

# **The Women's International Democratic Federation World Congress of Women, Moscow, 1963: Women's Rights and World Politics during the Cold War**

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## **Abstract**

My thesis focuses on the June 1963 WIDF World Congress of Women that took place in Moscow, in combination with the successful space flight made by Valentina Tereshkova, the world's first woman astronaut, just a few days before the WIDF Congress. I explore the meaning of these combined events in the context of Soviet leader Khrushchev's policies of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition.

Based on my research of the archives of the Soviet Women's Committee (the Soviet member of the WIDF which organized the 1963 Congress) and Soviet and American media, I argue that the Soviet Union successfully used the June 1963 events as an opportunity for public diplomacy, and showcased the USSR to the world as the champion of women's rights. While most of the literature on the history of the Cold War is still gender blind, I attempt to show not only that the competition (peaceful and not) between the United States and the Soviet Union went beyond missiles, satellites, technology, or even agriculture, but also that their competition regarding the treatment of women by the 1960s was a key part of their rivalry.

The thesis also hopes to make a meaningful contribution to the historiography of international women's organizations in the postwar era, and in particular to the still largely unwritten history of the biggest global women's organization, the Women's International Democratic Federation.

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# Contents

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1. Literature Review .....	9
Chapter 2. Historical Background.....	17
2.1 – The nuclear arms race and the Cuban Missile Crisis .....	18
2.2. Destalinization .....	21
2.2.1. Domestic policies: ‘helping the women’ .....	24
2.2.2 Foreign policy: peaceful coexistence .....	25
Chapter 3. The 1963 WIDF World Congress of Women in Moscow as an Exercise of Soviet Public Diplomacy.....	32
3.1. The 1963 WIDF World Congress of Women in Moscow: an Overview .....	33
3.2 Space Flight of the First Woman Cosmonaut as the Soviet “Gender Victory” .....	42
3.3. The World Congress of Women as an Exercise of the Soviet Public Diplomacy; Valentina Tereshkova as an Embodiment of the “Soviet Dream” and a Soviet “Gender Weapon” .....	53
Conclusions .....	65
Bibliography .....	67

# Introduction

This thesis focuses on the Fifth World Congress of Women (June 24-29, 1963) organized by the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), and held in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses in Moscow. The WIDF was founded in November 1945 in Paris by women members of the French Communist resistance. Its goals were “the fight against fascism; for democracy and peace; for the extension of women’s rights; for the improvement of the condition of children”.<sup>1</sup> The organization, which still exists, in spite of being less active than before the demise of socialism, was the largest post-war international women's organization and can take credit for a number of landmark women's rights initiatives on the level of the United Nations (de Haan, 2010).

A few days before the 1963 WIDF Congress in Moscow, Valentina Tereshkova from the USSR became the world’s first woman astronaut, and she was invited to and celebrated at the Congress. As I will demonstrate, the Soviet media and official discourse linked the two events, evincing a very strong message that the Soviet Union was the country that supported women’s emancipation. The thesis will show and argue that the 1963 WIDF Congress and its links with Tereshkova’s flight took place in the context of and were embedded in Nikita Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition with the USA, and in that competition were a resounding success for the Soviet Union.

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<sup>1</sup> In: Introduction, Second Women’s International Congress WIDF 1948, by Women’s International Democratic Federation (Paris, France: Women’s International Democratic Federation, 1949).

### *What my thesis is about*

In this thesis, I argue that the Fifth World Congress of Women organized by the Women's International Democratic Federation was an exercise of public diplomacy on the part of the Soviet Union. At the Congress, a number of Soviet officials, including the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, presented an overwhelmingly positive picture of women's situation in the Soviet Union, claiming that it was the best in the world (and thereby implying its superiority vis-à-vis the United States). Yet the role of the primary "promoter" of the positive image of the Soviet Union in front of a huge audience of women activists from all over the world was assigned to Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman cosmonaut in the world, who had successfully finished her space venture just five days before the start of the Fifth World Congress of Women and was invited to attend it as an honorable delegate. Soviet media before and during the World Congress of Women portrayed Tereshkova as an embodiment of what I call the "Soviet dream" (the counterpart of the "American dream"), a woman who, according to her image in the Soviet media, came from a very simple background and achieved unprecedented success, enjoying the fruit of Soviet technology, thanks to the positive environment provided to women under socialism.

I argue that Tereshkova's flight was a "gender victory" rather than a technological victory of the Soviet Union in its struggle for ideological supremacy over the United States. Convening the Congress on its territory and in that period of time provided the USSR with an opportunity to demonstrate its profound interest in advancement of women's rights, with Tereshkova serving as the "living proof" of this commitment. Thus, the thesis proposes to view the Fifth World Congress of Women of the Women's International Democratic Federation in the

framework of the peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition policies, promoted by the First Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev (1955 to 1964) in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. It also underscores the existence of a strong gender dimension of the Cold War, which is generally overlooked in the literature.

In the thesis, I refrain from using a term “propaganda” as it is imbued with a negative connotation (even though in the USSR it was not), and substitute it with “public diplomacy.” The definition of the term provided by the American Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy in 1965, just two years after the Moscow Congress of Women had taken place, reads:

Public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of cultural communications. Central to public diplomacy is the transnational flow of information and ideas. (Edward R. Murrow Center. 1965, cited in Waller 2007)

According to the 1987 U.S. Department of State definition, “public diplomacy refers to government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television” (U.S. Dept of State dictionary, p.85, cited in Waller 2007). Public diplomacy presupposes the presentation of a country in a positive light. “We underline those aspects of American life and culture which facilitate sympathetic understanding of our policies,” wrote

Edward R. Murrow, then a member of the U.S. Information Agency, in 1963 (cited in Waller 2007).

### ***Methodology and sources***

The arguments in the thesis are based on analysis of a variety of sources. First and foremost, I have used the Moscow-based archive of the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC), a founding member of the Women's International Democratic Federation and the main organizer of the 1963 Congress. The dozens of documents related to the 1963 Congress available in this archive include a number of speeches, including Nikita Khrushchev's Address to the World Congress of Women and the speech by Valentina Tereshkova, transcripts of the plenary sessions of the Congress, speeches of the delegates, reports submitted by the participants, documents adopted by the Congress, as well as correspondence between the organizers and various Soviet and foreign organizations. I use these historical documents to provide basic information about the World Congress of Women and to build up the arguments of the thesis (indeed, the SWC archive is very rich, and I will be using here only a small part of the material I have seen).

The thesis also includes textual analysis of the coverage of Valentina Tereshkova's flight in Soviet and US printed media. The Soviet media sources include the newspapers *Pravda* (which was an organ of the Central Committee of the CPSU and whose position reflected the opinion of the government) and *Izvestiya* (published by the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR) as well as the magazine *Sovetskaya Zhenshina* (Soviet Woman) published by the Soviet Women's Committee. The American sources are the daily newspaper *The New York*



*Times* and the magazines *Newsweek*, available in the Open Society Archives in Budapest, Hungary, and *LIFE*, available online.

Supporting literature includes studies that explore and elaborate upon the global political climate at the time of the Congress (in particular the Cold War) as well as the domestic political change in the Soviet Union, following the death of Stalin in 1953 and the coming to power of Nikita Khrushchev in 1955. The historical context helps explain the attitude of the Soviet government towards the World Congress of Women as an ample opportunity to engage in public diplomacy and promote an image of the USSR as a state standing at the global forefront of women's rights. Apart from this, the thesis relies on the few available sources that elaborate upon the activities of the Women's International Democratic Federation.

***Why studying the 1963 WIDF Congress and why in the context of the Cold War and Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence and competition?***

Congresses organized by the WIDF were fora at which members of women's organizations could meet, report about women's situation in their countries, learn from each other's experience and identify differences and commonalities between women's concerns in the world. The Fifth Moscow World Congress of Women was one of such congresses. Little has been written about it - the bits and pieces of information are scattered in different publications. Ilic (2010) discusses it as an example of cultural exchange that existed between "Eastern" and "Western" women in spite of the Cold War, in other words as one of the gaps in the Iron Curtain and a challenge to its seemingly impenetrable nature. Differently from Ilic, I argue that the WCW was much more than a form of cultural exchange between "East" and "West" and that to

understand its meaning we have to analyze the contemporary Soviet and Cold War politics, which will allow us to understand the importance of gender as an area of Cold War competition. I also examine the meaning of the link between the flight of Valentina Tereshkova and the World Congress of Women. In order to support my argument, I provide a short overview of the political background of the time, which is crucially important in order to explain the welcoming attitude of the Soviet government toward the Congress.

The thesis contributes to literature from a number of fields, first of all Cold War historiography. This literature generally does not include a gender dimension, aside from some isolated cases. The thesis also makes a contribution to the historiography of women's international organizations, in particular the yet unwritten history of the WIDF, which is highly underresearched. De Haan (2010) notes that it was the WIDF that initiated the 1975 UN International Women's Year and pushed for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In spite of that, Western scholarship has been silent about the WIDF, focusing instead almost exclusively on the "Western" women's organizations. Considering the scope of the WIDF's activities and the influence it exerted on both women's rights-related affairs and politics in the global arena, the amount of available scholarship is disproportionately miniscule. While some isolated facts about the impact of politics on the 1963 Congress are known (Ilic 2010), they are not sufficient to understand the full scope of the impact of the Congress within the Soviet Union and elsewhere, nor to fully gauge the influence global politics exerted on the Congress. My study, therefore, will contribute to the existing historiography of international women's movements by providing information about a major but highly underresearched actor. It will allow us to rethink the role of the international women's

movement in the broader contexts of world politics of the time. Thirdly it will contribute to our understanding of gender in the competition between the two superpowers during the Cold War.

### *Structure of the Thesis*

In chapter 1, Literature Review, I review the bodies of literature which my thesis builds upon and aspires to contribute to. This literature includes works that deal with the history of the Cold War (or, more narrowly – the history of the peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition policy of the Soviet Union). Furthermore, I review the literature that has in one way or another dealt with the history of the WIDF and the Congress, and thereby show the multiplicity of gaps in knowledge about the WIDF in general, and the 1963 Congress in particular. In Chapter 2, I focus on the contemporary political climate of the early 1960s, thus providing the historical-political background that is crucial for understanding why the Soviet Union welcomed the Congress on its territory. This chapter primarily elaborates upon Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition, and the domains in which this competition was expressed, such as technology, cultural exchange, and, finally, gender. Chapter 3 deals with the Fifth World Congress of Women as an exercise of Soviet public diplomacy in the time of peaceful competition between the Soviet Union and the USA. Subchapter 3.1 provides basic information about the 1963 Congress, underlines its tremendous scope, and examines the character of issues discussed and the decisions arrived at during the Congress. Subchapter 3.2 provides biographical information about Valentina Tereshkova, thus making a foundation for the argument that Tereshkova was the embodiment of the "Soviet dream."<sup>2</sup> By analyzing the Soviet and American media reactions to Tereshkova's flight, the chapter argues that the first woman's space venture

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<sup>2</sup> Cf: Reid 2009, 83.

was a “gender victory” (rather than a technological victory) of the Soviet Union over the United States. Subchapter 3.3 examines the way in which the link between Tereshkova’s flight and the World Congress of Women was established in the media of the Soviet Union and examines the messages about the Soviet Union conveyed by Tereshkova at the Congress.

# **Chapter 1. Literature Review**

My thesis, broadly defined, explores the gender dimension of the Cold War; more narrowly defined, it deals with the gender dimension of the peaceful competition between the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. This chapter elaborates upon the fields of literature that the thesis builds on and aspires to contribute to. The relevant areas include the history of the Cold War, the evolution of the gender question within the Soviet Union, and the history of women's activism within the USA. The other main field is that of the history of the international women's movement, particularly of the post-1945 era. My work aspires to contribute to the mostly still unwritten history of a major post-war international women's organization, the WIDF, of which we currently only have some articles about specific parts of its history. Below I will discuss the main characteristics of the fields mentioned just now as they relate to my study of the 1963 WIDF Moscow World Congress of Women as an exercise of the Soviet Union public diplomacy in the period of Cold War when, in the framework of the peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition policy, the two superpowers competed about a number of issues, including gender equality and women's well-being.

## **Cold War Historiography**

Historical literature on the Cold War largely overlooks the gender dimension of the struggle between the two superpowers for dominance in the world arena. Until the 1980s, this literature described the competition between the two countries in terms of arms, economics, agriculture, et cetera. Since the 1980s, historians have increasingly studied the cultural dimension of the Cold War competition. Examples include such authors as Hans Krabbendam and Giles Scott-Smith

(2003) who wrote a book on the cultural Cold War in Western Europe between the end of the Second World War and 1960, or David Caute (2005), who traced the history of cultural competition between the superpowers after the Second World War. In recent years, leading mainstream Cold War scholars such as Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn Leffler have recognized the importance of gender and other previously neglected factors in studying the Cold War. In an overview article on Cold War historiography published in the *American Historical Review* in 1999, Melvyn P. Leffler (1999, 501-502) noted the increasing scholarship on gender and the likelihood that this scholarship (but also that on “race” and similar categories) would undermine the single master narrative about the Cold War. Odd Arne Westad (2000, 10-11) recently argued in an influential book that “gender relations were closer to the core of the conflict both in terms of representation and in language than we have previously thought.” Gender equality, in the words of historian Helen Laville (2002, 113), became an “important [Cold War] battleground.” Despite this recognition from prominent Cold War scholars, women and gender still remain only marginally included in mainstream Cold War historiography.<sup>3</sup> The various ways in which gender was part of and shaped the Cold War competition are only beginning to be recognized. One of the examples of such recognition is Susan E Reid’s article elaborating upon the implications of the 1959 “kitchen debate” between First Secretary Khrushchev of the USSR and U.S. Vice-President Nixon.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Gender Question within the USSR**

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<sup>3</sup> As pointed out by De Haan 2010, 551.

<sup>4</sup> The kitchen debate and Reid’s article are discussed in Chapter 2.

Another field relevant for my work is the literature exploring the history of the “woman question” in the USSR. Even though the Soviet “woman question” and the situation faced by women within the Soviet Union have been extensively covered both within the Soviet Union and in Anglo-American studies,<sup>5</sup> this literature does not or hardly at all include the Soviet Women’s Committee, established in 1941 as the Soviet Women’s Anti-Fascist Committee and the only official women’s organization in the USSR, nor the Soviet Women’s Committee’s role in the Women’s International Democratic Federation. Consequently, the 1963 World Congress of Women, organized by the Soviet Women’s Committee on behalf of the WIDF, is left out of the picture, as are questions about its importance in Soviet history, including the boast it gave to the discourse on socialist support for women’s equality.

### **The Cold War and US Women’s Activism**

In as far as there is literature about the Cold War, women’s organizations and gender, it generally focuses on one country.<sup>6</sup> Helen Laville, for instance, examines the international activities of American women's organizations in her book *Cold War Women*. The book is, however, rather written from an American perspective, and, while it does mention the WIDF, it does so from a rather negative perspective, viewing the WIDF as a communist organization and hence dangerous. *Red Feminism* by Kate Weigand discusses the negative impact of the Cold War U.S. phobia of communists on the activities of “communist feminists” in the country. In contrast

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Noonan, Norma C. “The Bolshevik Legacy and Russian Women’s Movements”. In *Russian Women in Politics and Society*; edited by Wilma Rul and Norma C. Noonan. London: Greenwood Press, 1996; Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid, Lynne Atwood, eds. *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> The question of how the animosities between the two countries affected women’s organizations around the globe, and in particular international women’s organizations, has hardly been asked yet. The work-in-progress of Francisca de Haan is one of the few exceptions here.

to Laville, Weigand “rehabilitates” the WIDF. She states that the Congress of American Women (the US member organization of the WIDF destroyed in 1949/50 for its alleged anti-American activities)<sup>7</sup> was not precisely a Communist Party tool and claims that the second feminist wave, trying to distance itself from the communists in general and the WIDF in particular, in fact owed some of its foundations and vocabulary to these women. Both books, in spite of taking rather different perspectives on the “communist feminists”, nevertheless focus on the activities in the United States, leaving the rest of the world aside. The work of Landon R.Y. Storrs (2007) similarly focuses on the impact of the Cold War within the USA.

### **The History of the International Women’s Movement in the Post-1945 Era, and in Particular the History of the WIDF**

Most importantly, I believe, the thesis aspires to contribute to the history of international women’s movements in general and the not-yet-existent history of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (which convened the World Congress of Women) in particular.

The majority of publications on the history of women's movements fail to give much information about the activities of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). In spite of the scope of the activities of the Federation (as briefly mentioned in the Introduction), Western scholarship has been mostly silent about the WIDF, focusing instead nearly exclusively on the “western” women's organizations. Isolated pieces of the WIDF history are scattered around various publications. Those writers that do acknowledge its existence usually do so within the limits of one or two pages - and comment on its role as a “politicized” participant of

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<sup>7</sup> For more details, see De Haan 2010.



the Cold War. Authors of books and articles on women's history, specifically focusing on the history of global women's movement, such as Leila Rupp (1997), Karen Offen (2000), and Els Flour (2005), refer to the WIDF episodically and seem to treat it with mistrust, preferring to focus in-depth on the “western” organizations that avoided association with the WIDF.

In histories of such organizations, the WIDF is merely an episodic actor. One of the chapters of the book *Women Changing the World: A history of the International Council of Women*, which is devoted to narrating the history of the ICW, briefly mentions the WIDF. Because of its anti-fascist “aura”, as Flour puts it, the WIDF attracted women with various opinions, in spite of the fact that founding of the organization was an initiative coming from “Moscow” and despite the organization’s communist agenda. However, according to Flour (42), “communist associations were soon the only ones to remain.” The ICW considered the WIDF to be an unreliable competitor, and the author rather uncritically reproduces that view.

In her 1997 book *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, Leila J. Rupp “explores the complex process at work as women from far-flung countries came together in transnational women's organizations and constructed an international collective identity” in the twentieth century (3). She recognizes three major organizations that were the major players in the pre-1940 transnational arena of women's movement: the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women (originally called the International Woman Suffrage Alliance), and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Not much discussion is devoted to the pro-communist WIDF, which Rupp gazes over when elaborating upon post-war developments in the global women's movement. The reader is presented with the opinion that members of the International Alliance of Women had about the

WIDF: a feminist organization with an anti-fascist agenda (here Rupp notes that anti-fascist in that context meant communist), with quite old-fashioned views, but not impossible to cooperate with. The WIDF, she states, “continued the well-worn socialist tradition of hostility to the bourgeois women's movement.” (Rupp, 47). The opposition of the two camps, induced by the Cold War, contributed to “increased global organizing,” especially in the light of the growing number of states that shed Western colonial domination (Rupp, 47). This author, too, reproduces the view of the Western women’s organizations towards the WIDF without a critical rethinking of the role of both sides.

Similarly, Karen Garner’s 2010 book *Shaping a Global Women's Agenda: Women's NGOs and Global Governance* includes merely a page on the WIDF. In a chapter about postwar Allied reconstruction projects, Garner elaborates on the activities of the World Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). The WIDF, which was “sympathetic to the USSR” and “set itself up as an ‘Eastern’ counterpoint to the Western-led women’s international organizations,” is mentioned there because Ruth Woodsmall, general secretary of the World YWCA and advisor of the US delegate to the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women, was asked by the US State Department to investigate the WIDF and its activities in the Middle East (Garner 2010, 168). The US State Department “feared that the meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to be held in Beirut .... [might] be used by the USSR to agitate against the United States in the Middle East,” and consequently (unsuccessfully) opposed the granting of UN consultative status to the WIDF, which they saw as “a tool of the Soviet Union” and a source of Soviet propaganda (Garner 2010, 168).

In spite of being a “significant newcomer” to the group of women's international NGOs,

as Flour (42) has put it, the WIDF nevertheless has enjoyed little attention from historians, as shown above. It is only in recent years that some accounts dealing exclusively with the WIDF started to appear. Two authors have so far been trying to “break the silence” about activities of the organization: Francisca de Haan (2009, 2010) and Melanie Ilic (2011). As de Haan (2010) argues, the silence about the WIDF has its roots in the fact that Western historiography of international women's organizations continues to be shaped by what she calls Cold War paradigms. In line with these, the “western” organizations have been viewed as apolitical (a notion challenged by de Haan [2010, 564], who talks of the “self-proclaimed political neutrality” of these organizations), whereas the WIDF was seen and rejected as deeply politicized and communist, rather than “feminist.” She also suggests (2009, 255) that considering the WIDF to be a mere “tool of the Soviet Union” is simplistic and underestimates the complexity of the situation. Carol Harrington (2010) has similarly denied the viability of considering the WIDF a Soviet instrument, but, as in most literature, there is hardly more than a paragraph in her book dealing with the WIDF.

Melanie Ilic devoted her 2011 article to a discussion of two of the WIDF International Women’s Congresses, held in Moscow in 1963 and in Helsinki in 1969. Ilic discusses these women’s conferences as examples of cultural exchange between women from both sides of the Iron Curtain. The depth of her analysis is, however, insufficient for understanding the possible impact of the 1963 Congress (since I haven’t studied the WIDF 1969 Congress, I am not commenting on her treatment of that Congress). Regarding the 1963 Congress, I argue that it was not just an example of cultural exchange between the East and the West – but, more than that, an exercise of Soviet public diplomacy. I also make a larger connection to the historical context in which the Congress took place, differently from Ilic, and discuss the significance of

Tereshkova's space flight and how it became connected to the 1963 Congress.

This thesis builds on the above-mentioned writings by de Haan and Ilic, and aspires to make a contribution to the history of the WIDF that has just started to be written. It also explores one of the sides of the gender dimension of the Cold War in general, and of the peaceful coexistence policy in particular. In the next chapter, I will provide historical background for my study of the 1963 WIDF Moscow Congress as an important moment in the struggle of two superpowers for ideological supremacy on the global scale.

## Chapter 2. Historical Background

This chapter provides a historical-political background of the period in which the 1963 Moscow Fifth World Congress of Women (WCW) of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) took place. It is crucial, for the purposes of my argument, to elaborate on the global political climate of the time, particularly the Cold War arms and space race, as well as the domestic and foreign policies of the Soviet Union. I do not include all events of the time related to the Cold War, but will focus on those most closely related to my topic. The questions that this chapter aims to answer are: "What was the political climate in the world and in the Soviet Union in the period during which the Fifth Moscow World Congress of Women took place? How does knowledge about this broader political climate help us understand the Soviet authorities' attitude toward the WCW and what opportunity it represented for them?"

The historical background provided in this chapter includes USSR policies under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, in particular de-Stalinization, peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition of countries with different social systems. Subchapter 2.1 briefly describes the events that led to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, since it was a vivid expression of the Cold War military confrontation, and the direct reason for President Kennedy and First Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev to start rethinking their policies. Subchapter 2.2 delineates the process of de-Stalinization started by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956. Section 2.2.1 elaborates upon the change in domestic policy that was part of de-Stalinization, whereas section 2.2.2 discusses foreign policies, primarily peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition of countries with different social systems.

## ***2.1 – The nuclear arms race and the Cuban Missile Crisis***

Throughout the 1950s, in the quest for global supremacy, the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a severe arms race, accompanied by the development of ever-more destructive nuclear weapons. The destructive power of these weapons far exceeded that of the nuclear bombs that had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. When in 1949 the Soviet Union devised its own nuclear bomb, President Truman gave American scientists the green light to devise a new, far more powerful weapon. It was clear that a new era – that of the hydrogen bomb, or in short, H-bomb – had arrived, when in 1952 the U.S. scientists achieved their first thermonuclear explosion, hundreds of times more destructive than the atomic weapons used earlier. In order to reciprocate, the Soviet Union devised its own bomb, attempting to exhibit that there was no technological gap between the two superpowers. In 1953, the Soviet Union was, in fact, significantly behind the United States, if one takes into account the number of the bombs it possessed. In 1955, two years after Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev became the First Secretary of the CPSU. In spite of Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinization and peaceful coexistence, it soon became clear that the new Soviet leader, while having acknowledged the oppression under Stalin as fundamentally wrong, did not hesitate to use military force to suppress dissent by resorting to weapons, as in the case of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and that the Cold War was there to stay. The leader of the USSR masterfully deceived the United States into thinking that his country was not behind in terms of arms possession. This only instigated a further escalation of the arms race, forcing the U.S. to produce more and more missiles. Things got even worse when on 26 August 1957 the Soviet Union tested the first intercontinental

ballistic missile in the world, for the time being indeed leaving the United States behind in the competition (Judge and Langdon 2011).

In 1957, shortly after the significant Soviet victory in the arms race, the space race was started. It began with the Soviet Union launching the first satellite in the world, Sputnik I, on October 4, 1957. This news was “devastating for the Americans. It undermined their faith in their own science and educational system” (Judge and Langdon 2011, 114). In November, the USSR already launched the second satellite – this time, a bigger one, with a dog on board. Only in January 1958 did the rivaling superpower manage to launch its first satellite (ibid).

The military competition between the United States and the Soviet Union made the world feel like it was constantly threatened by the possibility of war. This danger was probably at its highest in 1962. After the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro succeeded in 1959, the relationship between the United States and Cuba began to sour, with eventual termination of their diplomatic ties in 1961. Instead, the leftist regime built an alliance with the Soviet Union, which provided protection and a market for the sugar that Cuba lost in the United States. The Soviet Union gained a site for its military bases in the Caribbean. Having an ally of the main enemy “in the backyard” was not something that the US was taking lightly. The CIA, deciding to rely on anti-Castro Cubans, planned an invasion of Cuba, with the aim to overthrow Castro. What came to be known as the Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961 turned out to be a failure for the United States. This, combined with the fact that the Soviet Union had just launched a rocket with the first man in space, Yuri Gararin, only aggravated the situation (Judge and Langdon 2011).

At the Vienna Summit of June 1961, where the leaders of the two superpowers, First Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev and President Kennedy met, the latter admitted that Bay of Pigs was a mistake. However, he did not make a promise that attacks on the Soviet ally would not be repeated. Khrushchev, witnessing the continuing arms build-up in the United States, decided that the best possible solution to defend Cuba was to place missiles there. The agreement on placement of arms in Cuba was reached between Khrushchev and Castro in spring 1962 (Judge and Langdon 2011). Kennedy was repeatedly warned that the Soviet Union was placing its missiles in Cuba, and yet did not believe these reports. In October 1962, a U.S. spy plane flew over the island, confirming the rumors that Kennedy had been refusing to believe. In search for ways to have the Soviets remove the missiles from the threateningly close Cuba, Kennedy opted for a naval quarantine of the island. Khrushchev warned that the U.S. ships would be sunk by Soviet submarines. On October 23, 1963 “the world watched in spellbound terror as Cuba-bound Soviet vessels approached American ships” (Judge and Langdon 2011, 148). Suddenly, the Soviet submarines turned around, because Khrushchev chose to avoid this dangerous confrontation. Khrushchev in addition feared that, if they are stopped and searched, the lagging of the USSR behind the USA in terms of military technology would become all too obvious (Judge and Langdon 2011). Eventually, after a series of letters and some more tensions, an agreement between Kennedy and Khrushchev was struck – at the price of holding the whole world in fear of nuclear war for a week.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was one many expressions of the military competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, but perhaps the most severe one. Putting the world on the brink of possible nuclear annihilation, it revealed the bitterness of the confrontation between



the two superpowers. Four years later, a 1966 American book called *Patterns of Competitive Coexistence*, contained the following passage:

A considerable number of experts and laymen believe that for the first time in human history, mankind is confronted with the possibility of total self-destruction. The all-out use of nuclear weapons in total war, triggered either by accident, misunderstanding, miscalculation, irrational act, or escalation, is equated with automatic mutual annihilation. Under such a “balance of terror” condition, leaders of both the United States and the Soviet Union seem to realize the inherent threat subsisting in nuclear policies, not only to the survival of their own people, but to that of humanity as a whole (Kim 1966, 5-6).

Because of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the way it highlighted the “balance of terror,” vast numbers of people around the world realized the viability of the policy of peaceful coexistence that Nikita Khrushchev had proposed in 1956. The concepts of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition will be discussed in the subsequent subchapters.

## **2.2. *Destalinization***

Prior to elaborating Nikita Khrushchev’s policy of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition, it is crucial to discuss the profound political change in the Soviet Union that preceded and allowed it. This subchapter will elaborate on the process of de-Stalinization and the domestic and foreign policy changes that it brought about.

Three years after Joseph Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953, First Secretary of CPSU Nikita Khrushchev started a new era in Soviet politics and policies. On 14 February 1956, during the

XXth CPSU Congress, Khrushchev gave a speech which marked the start of profound change in the Soviet policies: namely, de-Stalinization. Khrushchev not only spoke about the late Stalin without reverence, but also chose not to mention him in any way in his General Report. Instead, he pointed out a number of corruptive consequences of the personality cult that had characterized Stalin's reign:

The Central Committee has decisively condemned as alien to Marxism-Leninism the cult of personality, which transforms this or that leader into a hero-miracle worker and simultaneously plays down the role of the party and the popular masses, leading to a reduction in their creative activity. The propagation of the cult of personality reduced the role of collective leadership in the party and led at times to serious errors in our work (quoted in Thompson 1997, 154).

After Stalin's death, the victims of his repression were returning from the GULAG to their homes, bringing together with them knowledge about Stalin's politics of terror (Thompson 1997, 154). Khrushchev realized that the truth about Stalin's crimes could not remain hidden forever, and that it was in the interest of the party to confront and acknowledge the past before it had no other choice but to do so because of external circumstances (Thompson 1997, 155). His idea to bring up these issues at the Congress met with severe opposition from his colleagues in the highest echelons of the Communist Party. Open discussion of the Stalinist past was not sanctioned by the Party leaders because they feared the repercussions this might have for them. Like Khrushchev himself, they also once had been Stalin's supporters. Therefore, Khrushchev decided to deliver the message but to keep it secret, not allowing the information to leak and in that way to threaten the reputation of his colleagues. What came to be known as Khrushchev's

“Secret Speech” was delivered at a closed session of the XXth Party Congress, on its last day, in the first hours of 25 February 1956 (Tompson 1997, 156). The past, which the Party elite wanted to keep silence about, was finally raised by Khrushchev. He demolished Stalin’s reputation, and in particular condemned Stalin’s repression of the most prominent CP members (Tompson 1997, 156-157). Up until 1934, claimed Khrushchev, Stalin heeded Lenin’s advice and was a good Communist leader, but then he created a harmful personality cult, starting to disproportionately distance himself from the Party and thereby undermine the principle of collective leadership. As a consequence, said Khrushchev, Stalin committed multiple domestic and foreign policy mistakes (from disastrous agricultural policy to spoiling the relations with Yugoslavia) and eliminated committed, capable Party cadres (Thatcher 2011). Khrushchev, therefore, called for re-evaluation of the whole Party history and a subsequent gradual rectification of the wrongs that the personality cult had caused in multiple areas (Thatcher 2011).

In spite of Khrushchev’s warning that no one outside of the party should find out about the speech, lest the enemies of the Party take advantage of its weaknesses, very soon it became known not only in the Soviet Union, but around the world (Tompson 1997, 158). The Secret Speech was “a genuine and profound reflection on what had gone wrong in the Stalin period” (Thatcher 2011, 112). De-Stalinization, beginning with the XXth Party Congress, was pronounced successful by Khrushchev at the XXIIth Party Congress in 1961, which was followed by the removal of Stalin’s body from the mausoleum, where he had lain next to Lenin (Thatcher 2011). In the words of William Taubman, author of an award-winning biography of Khrushchev, Khrushchev’s Secret Speech was “the bravest and most reckless thing he ever did. The Soviet regime never fully recovered, and neither did he” (cited in Thatcher 2011, 12).

As “leader of a new era”, as Sari Autio-Sarasmö has called him, Khrushchev had a number of tasks: “to strengthen the Soviet Union’s status as a superpower in world politics” and “to boost its economic and ideological role as a leader of the Eastern bloc” (Autio-Sarasmö, 133). De-Stalinization thus presupposed a number of changes in the internal and external policies of the Soviet Union, and the next sections will elaborate upon this.

### **2.2.1. Domestic policies: ‘helping the women’**

The process of de-Stalinization induced a number of domestic policies that signified a general liberalization of life in the Soviet Union (as far as artistic expression was concerned, for example) and aimed at improving the living standard of the population, in particular women’s living standards. Khrushchev “pledged to ‘help women’ and linked his country’s transition to communism to the attainment of high living standards for all Soviet citizens” (Reid 2009, 84). For decades before Khrushchev’s coming to power, the Soviet leadership had seemed reluctant to invest in improving the living standards of its citizens. In the 1930s, the industrialization forced masses of people to move from rural to urban areas, creating a housing shortage. The situation was only exacerbated by the Second World War that devastated the country. In Leningrad of 1951, each communal apartment was occupied by an average of 3.3 families and, compared with the rest of the country, that situation was relatively good (Reid 2009, 84). Khrushchev decided to direct his attention to this issue and to rectify the wrong, for example, by vastly increasing the building of urban housing in order to let the Soviet citizens enjoy private apartments, and not have to continue living in the cramped conditions of communal housing. Around 1955, Khrushchev initiated a campaign for housing, involving the architectural community and the Communist Party, and making a claim that in a matter of three five-year plans, each Soviet family would reside in its own apartment (Ruble 1995, 31). At least during the

first decade of its implementation, with Khrushchev in power, the policy did prove successful. Aside from building urban housing, Khrushchev revived the nineteenth-century socialist feminist commitment to remove domestic labor from the home as a means of improving women's social position, the commitment initially pronounced by the Bolsheviks, but later abandoned for a number of reasons (Reid 2009, 90). He initiated a huge increase of service institutions that would improve women's situation, where the service, he said, was going to eventually become free. Moreover, Khrushchev promised to increase the "production of consumer goods, including technology and chemical products that would 'alleviate women's work' in the home" (Reid 2009, 85). Importantly, in spite of the fact that this model of social development was supposed to underline the different nature of socialism as compared to U.S. capitalism, the promise was framed in terms of "catching up with and overtaking America," as repeated by Khrushchev at the January 1959 XXI Party Congress (Reid 2009, 85). The domestic policy concerning the life standards of the general population, and women, in particular, seemed to be inherently connected to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, namely, to the competition with the United States.

### **2.2.2 Foreign policy: peaceful coexistence**

In 1955, when Khrushchev became the undisputed leader of the USSR, he became "an instrument as well as shaper of Soviet foreign policy" (Tompson 1997, 150). In his General Report at the 1956 XXth Party Congress, Khrushchev elaborated upon his new conception of Soviet relations with the world. He rejected Lenin's thesis that war was the "midwife of revolution" and stuck to a new thesis, one that claimed that the way to communism could be peaceful, and, moreover, admitting, unlike Stalin, that the communists in Yugoslavia and China had the right to build their own version of socialism, adjusted to the local context, rather than

being required to copy that of the Soviet Union (Tompson 1997, 150). While Stalin was suspicious of the non-communist nationalists in the former colonies, Khrushchev decided to take advantage of the disintegration of the colonial system and use it for the interest of the Soviet Union. The important detail was that he was not planning to *impose* socialism. During a trip in the Indian subcontinent, Khrushchev declared that his country was eager “to share its experience of socialist development” (Tompson 1997, 149). According to his assessment, the non-aligned countries, by witnessing the Soviet achievements, would be convinced that cooperation with Moscow would be beneficial and that the Soviet model of development was superior to the capitalist one (Tompson 1997, 150). The idea of the inevitability of war was outdated, according to Khrushchev, since it belonged to those times when imperialism had no alternatives in the world. He believed that since socialism had expanded, peaceful forces had multiplied. Instead of Lenin’s doctrine of war as a midwife of revolution, Khrushchev proposed a new concept: that of peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems. The alternative to peaceful coexistence, claimed Khrushchev, was an all-annihilating war. “Either peaceful coexistence or the most destructive war in history. There is no third option (quoted in Tompson 1997, 150).”

Khrushchev’s essay “On Peaceful Coexistence”, published in the American magazine *Foreign Affairs* in October 1959, revealed the First Secretary’s views on the supremacy of socialism as a system, and the pressing need for peaceful coexistence and the implementation of peaceful competition. Some of the main points of Khrushchev’s essay are described here, as they give insights into the contemporary political situation. First of all, wrote Khrushchev, the pressing need for peaceful coexistence was caused by the ever-growing pace of technological advances, reducing the planet to a small place and bringing people and countries closer and closer to each other (Khrushchev 1959, 1-2). Khrushchev concluded that in such an environment,

it might be particularly difficult for states with different social systems to tolerate each other, and yet this tolerance was necessary, since the disliked state could not suddenly decide “to move to Mars or Venus” (ibid). He compared the situation to that of neighbors who live next to each other, dislike each other, but realize that it would be unreasonable for one to oppose the other to the point of moving out. Khrushchev suggested there were only two ways in which the situation could develop: “either war – and war in the rocket and H-bomb age is fraught with the most dire consequences for all nations – or peaceful coexistence.”

In its simplest expression it signifies the repudiation of war as a means of solving controversial issues (...) Apart from the commitment to non-aggression, it also presupposes an obligation on the part of all states to desist from violating each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty in any form and under any pretext whatsoever. [It] signifies a renunciation of interference in the internal affairs of other countries with the object of altering their system of government or mode of life or for any other motives. The doctrine of peaceful coexistence also presupposes that political and economic relations between countries are to be based upon complete equality of the parties concerned, and on mutual benefit. (Khrushchev 1959, 3)

***Peaceful competition***, a concept crucial for my analysis, according to Khrushchev, “can and should” follow from peaceful coexistence, “for the purpose of satisfying man's needs in the best possible way” (Khrushchev 1959, 4). He offered to “try out whose system is better”, to “compete without war” (Khrushchev 1959, 4).

Even though the military confrontation remained on the agenda (as the Cuban Missile Crisis made all too clear), the two superpowers started to engage in a qualitatively different type

of confrontation, with both systems trying to come out as the winner. Peaceful coexistence essentially meant “that Soviet expansion could occur without armed conflict with capitalist countries” and “was for them a program of victory without war” (Gaddhis, 89). “Competitive coexistence”, as it is described in the 1966 book *Patterns of Competitive Coexistence: USA vs. USSR*, presupposed that the coexistence between the ideological camps had to be competitive. The rivals would have to prove their superiority in all fields but the military, in the ability to “effectively eliminate human misery and poverty” (Kim 1966, 5).

One of the areas in which the Soviet Union, in the framework of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition, competed with the United States, was that of science and technology. “Overcoming backwardness” was historically on the agenda of Russia and the USSR, but it was framed in different terms in different historical periods: “while Lenin wanted Russia to become part of Europe, Stalin wanted to catch up with Europe, Khrushchev wanted to catch up with and then overtake America” (Autio-Sarasma 2011, 133). Nikita Khrushchev believed that the technological gap existing between the West and the East in the post-war period would be overcome by the Eastern bloc (it was only a matter of time), which seemed realistic in the light of the successes of the Soviet Union in its space program after Sputnik was launched in 1957 (Autio-Sarasma 2011). The success of the Soviet space program “was effectively exploited in Soviet propaganda: the superiority of the Soviet technology and science was strongly emphasized and the Soviet need for Western technology was concealed” (Autio-Sarasma 2011, 136). The messages about Soviet technical advancement were especially directed towards countries outside of the Socialist bloc, with a view to strengthening the Soviet Union’s superpower status. In the 1950s and 1960s, the USSR could indeed boast some “remarkable technological breakthroughs” (Autio-Sarasma 2011, 136). The first victory over the U.S., the



1957 launching of the Sputnik, was followed by further successes. From the onset, “the space program seemed to be a huge blow to the United States and clear proof of Soviet technological superiority” (Autio-Sarasmo 2011, 136). The first manned space flight, in 1961, was the most important victory in the space race (Autio-Sarasmo 2011, 136). Khrushchev was willing to adopt scientific innovations, and during the period he was in power, from 1955 to 1964, Soviet computer science was on par with that of the United States (this changed after the ouster of Khrushchev in 1964, when the projects he had sponsored were immediately closed down).

From 1958 onwards, with the conclusion of the first cultural agreement between the USSR and the USA, the scope of the competition widened to include the domain of cultural exchange. The two-year cultural agreement, along with others that followed it in subsequent years, presupposed exchanges in science and technology, medicine, radio, agriculture, television, motion picture, youth, government, athletics, scholarly research, culture and tourism (Richmond 1987, 2). Throughout the 1940s, the US repeatedly attempted to initiate cultural exchange with the Soviet Union, but its requests stayed unanswered until 1955, when the Soviets “opened the door slightly” (Richmond 1987, 2). The changes acquired an even swifter pace after the XXth Party Congress with Khrushchev’s Secret Speech. The Soviets’ desire included (and exceeded) the objective of learning from Western technology; the Soviets, within the framework of the newly initiated peaceful coexistence policy, wanted “to gain recognition for their achievements in the arts, culture and science which they tout[ed] as achievements of a communist society” (Richmond 1987, 5). Contacts with foreigners, for instance, through travel abroad, were for the Soviets “an instrument of Soviet policy” (Richmond 1987, 3).

The cultural agreement of 1958 was followed by the July 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow, during which the famous “kitchen debate” between First Secretary Khrushchev and U.S. Vice-President Nixon took place. The kitchen display and the “kitchen debate” suggest that there was an important gender dimension to the peaceful competition between the super powers. The exhibition of American trade and culture “brought the ideal image of American mass consumption and domesticity vividly before the Soviet public on an unprecedented scale” (Reid 2009, 85). Most attention of the Moscow public went to a model American kitchen that was part of the US display. The spacious kitchen, full of the latest gadgets, was essentially an advertisement of the American lifestyle – the lifestyle in which a housewife, the message implied, would be happy. As Susan Reid (2009) put it, “the American housewife- consumer, personifying the American dream and the life worth fighting for, had been a potent propaganda weapon on the U.S. home front”(83). Now the kitchen arrived in Moscow, and was supposed to serve as a proof of superiority of “people’s capitalism” over the socialist project. Western observers constructed the Eastern housewife as a worn-out, poor woman, who was the complete opposite of the happy American housewife. The display of the American kitchen was meant to show women which system really provided for the housewife – and, of course, socialism was meant to be downgraded.

In fact, Vice-President Nixon and General Secretary of the CPSU Khrushchev engaged in an ideological discussion in the kitchen at the Exhibition. Nixon pointed to the sophisticated gadgets and said that “these are designed to make things easier for our women,” with Khrushchev replying that “your capitalist attitude to women does not occur under Communism” (Reid 2009, 83). Khrushchev claimed that the kitchens of the Soviet housewives were as good as those of the Americans, and were not worse as to “liberating women.” Thus, the official response

was that of “repudiation,” but subsequently “coincided with the selective appropriation and reverse engineering of American models” (Reid 2009, 105) in the Soviet effort to catch up with and overtake the United States. The kitchen display and the “kitchen debate” make it obvious that the peaceful competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was being conducted not just in the broad terms of which system has advanced further in space exploration or technology, but also in terms of the capacity and willingness of each system to provide for its women.

In the next chapter, I will examine the 1963 World Congress of Women as an expression of the peaceful competition policy, a competition in which the main issue was the above-mentioned capacity to provide for women, and out of which the Soviet Union for the time being come out as the winner.

## **Chapter 3. The 1963 WIDF World Congress of Women in Moscow as an Exercise of Soviet Public Diplomacy**

This chapter deals with the 1963 WIDF Moscow World Congress of Women as an exercise of Soviet public diplomacy, with the space flight of the first woman cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, and with the creation of a symbolic link between the two. The chapter will argue that this international women's conference, coupled with Tereshkova's flight, presented the USSR with a brilliant opportunity to exercise public diplomacy (a term that has been explained in the Introduction), and the USSR made sure to take advantage of this opportunity.

The central questions of Chapter 3 are the following ones: What significance did the World Congress of Women have for the Soviet Union in terms of the gender dimension of its peaceful competition with the United States? In which way did the WIDF World Congress of Women held in Moscow in June 1963 provide the Soviet Union with an opportunity to exercise public diplomacy? How did the USSR use this opportunity? How was the space flight of the first woman cosmonaut linked to the World Congress of Women, and what messages did the Soviet Union want to communicate by making this link?

The chapter is divided in three sections. Section 3.1 provides basic information about the Congress, outlining its agenda and the final decisions. It aims to show the scope of the Congress as well as the issues it raised. Secondly, subchapter 3.1 also aims to show—based on documents from the archive of the Soviet Women's Committee—how the Soviet Union prepared to use the opportunity provided by the conference to promote a positive image of the Soviet Union internationally. This supports the main argument of the thesis that the Congress was indeed a

great opportunity to exercise public diplomacy, since it ensured a large flow of foreigners into the country. Section 3.2 elaborates on the twin space flights of cosmonaut Valery Bykovsky and the first woman cosmonaut, Valentina Tereshkova, in June 1963. It argues that although their flights were part of a series of space victories of the Soviet Union, Valentina Tereshkova's flight was especially important in view of the gender competition between the superpowers. In order to support this argument, subchapter 3.2 includes an analysis of the coverage of the flights of the two cosmonauts by some influential Soviet and American newspapers and magazines. Finally, section 3.3 discusses how Soviet newspapers established a link between Tereshkova's flight and the 1963 WIDF World Congress of Women. It also examines the role Tereshkova played at the WIDF World Congress of Women, and shows that she was a powerful "weapon" in the gender competition "arsenal" of the Soviet Union. The World Congress of Women was a golden opportunity for the USSR to "deploy" this weapon, and to communicate through Tereshkova certain messages about gender equality – and the overall emancipatory opportunities – granted by socialism in the Soviet Union.

### ***3.1. The 1963 WIDF World Congress of Women in Moscow: an Overview***

The 1963 Fifth World Congress of Women convened by the WIDF and held in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses in Moscow lasted for six days, from June 24 to 29, 1963 and already on the first day gathered 1381 delegates from 105 countries.<sup>8</sup> The initial plan to convene a Congress of 1000 delegates had to be reconsidered because of the much higher interest shown from around the world towards participating in the Congress. In Nina Popova's words, "the

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<sup>8</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3, file 956 (Texts of the speeches of the delegates of the plenary session), June 24 1963.

Americans alone were requesting to allow them to send 200 [delegates].”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, each country was allotted an equal maximum number of delegates: 25. The Congress was opened on the morning of Monday, June 24 by Nina Popova, the President of the Soviet Women’s Committee and a Vice-President of the Women’s International Democratic Federation, who announced that even more delegates were on their way: in total, around 2000 people from 119 countries were expected.<sup>10</sup> In her introductory speech, Popova stated that the World Congress of Women would “represent women of the whole world” and claimed the Congress could be “considered the most representative assembly in the history of women’s international cooperation.”<sup>11</sup> In the words of the WIDF President Eugenie Cotton, it gathered a far greater number of delegates than any of the four WIDF congresses held before. These were women from every continent, affiliated to various organizations, possessing apparently different, often conflicting, ideological points of view and diverging religious beliefs.<sup>12</sup> While some members of the WIDF believed the Congress had to be only open for member organizations, Popova reported that the final decision of the WIDF had been to keep the Congress open.<sup>13</sup> Not all the delegates belonged to member organizations of the WIDF; a number of them represented 54 countries without membership in the umbrella organization.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op.3, file 973 (Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for Assistance of Preparation for the Congress), April 12 1963, p.2-3 .

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3, file 956 (Texts of the speeches of the delegates of the plenary session), June 24 1963; op. 3 file 950 – (Minutes of the plenary session part 5), June 29 1963.

<sup>13</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op.3, file 973 (Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for Assistance of Preparation for the Congress), April 12 1963.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

It was not only the great amount of delegates that made the World Congress of Women stand out. The number of prestigious international organizations whose representatives attended the Congress was also impressive and included the International Association of Democrat Lawyers, UNESCO, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the International Union of Students, the Conference of African Women, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Federation of Trade Unions, the World Peace Council, and the World Federation of Democratic Youth.<sup>15</sup>

A tremendously important event for the Soviet Union, judging by the amount and scale of media attention the Congress received, it gathered, aside from a huge amount of foreign visitors, a number of Soviet officials from different levels of the Communist Party hierarchy. The First Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev was present at the Congress, although not on the day when he was supposed to deliver his address to the World Congress of Women.<sup>16</sup> The address was instead delivered by the Secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee of the CP, Olga Ivashenko, Khrushchev's supporter, who was, a year later, trying to warn him about his impending replacement. Khrushchev, nevertheless, appeared in *Pravda* photographed next to delegates from around the world.<sup>17</sup> Cosmonauts Valentina Tereshkova and Valery Bykovsky,

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<sup>15</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op.3 file 1002 (Data about the international organizations-participants of the World Congress of Women) July 1963.

<sup>16</sup> GARF Fond 7928 op. 3, file 946 (Minutes of the plenary session of the World Congress of Women, Moscow, Part 1) 24 June 1963.

<sup>17</sup> *Pravda*, No 176 (16397), 25 June 1963, p. 4.

who had just 5 days before the Congress returned from their twin space flights, were also present at the Congress and were invited to be members of the Congress Presidium.<sup>18</sup>

On the first day, a number of important speeches were given. Popova's welcome speech was followed by one from the President of the WIDF, Eugenie Cotton, called "The WIDF in the Struggle for Peace, National Independence, Women's Rights and Happiness of Children," in which Cotton presented some of the achievements of the organization since its previous Congress.<sup>19</sup> She discussed the political situation in the world and the state of affairs faced by women. Cotton praised the recent successes in the "struggle against colonialism, racism and imperialism", showing what the map of Africa had looked like ten years before as compared to the time when she was speaking. Peace, asserted Cotton, was one of the top interests of women. She explicitly endorsed the need for peaceful coexistence and praised Khrushchev for being the first one to suggest a plan of general and controlled disarmament at the UN General Assembly. Stating that the "the isolation of the continents is over," she asserted that the only basis for collaboration between states was that of equality and pointed out that attainment of peaceful coexistence, "which we are all striving for," was possible if "we give all the children, women, and men the feeling of brotherhood, feeling of equality and common interest."<sup>20</sup> In the light of Cotton's words, the Fifth World Congress of Women itself seems to have contributed to promoting peaceful coexistence by endorsing this notion and fostering a feeling of unity between women. Cotton, in supporting the peaceful coexistence policy, was more than simply repeating

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<sup>18</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3 file 946 (Minutes of the plenary session of the World Congress of Women), 24 June 1963.

<sup>19</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3 file 952 (Texts of the delegates' speeches, in English, part 1), June 24, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



Khrushchev's words; as the instigator of the WIDF in 1945 and co-founder of the World Peace Council in 1949 and later a member of its Presidium, she had been promoting this policy for almost twenty years.<sup>21</sup>

Cotton's speech was followed by four more specific reports that focused on the main items of the WIDF's agenda. Anna Matera, from the Union of Italian Women, gave a speech on "The Struggle for Women's Rights in Society and the Family". Fuki Kushida, peace movement activist from Japan, talked about women's "Struggle for peace, disarmament and friendship between peoples". Aoua Keita from the recently independent Mali presented the report "The Struggle of Women for National Independence", whereas Vilma Espin de Castro from Cuba spoke about "The Health, Schooling and Education of Children and Youth".<sup>22</sup> In this well-prepared and well-orchestrated public presentation of the WIDF, who gave which speech was carefully thought through to attain the best possible effect. Thus, it was due to the fact that the Italian women had made great advances in the area of women's rights that they would deliver a report dealing with this issue, said Nina Popova at the April meeting of the Committee for Assistance for Preparation and Conduct of the Congress.<sup>23</sup> Because the Japanese had endured the horrors of nuclear bombing, their delegate was to speak on the issue of peace and disarmament. A representative of an African country that had recently acquired independence was considered most fit to deliver a report on the necessity of national independence. And because the Cubans

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<sup>21</sup> Eugénie Cotton: Mitbegründerin und Präsidentin der Internationalen Demokratischen Frauenföderation Dezember 1945 - Juni 1967, Mitbegründerin des Weltfriedensrates und Mitglied seines Präsidiums, Ehrendirektorin des Höheren Lehrerinnenseminars von Sèvres (Berlin: Internationale Demokratische Frauenföderation, 1968).

<sup>22</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3 file 952 (Texts of the delegates' speeches, in English, part 1), 24 June 1963.

<sup>23</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op.3, file 973 (Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for Assistance of Preparation and Conduct of the Congress), 12 April 1963

had, in Popova's words,<sup>24</sup> achieved a lot since the socialist revolution, such as liquidation of illiteracy, a delegate from that country would speak out on the issues pertaining to children's upbringing. It was, therefore, from their own experience that the delegates spoke about the issues they addressed.

In each plenary session, representatives of various organizations from around the world shared their views and experiences. They elaborated upon the programs of the organizations that they represented, positive and negative sides to women's position in their home countries, discussed global politics and gave assessments of the performance of the governments in their home countries. Apart from the plenary sessions, there were five commissions that each focused on a specific issue: Women's Position in Family and Society; Peace, Disarmament and Friendship between Peoples; The Health, Education and Schooling of Children and Youth, and The Struggle of Women for National Independence.<sup>25</sup> On the last day of the Congress, the delegates nearly unanimously adopted a document encompassing the key points, called "Appeal of the World Congress of Women to the Women of the World," the most important document produced by the WCW. One of the central motives of the Appeal was that of unity between women from all over the globe – unity for the sake of a common goal, ignoring the racial, religious, and ideological divisions that might seem to separate women.<sup>26</sup> The Congress was convened by the participant women, the Appeal said, "to share our experiences, our fears and our

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Fond 7928 op. 3 file 964, Information on the Commissions. Brochure "World Congress of Women" p. 69. (Documents adopted by the World Congress of Women, version 2; resolutions, recommendations, an appeal), June 1963.

<sup>26</sup> Fond 7928 op. 3 file 964. Appeal. Brochure "World Congress of Women" p. 91. (Documents adopted by the World Congress of Women, version 2; resolutions, recommendations, an appeal), June 1963.

hopes and to examine together ways of overcoming our sufferings and of realizing our hopes.”<sup>27</sup>

The central and most important goal in bringing these women together was the aspiration for “a lasting peace for all peoples of the world.” In addition to the peace agenda, the Appeal included a gender equality component: “we are unanimous in our wish to win for the women workers, women peasants, housewives and women intellectuals, a worthy and just position in society as in the family, with equal rights and responsibilities, which will assure them the opportunity to develop their aptitudes to the full and to collaborate in all spheres for the progress of humanity.”<sup>28</sup>

Millions of women, said the Appeal, had won these rights already, and were struggling further to solidify them. The role of women as mothers was pointed out separately: “Woman is the mother of all children.” Therefore, children’s rights well-being was also on the agenda. The Appeal underlined the perversity of the situation when in a “century of scientific and social progress...millions of children are starving, illiterate, exploited, disinherited, doomed to a premature death.” It inspired the women to “struggle unflaggingly without the fear of difficulties” for promotion of change in their respective countries, and, consequently, the whole world. The Appeal expressed concern about the arms race and the threat of nuclear war, called for the fostering of lasting peace on the basis of peaceful coexistence and the resolution of conflicts between countries by means of peaceful negotiations. It called on women to support the initiatives for general complete, controlled disarmament, the creation of atom-free zones and the multiplication of women’s campaigns for peace, peaceful coexistence and disarmament.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

The Appeal exhibited an intersectional perspective of women, recognizing the differences caused by race, class and other factors. At the same time, women were referred to as “sisters,” whom the Appeal was meant to inspire to unite in the name of the common goal of peace, women’s and children’s well-being. “That which unites us constitutes a great force: it is love for our children, friendship, and solidarity between the women and the peoples of the entire world, it is our striving for peace justice, progress and happiness of all mankind,” the text said. Thus, the Appeal aspired to reach out to a vast number of women – ideally, to all women around the world.

Keeping in mind the number of delegates, the prestige of the international organizations that were present, and the potential of the WIDF goals to appeal to a huge number of women (and humanity in general), it becomes understandable why the USSR had agreed to have the Congress in Moscow. The Congress would provide an opportunity for transmitting a positive message about the USSR to a global audience, in other words, it would an opportunity for public diplomacy. Public diplomacy, as the definition in the Introduction has shown, has at its core the aspirations of a certain country to influence the attitudes of the general population of other countries in order for those to change the policies of their respective governments. The presence of the large number of activist, engaged women from around the globe provided the USSR with such an opportunity. In April 1963, months before the WIDF World Congress of Women was convened in Moscow, the President of the Soviet Women’s Committee (and a Vice-President of the WIDF), Nina Popova, had discussed the details of preparation for the congress with a number of Soviet officials from different levels and with different responsibilities.<sup>29</sup> It is important to note here that Popova at the time held a number of official positions in the Soviet Union – apart

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<sup>29</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op.3, file 973 (Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for Assistance of Preparation and Conduct of the Congress, April 12 1963)

from being a Member of the Central Committee of CPSU, she also chaired the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. The latter was “among the biggest and the most important organizational structures within the people's diplomacy of the socialist super power” (Knopova-Ziferblat 2011, 15) and as such definitely had experience in organizing events that helped the Soviet Union promote a positive image of itself. The Soviet officials, including the Minister of Culture, Furtseva, the already mentioned Secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee of the CP, Olga Ivashenko, the Head of the Moscow Restaurant Trust, Mityurin and others, discussed preparations for the Congress at a meeting of the Committee for Assistance of Preparation and Conduct of the World Congress of Women.<sup>30</sup> The minutes of the meeting reveal some valuable information that supports the main argument of this thesis about the World Congress of Women as an exercise of Soviet public diplomacy. Popova stated that the arriving women would have “a big interest in our life, the everyday life of Soviet women, our nation, and children” and that it was necessary to

make sure that the women who arrive get a true understanding of our life, our country, our tasks, and would leave as our friends and upon arrival to their home countries carry out work in favor of friendship, mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence and trust towards the Soviet Union.”<sup>31</sup>

As a part of this endeavor, it was planned that no less than seven to eight hundred delegates would stay in the country and tour it for a week, “to get acquainted with the Soviet

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<sup>30</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op.3, file 973 (Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for Assistance of Preparation and Conduct of the Congress), 12 April 1963, p. 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

realities,” as Popova said.<sup>32</sup> In order for the country to leave the best impressions on the visitors, she said, the officials occupied with provision of lodging and dining would have to strive for good service, bearing in mind the international character of the delegates, some of whom would have to be treated in a special way (she pointed out, for example, that on a previous occasion visitors from India to Moscow were catered meat dishes, which they could not eat).<sup>33</sup>

Popova’s conversation with the Soviet officials of different levels, from the Minister of Culture, Furtseva to the head of Moscow Restaurant Trust, Mityurin, about the way the Moscow World Congress of Women had to be prepared, revealed the attitude of the Soviet authorities towards the women’s conference as an opportunity to conduct public diplomacy and improve the image of the Soviet Union.

### ***3.2 Space Flight of the First Woman Cosmonaut as the Soviet “Gender Victory”***

On 14 June 1963, the Soviet Union continued its series of space ventures by launching Vostok-5, a space capsule with cosmonaut Valery Bykovsky on board. Bykovsky was not going to remain alone in the orbit for long, as two days later, on June 16, the second capsule, Vostok-6, was launched. On board, it carried the first woman to ever fly into space, 26-year-old Valentina Tereshkova. Bykovsky orbited the Earth for 119 hours, which established a new world record and exceeded the time that had been spent in space by all U.S. astronauts combined. In 2 days, 22 hours, and 50 minutes, Valentina Tereshkova orbited the globe 48 times. On June 19 (just five days before the opening of the World Congress of Women), both cosmonauts landed in the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

steppes of Kazakhstan. The public witnessed, therefore, not just a double mission of Soviet cosmonauts, but a simultaneous flight of a man and a woman (albeit in different ships), which made for a particular spectacle.

Now, decades later, reports of the Russian media that commemorate the anniversaries of the two flights mainly discuss Tereshkova, leaving Bykovsky obscured and in fact barely mentioning him,<sup>34</sup> although ten world records were broken during the combined space flights of the two cosmonauts.<sup>35</sup> In 1963, following the flight, the situation was similar. This section will show, by referring to reports in Soviet and American newspapers, that the two-flight space venture of June 1963 brought the Soviet Union a “victory” in the space race with the USA, not in the area of technology, but primarily in that of gender equality.

For the purposes of my further analysis, it is first necessary to discuss Tereshkova’s biography at some length. Tereshkova’s hardworking, fatherless postwar youth, her simplicity (and her ability to retain this simplicity in spite of the space flight) were repeatedly underlined during the Congress. Her life story was printed and reprinted in the newspapers and magazines of the Soviet Union. The fact that she ascended from a simple, underprivileged background into nearly literal stardom and managed to remain simple was very important for the image the Soviet Union presented of itself at the Congress, as section 3.3 will show.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, [http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=189286&photo\\_id=250221&p=1&fr=0](http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=189286&photo_id=250221&p=1&fr=0)

<sup>35</sup> Anatoly Perminov, Head of the Russian Federal Cosmic Agency, in an interview with Vesti: [http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=189286&photo\\_id=250221&p=1&fr=0](http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=189286&photo_id=250221&p=1&fr=0)

Valentina Tereshkova was born in March 1937 in a small village at a collective farm, in a wooden country house without electricity or running water.<sup>36</sup> When Valya (the diminutive version of Valentina in Russian, the way Tereshkova preferred to be called) was only two years old, her father died while participating in the Soviet-Finnish War. After the end of the Second World War, without income or resources necessary for survival, Tereshkova's mother decided to move out of the collective farm into a suburb of the town of Yaroslavl in search for employment. There the former peasant woman started working as a weaver at a mill called Krasny Perekop and, living with her own mother, supported herself and her three children. Tereshkova was always adamant that her youth was, in spite of being materially difficult, nevertheless full of love. In 1954, at the age of 16, Tereshkova graduated from secondary school and got a job at a local tire factory, starting a life of hard labor in difficult conditions.

A year later, she left the tire factory and joined her elder sister and mother at the textile mill, where she learned to work with machinery, which she enjoyed. As a teenager, she actually dreamt of becoming an engineer on steam trains and was envious of the engine drivers on the trains that passed by her grandmother's house, in which the whole family resided. Already at a young age, Tereshkova was refusing to act like the majority of girls around her, and, for example, questioned the boys' exclusivity in some activities, such as horse-riding, for which she became an object of respect and admiration. Later, she became a cotton-spinning technologist, combining her work at the factory with active participation in the Komsomol, the Youth Communist League. One day, the Yaroslavl Aero club started recruiting new members for its parachuting club from the mill at which Tereshkova worked. The choice to take up this activity

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<sup>36</sup> The biography sources are: Francis French, Colin Burgess, and Paul Haney, *Into That Silent Sea: Trailblazers of the Space Era, 1961-1965*, 2007 and Ben Evans, *Escaping the Bonds of Earth: the Fifties and the Sixties*.



would prove to be determinant for her future career as a cosmonaut. After having jumped with a parachute for the first time in her life, Tereshkova wrote that she wished she could do it every day. Her successful training led to her advancement in the ranks of parachute jumpers. Three months later she was already a third-rank parachutist, and in two years she trained the newly admitted club members. By 1960, Tereshkova had shown herself to be an active communist, won the local Komsomol election and became a branch secretary. When on 12 April 1961 Soviet citizen Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space after having orbited the Earth once, Tereshkova and her factory co-workers could not believe the news. Tereshkova later wrote that she instantly felt inspired and declared to everyone that even though the men were the first ones to fly, the women would soon follow.

In 1962, the Soviet Ministry of Defense came up with a proposal to select sixty new cosmonauts, including five women. Nikolai Kamanin, Assistant of the Head of the Soviet Sky Force in cosmos affairs, who actively participated in the selection of the first Soviet cosmonauts, framed the question of sending a woman to space in terms of competition between the Soviet Union and the United States. To him belong the following words: "We cannot allow that the first women in space will be American. This would be an insult to the patriotic feelings of Soviet women. The first Soviet cosmonauts will be as big an agitator for communism as Gagarin and Titov have turned out to be."<sup>37</sup>

The future woman cosmonaut had to meet a number of criteria, one of which was having skills in parachute jumping in order to be able to land after the space flight was over. Tereshkova, a successful jumper, appeared on the list submitted by the sports clubs of the Soviet

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<sup>37</sup> Gagarin - the first human in space and Titov – the second Soviet cosmonaut.

Union, but was not considered a top rank candidate. The next round of selection brought her in the limelight - the woman cosmonaut had to fit an ideological profile, that is, to be a communist. A successful member of Komsomol, Tereshkova fit the standard, and eventually caught up with and overtook the other contestants (to use Khrushchev's slogan).

On June 17, 1963, the major Soviet newspapers printed the portrait of the first woman cosmonaut, who had just started her flight, on their front pages. The front page of *Pravda* featured a headline "The first woman cosmonaut in the world" and a picture of Valentina Tereshkova, occupying approximately one-fourth of the page.<sup>38</sup> It was reported that on the previous day, at 12:30 pm, a space ship with the first woman cosmonaut in the world had been launched into space. Khrushchev's words "The Soviet people are proud of you," were printed next to the photograph in red.<sup>39</sup> *Izvestiya* printed a lengthy headline: "To Everyone: Daughter of the Land of the Soviets Valentina Tereshkova is The First Woman in the History of Humanity to Pilot a Space Ship" - next to Tereshkova's photograph on the front page.<sup>40</sup> *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* explained that the second Soviet "group flight" was meant to test and compare the effects of being in space on the male and female organisms. "Glory to the Motherland, Glory to the Party, Who Nurtured the Heroes of Space!" read the headline of *Izvestiya* on the next day.<sup>41</sup>

The significance of the event is hard to overestimate, especially considering the immense attention it received in the Soviet media. All communications between Vostok-5, Vostok-6 and

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<sup>38</sup> *Pravda*, No 168 (16389), June 17, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Izvestiya*, No 143 (14306), June 16, 1963, p.1.

<sup>41</sup> *Izvestiya*, No 144 (14307), June 17, 1963, p.1.

the Earth were tediously published, including (alleged) telephone conversations and radiograms between Khrushchev and the two cosmonauts – in both *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*.<sup>42</sup> Both newspapers published a photograph of Khrushchev holding a phone in his hand, sitting at the table with microphones, and smiling with satisfaction. The cosmonauts reported to the First Secretary that they felt absolutely fine and that their space operations were proceeding well. Tereshkova, it was reported, thanked Khrushchev for his fatherly support (which must have sounded especially touching, since she grew up without one, as the biography has shown).

The telephone conversation between Khrushchev and Tereshkova,<sup>43</sup> as reported in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, allegedly included some rather informal and even humorous details. For instance, Khrushchev was said to have expressed his admiration of Tereshkova, and in order to support her, mentioned that the previous night at the dinner he had given, all the women were especially cheerful because of a woman's space flight. Khrushchev also noted that Voroshilov, a prominent Soviet military commander, had called and bragged that he had always raised his glass to women, adding: "And look what women are doing now!" To this, Khrushchev replied that Voroshilov should not position himself as if he were the only supporter of women's emancipation, suggesting that the others were not. The newspapers' report of this conversation—no matter which parts of it actually took place or had been embellished—in addition to being quite amusing, also conveyed the message that women's equality was a major concern for the highest Soviet leadership. Khrushchev's reply to Voroshilov showed that the First Secretary by no means wanted himself or his colleagues to be portrayed as disinterested in women's equality.

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<sup>42</sup> *Izvestiya*, No 144 (14307), June 17, 1963, p.1 and *Pravda*, No 168 (16389), June 17, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The Soviet media underlined the global scale and significance of Tereshkova's and Bykovsky's flights, but paid particularly much attention to the former and less (although still a lot) to Bykovsky and the cosmonauts' double flights. Alongside poems dedicated to Tereshkova by Soviet authors, pages after pages in *Pravda* featured greetings sent to Tereshkova by world leaders and foreign activists. "The world is amazed, the world is applauding" – wrote *Pravda* (in large red font) on the last page of its June 17 issue, framing the event as an ultimate victory of the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> On the same page, one saw a photograph of a demonstration on the Red Square, with people holding portraits of Lenin and Tereshkova as well as posters with "Glory to the communist party" and "Glory to the Soviet cosmonauts" written on them.<sup>45</sup>

Especially worth noting is a rather bitter *Izvestiya* review, published on 1 July 1963, of the American book *Woman into Space*, which, the review said, was published for propaganda purposes.<sup>46</sup> The authors of the review recounted the story of Jerrie Cobb, an experienced American pilot and an aspiring astronaut. Her advice was allegedly never listened to by fellow aspiring male astronauts – which was, *Izvestiya* reported, her first disappointment. Her second disappointment came from the fact that she never managed to become the first woman to fly into space – for lack of interest from American aeronautics. *Izvestiya* reported that when Tereshkova flew into space, Cobb had bitterly noted, "I am very disappointed that the first woman in space turned out to be a Russian, not an American." Cobb did manage to become the first one – not in space, but in terms of being used as propaganda, wrote *Izvestiya* with condescending irony. This article, seen next to the headline "Socialism is the best starting ground" on the same page, makes

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<sup>44</sup> *Pravda*, No 168 (16389), June 17, 1963, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *Izvestiya*, No 156 (14319), July 1, 1963, p.3.

it obvious to which extent Tereshkova's flight into space was seen within the country as a major (gender) victory of the USSR over the USA, which supposedly just denigrated and used its women, who only saw disappointment from their country, but not actual results.

There is a significant (and not surprising) contrast between the glorifying reporting of the flight done by the Soviet newspapers and the attitude emanated by the American media. While the Soviet media claimed the space feat of the two cosmonauts to be an overwhelming victory for the Soviet Union, the media reactions in the United States, its primary competitor in space and elsewhere, were not quite so exhilarated, to put it mildly. First of all, the news outlets published very few articles on the issue, especially in comparison to the amount published in the USSR, where on some days it dominated the coverage to an extent of nearly becoming *the only* reported issue. Secondly, the American media, eager to criticize the ideological enemy of their country, suggested that, in terms of technology, the flight had been more of a failure than an achievement, relying on the opinion of the U.S. scientists. On June 23, *The New York Times* reporters wondered whether the actual goal of the Soviet space operation had been to connect the capsules carrying Bykovsky and Tereshkova. "If a rendez-vous was their aim, the Russians appeared to have failed in some phase of their launchings," wrote *The New York Times*.<sup>47</sup> On July 1, *Newsweek*, in its section "Space and Atom", obviously named after two of the areas in which the competition between the two superpowers was taking place, claimed that "the achievement was less spectacular than the Soviet sources led the world to believe,"<sup>48</sup> and elaborated upon the reasons why the US scientists concluded that the group flight could in fact

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<sup>47</sup> *The New York Times*, Vol CXII, No 38501, June 23, 1963.

<sup>48</sup> "His and Hers." *Newsweek*, July 1, 1963, p. 46.

be a technological failure. Apart from this, the journalists made sure to point out that Karaganda, 380 miles away from Tereshkova's landing spot, was "notorious for its slave-labor camp during Stalin's era."<sup>49</sup>

"The Weaker Sex?" asked *Newsweek* in the title of one of its articles, starting a discussion about gender differences and referring to *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>50</sup> The article, after saying that the book "bemoaned the fact that even the act of love places man in the dominant position," embarked on a discussion about biological differences between men and women and pointed out that women, because of having a higher percentage of body fat, could endure extreme temperatures better than men, which could save them in cases of plane crashes.<sup>51</sup> Earlier in the article, Tereshkova's "concentration of body fat" was underlined by the phrase "Junior Lt. Valentina Tereshkova, an attractive size 18."

*The New York Times* tried to show the lack of importance of the flight by stating that it "appeared to be essentially a repeat of last August's performance, though its use of a woman was undeniably a propaganda coup contributing to the image Russia promotes of herself as the world's most progressive society." As to the reaction of official Washington, *The New York Times* said it could primarily be described as "relief," by which it again tried to diminish or even deny the meaning of the flight.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "The Weaker Sex?," *Newsweek*, July 1, 1963, p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *The New York Times*, Vol CXII, No 38501, June 23, 1963.

The U.S. newspapers seemed eager to resort to sexist remarks (e.g. negatively commenting on Tereshkova's looks) in order to undermine the significance of a woman's space flight, and perhaps even hint that there was no significance whatsoever, at least for the competition between the two superpowers in space. The overall message emanated by the U.S. media in reaction to Tereshkova's flight was that if the space flight was not a technological advancement beyond the previous one, it was unimportant. Thus, the media intentionally or not, tried to distract attention from or diminish the meaning of the flight as a symbol of the USSR's support for women's emancipation. The interest in gender equality was, in fact, ridiculed – note the use of vocabulary about de Beauvoir, whose book “bemoaned” the unfair treatment of women.

Condescendence and ridicule, however, were not the only reactions in the United States. *The New York Times* admitted in the same article where it questioned the importance of the flight that the National Space Agency (NASA) predicted that it would face “increasing pressure for astronettes,” since women had been kept out of space missions because of the organization's insistence of pilots with strong engineering backgrounds.<sup>53</sup> Also, the chairman of the Senate Space Committee, Clinton Anderson, following the flight, expressed sorrow about the lack of women trained by NASA, claiming that the Soviets had proven that no extensive pilot experience had been needed to operate a space capsule (French, Burgess and Haney 2009, 322).

Clinton Anderson's reaction was not the only one that acknowledged the U.S. defeat brought about by the Soviet Union. *Pravda*, in one of its late June articles, said that even the enemies of the Soviet Union were forced to admit that Tereshkova's flight was a testimony to the

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<sup>53</sup> *The New York Times*, Vol CXII, No 38501, June 23, 1963.

high position of women in the Soviet society, as opposed to any other, especially American. “Symbol of a woman’s liberation” is the title of an article which elaborated upon a “confession” made by Claire Boothe Luce, a former U.S. ambassador to Italy, who, as it was pointed out, was “not a friend of the Soviet Union” and was known for her anti-Soviet statements, “just like her husband.” Nevertheless, even she was “forced to admit” that “Tereshkova’s flight [was] the symbol of a woman’s liberation under communism.”<sup>54</sup> Claire Boothe Luce indeed wrote an article concerning Tereshkova’s flight, published in LIFE magazine on June 28, 1963 (p. 31). Titled “But Some People Simply Never Get the Message,” the article asked “Why did the Soviet Union launch a woman cosmonaut into space?” and stated that “failure of American men to give the right answer to this question may yet prove to be their costliest Cold War blunder.” She then examined the set of “wrong answers,” given primarily by the American male “space experts” (which she herself put in inverted commas).

Neither the answer that Valentina Tereshkova is a scientific guinea pig of small worth or that she is the Moscow version of Madison Avenue’s sexy publicity gimmicks is the right answer. The right answer is that Soviet Russia put a woman into space because Communism preaches and, since the Revolution of 1917, has tried to practice the inherent equality of men and women.

She then discussed the achievements of the Soviet women since the revolution, and said that Tereshkova’s flight “symbolizes to Russian women that they actively share (not passively bask, like American women) in the glory of conquering space.”

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<sup>54</sup> “A Symbol of a Woman’s Liberation,” *Pravda*, No 178 (16399) June 27, 1963, p. 4.



Less of a space victory, it did look like a gender victory, granting the Soviet Union bonus points in its ideological warfare with the United States (even though, as the U.S. news media showed, some in the United States refused to admit this). Whether the flight did or did not go according to the initial plan is therefore not important for my argument here. Rather, it was significant to examine the image presented by the Soviet newspapers to the public, both domestic (since these newspapers were read by domestic public) and foreign (since foreign news media, such as *The New York Times* or *Newsweek*, followed what was written in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, in search for clues as to what was happening in the Soviet Union. It was also important to examine the two-fold reaction in the United States. Media coverage of the event both in the Soviet Union and the United States suggests that the space feat of two Soviet cosmonauts carried more significance for the gender competition than for space competition.

### ***3.3. The World Congress of Women as an Exercise of the Soviet Public Diplomacy; Valentina Tereshkova as an Embodiment of the “Soviet Dream” and a Soviet “Gender Weapon”***

In this subchapter, I will argue that the Congress represented a great opportunity for the Soviet Union to engage in public diplomacy and transmit to the foreign visitors positive images of women’s position in the Soviet Union, primarily by having Valentina Tereshkova attend the World Congress of Women and praise the virtues of socialism in front of the large audience. First of all, I show in which way Valentina Tereshkova’s space flight (which, as I argued in the previous subchapter, was a “gender victory” of the Soviet Union) was linked to the Congress in the first place. To do so, I refer to some articles published in the Soviet media during Tereshkova’s space flight. Secondly, I argue that Tereshkova was constructed in the media and

during the Congress as an embodiment of what I would like to call “the Soviet dream” (a pendant of the American dream) and thus constituted a “gender weapon” in the arsenal of the Soviet public diplomacy – a “weapon” that was deployed at the WIDF Moscow World Congress of Women.

The overt “insertion” of Tereshkova into the World Congress of Women began in the Soviet media shortly after the start of her space venture. I use the word “overt”, since the scope of my study does not allow me to establish whether the timing of the flight a few days before the Congress was carefully planned as such. It seems, however, highly likely that it was. The media of the Soviet Union reported on the Tereshkova’s flight and the WIDF World Congress of Women almost simultaneously and as if these two events were naturally connected to each other. Congratulations and greetings from the members of the WIDF were among the first ones the Soviet newspapers hurried to publish before Tereshkova even landed. The open letter of the WIDF President Eugenie Cotton to Tereshkova, published in *Pravda* on the first day of Tereshkova’s flight, sounded like an invitation of the first woman cosmonaut to the upcoming congress:

Dear Valentina Tereshkova! I am proud, from the name of the Women’s International Democratic Federation, to be able to congratulate you on your space flight, the flight that you started several days before the opening of the World Congress of Women. You may be certain, that in their minds, millions and millions of women are accompanying

you, congratulating you, and wishing you full success in completing the undertaking, that you, the first woman, managed to do.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Vice-President of the WIDF Nina Popova, in her open letter, promised that Tereshkova would be “the most honorable guest at the Congress.”<sup>56</sup> Soviet writer and *Pravda* journalist Anna Karavaeva, who had herself been at the Founding Congress of the WIDF in Paris, wrote that Tereshkova would be an inspiration to all the women present at the World Congress of Women:

Upon seeing her, our lovely heroine, women of the already liberated countries – and of countries that are just preparing for liberation – will be enriched by the feeling of hope and moral uplift: these are the great wings that can grown in a woman’s heart, this is what she can do when she is free and proud.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the first public links between the Fifth World Congress of Women of the WIDF were established in *Pravda*.

These open letters, apart from inviting Tereshkova to the women’s conference, also underscored her profound links to the Soviet Union (or, more precisely, the fact that the phenomenon of Tereshkova was “produced” by the USSR). They presented an image of the socialist state as a caring protector of its women, a world leader in questions of women’s equality. Popova called her a “heroic daughter of the land of communism,” “a sister, a daughter,

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<sup>55</sup> Cotton, Eugenie. *Pravda*. No 168 (16389) June 17, 1963, p.4.

<sup>56</sup> Popova, Nina. “Heroic Daughter of the Land of Communism.” *Pravda*. No 168 (16389). June 17, 1963, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Karavaeva, Anna. “Before the big meeting. A letter to different addressees.” *Pravda*. No 174 (16395), June 23, 1963, p. 3.

a granddaughter of the Soviet women,” whose “destiny is in the hands of the homeland of Lenin.” Even though Tereshkova was declared by Popova and Cotton alike to be the pride of *all* the women on the planet, it was underscored that she was primarily the object of pride of the Soviet women, whom her space flight glorified.

The positive image of the Soviet Union and its system was further amplified when these letters communicated an idea that it was only natural for a Soviet, and not any other woman, to become the first female space explorer. Cotton wrote that

like many people, I was sure that if a woman ever flies into space, it will be a Soviet woman. When Gagarin flew for the first time, I was jealously wondering, why can it not be a woman – Gagarina.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that the first woman in space is a citizen of the USSR sounds like a mighty hymn to the Soviet socialist formation, to Lenin’s Communist party of the Soviet Union. They are those who in the first time of history emancipated the woman, made her equal to a man, raised her to the heights of inspirational creativity.<sup>59</sup>

“Only in our Soviet Union, where civil rights of men and women are absolutely equal, could such an ambitious and noble idea be born – that a woman can also victoriously fly into space”, wrote Anna Karavaeva, essentially reinforcing the same message.

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<sup>58</sup> Cotton, Eugenie. *Pravda*. No 168 (16389) June 17, 1963, p.4.

<sup>59</sup> Popova, Nina. “Heroic Daughter of the Land of Communism.” *Pravda*. No 168 (16389). June 17, 1963, p. 4.

The fact that it was a Soviet woman who first flew into space was perceived and portrayed in the media as the proof of high position occupied by a Soviet woman in a socialist society. Media coverage surrounding Tereshkova's flight in the Soviet Union suggests she was represented as the embodiment of the "Soviet dream" – a woman, who, after an uneasy fatherless childhood, without any special privileges (but with the socialist state always there to help) through hard labor, literally rose to the stars on an equal footing with men – and managed to remain simple and charming. For instance, a biographical article in the July 1963 issue of *Sovetskaya Zhenshina* ( Soviet Woman), the magazine published by the Soviet Women's Committee, contained the following lines:

Uneasy was Valentina's childhood... No, dear Western ideologists, it is not in your boarding hotels for the chosen ones, for the rich, that people like Tereshkova and Bykovsky are raised, people like millions of other soviet heroes: builders of new electric power plants, factories and cities. Such heroes are raised in labor and joy of our constructive Soviet life.<sup>60</sup>

It was, therefore, implied (or even openly stated), that it was socialism that allowed a simple girl to realize her ambitions – and perhaps achieve even more than she had expected. Eugenie Cotton acknowledged at the congress that Tereshkova was "a simple and charming person", which in Cotton's words only reinforced the outstanding nature of her personality and made the delegates to the World Congress of Women even more delighted to have an opportunity to meet her. Tereshkova's simple background helped highlight the scope of emancipatory opportunities offered by the Soviet Union to its citizens, women in particular. Tereshkova's modesty was

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<sup>60</sup> *Sovetskaya Zhenshina*. No 7, July 1963, p. 5.

underlined throughout the congress; she herself diminished her own accomplishment, claiming that the trust was given to her, an ordinary woman, by the Soviet nation. In her speech, she called herself “an ordinary Soviet woman.” This ordinariness is very important for understanding the image the Soviet Union tried to present to the outside world – if Tereshkova, in the Soviet Union, is ordinary, and at the same is the first in the world, what kind of a fairy tale was that country?

Valentina Tereshkova, upon her return from space, was successfully “incorporated” into the course of the Moscow World Congress of the WIDF. In her address to the World Congress of Women, Eugenie Cotton, for example, presented Tereshkova as the ultimate inspiration for women (placing her name next to that of Marie Curie).

All successful women do not become Marie Curies any more than all cultivated men become Pasteurs. All daring and courageous women will not become Valentina Tereshkovas, but it is a very great encouragement for them all to know that the Marie Curies and Valentina Tereshkovas can exist.<sup>61</sup>

As was shown above, certain messages about the emancipation of women under socialism (underlining that it was only natural for a Soviet, and not any other woman to be the first one to fly into space) were already present in the open letters addressed to Tereshkova by the WIDF leaders while she was still in space. The very same messages were, at the Moscow World Congress of Women, present in the address of First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev to the congress. They were further reinforced by Valentina Tereshkova herself, who, due to speaking

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<sup>61</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3, file 956 (Texts of the speeches of the delegates of the plenary session), June 24 1963, speech Cotton.

from her own experience, was likely to be seen as possessing the greatest degree of legitimacy since she was, in the eyes of the public, a “direct beneficiary” of the socialist system. Fuki Kushida, Anna Matera, Aoua Keita and Vilma Espin, who presented the four key reports on the first day of the Congress,<sup>62</sup> spoke about issues that they were considered to be most knowledgeable about (as was discussed in section 3.1). According to the logic behind the matching of personalities with the reports,<sup>63</sup> Kushida like no one else realized the crucial need for disarmament since her country suffered from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Keita, who was from a former colony, a newly liberated country, could testify to the evils of colonization and advantages of liberation. Following the same logic, Tereshkova, as the ultimate (and brand new) symbol of women’s equality and success, could in the most persuasive and effective manner speak about the Soviet Union and socialism.

Nikita Khrushchev’s Address to the World Congress of Women, conveys the message that the Soviet Union wanted to send to the rest of the world about women’s situation in the country:

Your Congress is taking place in a country, where a woman has for a long time been enjoying the fruits of socialism, where she is a full-scale member of society, making use of all the advantages of our socialist formation. Her rights are not only protected by law, but also provided for materially. Soviet women have all the opportunities to fully participate in political, cultural, and social life of the nation. I hope you will treat my words with understanding and will not consider this to be propaganda. Communists

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<sup>62</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3, file 956 (Texts of the speeches of the delegates of the plenary session), June 24 1963.

<sup>63</sup> Explained by Popova at the Meeting of the Committee for Assistance of Preparation and Conduct of the World Congress of Women, 12 April 1963.

always speak with conviction, and I would like to say on this festive day of the opening of the World Congress of Women that true liberation of a woman, her ability to show all her capabilities and talents in labor and social activities, are fully possible only under socialism.

In the light of this quote, who was Tereshkova meant to be other than the embodiment of this pronounced commitment of the socialist Soviet Union to women's rights and equality? The flight made Tereshkova into the symbol of Soviet "gender victory," and it was only natural that the USSR would be interested in her appearing at and participating in the Moscow World Congress of Women organized by the WIDF. She seemed then to exhibit the materiality, the actuality of women's equality in the country, equality going beyond pronouncements on paper. As Khrushchev said, women's "rights are not only protected by law, but also provided for materially."

Soviet science received particular appraisal in the speech of the first woman cosmonaut. In Tereshkova's words, it was due to the "excellent mechanisms and systems of the cosmic ship planned by Soviet designers" and the "high ... skill of the Soviet engineers, technicians and workers," that her mission went successfully. The praise of the Soviet science was in line with by Eugenie Cotton's assertion in her introductory report that the problems of women should be solved by science – but the resources that could be allocated for science are instead used most often in military purposes. The message that Tereshkova was meant to convey at the Congress was that by caring for its women and letting them enjoy the fruit of science, the USSR proves itself to be an inherently peaceful state, an important message, especially in the light of Khrushchev's coexistence policy. According to Tereshkova's speech, when in space, she was not



left by the thought of the interconnectedness of the world, and the horrors that would ensue in case of nuclear war (something that Khrushchev had said himself, years before the congress when elaborating upon his proposed policy):<sup>64</sup>

As I flew, the thought came to me: how good it would be if my Vostok-6, a feminine cosmic ship, so to speak, could throw a bridge, invisible yet strong, from heart to heart, linking all the women of the world. I looked at our beautiful earth. Never, I thought, never must this earth, so blue and glowing, be blackened by atomic ash. Every hour-and-a half the dawn met me. The sun rose in an incomparable splendor of glowing color. Can we allow this sun to be darkened for the people of our earth by the black clouds of nuclear war explosions?<sup>65</sup>

In order to underscore the helpfulness of the Soviet state, Tereshkova brought up her personal experience, that is, being brought up by a single mother after the father's death during the war with Finland. Her mother, in spite of being alone, did her best to bring up the children in the best possible way. She did not do that on her own, however, Tereshkova pointed out clearly that this would not have been possible without the support from the state, a socialist state.

But I would not have said everything if I did not speak of the might achievement of my mother-country, the great land of socialism, which helped the millions of widows and orphans left after that dreadful war to get on to their feet.

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<sup>64</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>65</sup> Fond 7928 op. 3 file 964, Valentina Tereshkova Greets the Congress. Brochure "World Congress of Women" p. 87. (Documents adopted by the World Congress of Women, version 2; resolutions, recommendations, an appeal), June 1963.

The amount of praise and attention Tereshkova received at the World Congress of Women was immense. Nearly every speech was lauding Tereshkova's achievement. "Tereshkova's deed has once and for all buried the myth of women's inferiority, and opened a new stage of women's struggle for conquering the place in the sun, rightfully belonging to women," said Silvia Hernandez from Honduras.<sup>66</sup> "Tereshkova has proven to the world that women are capable of occupying in the society and life equal place with men," said the representative of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers.<sup>67</sup> During the plenary sessions, the delegates were getting distracted by Tereshkova's presence, and in the last session of the congress, the chair of the session made an announcement that it was disrespectful of the delegates to loiter and make noise around Tereshkova's table when the speaker was still delivering her speech. It is clear that the Soviet officials understood that such a situation would develop – not just Tereshkova appearing and speaking at the congress, but also her immense popularity among the delegates, would strengthen the effective transmission of messages about the USSR.

The Soviet representative and officials at the Congress were ready to provide a number of additional "proofs" of the superiority of the Soviet Union for people in general – and women in particular. As mentioned in subchapter 3.1, several hundreds of delegates were to stay after the Moscow World Congress of Women to tour the country. This message was voiced on the first day of the congress by Moscow Mayor Vladimir Promyslov, who combined his laudatory speech of Tereshkova with an invitation the delegates to stay in the capital and see with their own eyes

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<sup>66</sup> Fond 7928, op. 3 file 960. (Texts of the speeches of the delegates of the plenary session part 5), June 29 1963.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

“how much in this country is done for the well-being of people,” women in particular.<sup>68</sup> But it was Valentina Tereshkova who was the most impressive of these “proofs,” and her achievement, combined with her biography, created an image of her as an embodiment of the “Soviet dream.” Tereshkova was meant to serve – and served -- as a powerful “gender weapon” deployed by the Soviet Union in its ideological warfare with the United States.

## Conclusion

The Congress presented the Soviet Union with a perfect opportunity to deploy the “gender weapons” that had been created, of which Valentina Tereshkova was the most vibrant one. The “gender victory” of the USSR represented by the flight of the first woman in space, had already sent to the world the message about the position of the “land of socialism” at the forefront of women’s equality (obviously irritating the main rival of the USSR, the United States, and causing sexist defensive reactions in its media outlets and regrets from some of its top). Having Tereshkova appear at the World Congress of Women, which gathered an enormous number of foreign visitors, allowed the USSR to have her effectively communicate certain messages about socialism and the Soviet Union to a large audience whose members could potentially influence the policies of their respective governments. It was one thing when the WIDF President Eugenie Cotton and Vice-President Nina Popova praised the high standards of living and great opportunities for self-realization provided to women in the USSR. It was a qualitatively different thing when a woman who had herself undergone the ascendance from an ordinary factory worker to a world star of space exploration spoke from her own experience – and paid credits to the government and the ideological system of her country. Tereshkova, after her spectacular

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<sup>68</sup> GARF Fond 7928, op. 3, file 956 (Texts of the speeches of the delegates of the plenary session), June 24 1963.

achievement, possessed a particularly strong capacity of influencing and persuading audiences, which the Soviet authorities understood.

## Conclusions

This thesis has focused on the June 1963 WIDF World Congress of Women that took place in Moscow, only a few days after the successful space flight of Valentina Tereshkova, and has explored the meaning of these combined events in the context of Khrushchev's policies of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition.

For most of the post-1945 era, the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, struggled for global supremacy. They took sides in armed conflicts around the world, sponsored guerillas in distant countries, and tirelessly increased their military prowess. By the middle of the 1950s, it had become clear that an all-out war might destroy the whole world. The policy of peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems was proposed by Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the CPSU, who asserted that in order to avoid all-out war, the superpowers should compete in other areas than the military domain. A devout socialist, he believed that his system, and not capitalism, would inevitably win in this competition.

Based on my research of the archives of the Soviet Women's Committee (the Soviet member of the WIDF which organized the 1963 Congress) and Soviet and American media, I have argued that the Soviet Union successfully used the 1963 events—Tereshkova's flight and her being admired and hailed at the World Congress of Women—as an opportunity for public diplomacy, and showcased the USSR to the world as the champion of women's rights. Their victory was such that Claire Booth, a former US Ambassador to Italy, in an article in *Life* called the US men's inability to find the right answer to the question “Why did the Soviet Union launch their woman cosmonaut into space?” the “costliest Cold War blunder.” While most of the

literature on the history of the Cold War is still gender blind, I have attempted to show not only that the competition (peaceful and not) between the United States and the Soviet Union went beyond missiles, satellites, technology, or even agriculture, but also that their competition regarding their treatment of women by the 1960s was a key part of the superpower struggle for global ideological supremacy.

I hope that my thesis has also made a meaningful contribution to the historiography of international women's organizations in the postwar era, and in particular to the still largely unwritten history of the biggest global women's organization, the Women's International Democratic Federation. The scope of this thesis has allowed me to discuss only one aspect—though an important one—of the 1963 WIDF Congress, but my research in the archives has shown that a wealth of material and important issues such as the heated political debates among the WIDF membership await further exploration.

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