women's political participation, especially as it is expressed in political calendars featuring images of women, is placed here in the framework of the artificially created and imposed choice of being either "witty" or "pretty"—a choice that few men have to face, but that few women manage to avoid.*

In November 2014, Belarusian activist Ol'ga Karach, leader of the oppositional civic movement "Our Home" and possible future candidate for the Belarusian presidency, launched a social media campaign aimed at using a visual image to generate support for her