
‘A SONG FOR EUROPE’: MUSIC OR POLITICS?

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This article highlights some of the debatable issues related to the international media event – the Eurovision Song Contest. In addition to the theoretical basis of studying the ‘Eurovision’ phenomenon from the standpoint of theory and cultural history, the article reviews such aspects as problems of national identity, national branding, and political factors affecting the voting result. For the first time an attempt was made to briefly describe the musical trends of the contest in different periods of its development.

Despite the existing multidimensional studies of Eurovision, most of which are aimed primarily at the political and economic essence of the contest, the question remains unresolved: does politics affect the success of a song?

Keywords: *Eurovision, euro-pop, European Union, national identity, liberal values, Europeanness, national branding, cultural geography, neighborhood voting, sexual minorities.*

1. Introduction

International Television Eurovision Song Contest¹ (hereinafter referred to as ‘ESC’ was founded in 1956 by Marcel Bezençon, the general director of the Swiss television with the aim of promoting original and talented songs in the genre of pop music through a competition between authors and singers by comparing their creativity at the international level (O’Connor 2009: 9). The legal basis for the implementation of the European song contest is the formed provisions of the cultural policy of the Union of Europe, based on the idea of ‘national and regional diversity’ and at the same time, on ‘a common cultural heritage’ (Motschenbacher 2020). The cultural policy of the European Union, as well as the European culture itself, developed under the influence of two multi-directional trends: consolidation and integration, on the one hand, and the preservation of national characteristics and cultural diversity, on the other, alongside with the formation of an integral, unified cultural space due to the mutual enrichment of national cultures (Tabarintseva-Romanova 2016).

For many decades, the media event has been confidently developing its own internal patterns that reflect the agenda of the modern global media market and pop culture, along with that, it clearly captures the rapidly changing political, social, and national-cultural configuration of modern Europe. At the same time, the competition is increasingly consolidating non-musical factors around itself, which make it possible to support the idea of a ‘locus of global culture.’

Eurovision, similar to other international media events, is closely connected with complex diplomatic and economic relations between countries, so the largest controver-

sy that has arisen around it is considered to be the discussion of political voting criteria that are not related to the quality of music (Ciacu and Tasente 2012).

On the one hand, the contest declares current pan-European priorities that explicitly or covertly contribute to solving specific political problems, while focusing public attention on key problematic or the most dynamically developing countries and regions; on the other, it can be defined as aesthetically and emotionally balanced entertainment that forms a format-defined European model of pop music – ‘euro-pop’ (Shestakov 2013).

Unfortunately, Russian science pays insufficient attention to the study of the contest as an institution of popular culture yet; however, an appeal to the Eurovision contests would strengthen the scientific rationality of understanding the functioning of the instruments of the popular music industry; determine the national projection of Russia's image in foreign policy and its role in European integration, in order to develop intercultural dialogue *etc.*

The object of academic attention of existing scientific works of foreign authors is the issues of cultural and national identity in contradiction with Western and Eastern traditions and language problems (Rytzareva 2018: 30). At the same time, the ESC illustrates the use of the competition by states as a means of demonstrating national branding through culture and as a tool for creating an attractive image. In other words, the contest is a way of demonstrating one's statehood, where symbols are an integral part of nation-building. For example, the fact that the names of states are placed in the standings confirms this thesis, giving more importance to the nation in the imagination of the public than to the names of artists (Meijer 2013).

The geopolitical aspect of studying the role of ESC plays an important role in the research. In this context, the role of cultural geography is most clearly shown by the example of the phenomenon of ‘neighborhood voting.’ Many European countries that make up one cultural region² tend to rate each other highly due to the common cultural, confessional and linguistic basis, completely ignoring the actual musical aspect.³ As a result, cultural geography is one of the decisive factors for winning the competition (Alekseeva 2018).

Despite the obvious potential of studying the ‘Eurovision phenomenon’ for scientific discourse, the existing literature on the topic does not clarify two important questions: is the contest an instrument of unification in the hit production system; and is the contest a popularized media event that acts as an international cultural platform for political rivalry?

2. Theoretical Background / Hypotheses

The American ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (2008) points to the political use of music signs as an important symbolic tool. In this case, songs form a positive or negative identity, being an ideal means of combining iconic, indexical and symbolic signs. Signs form groups that are organically combined into a ‘semiotic field’ and are strengthened with more frequent repetition. The repetition of signs is of serious importance for the development of a positive feeling towards a certain product. The complex layering of various meanings in the simple form of a song is crucial for understanding the politics of identity and national imagery in general. Suffice it to say that the existing processes form the national identity through the use of symbols and traditions (Turino 2008)

Using Benedict Anderson's (2001) theory of ‘imaginary communities’⁴ we can assume that the image of identity at Eurovision is associated with the creation of an exter-

nal representation of oneself *to others*. This transition from identity to image is the essence of the concept of national branding in the ESC. Where identity is performed and celebrated, music creates an imaginary connection between the members of the nation (Anderson 2001).

The founder of the idea of 'national branding', an independent British political adviser, Simon Anholt (2003), identified two strategies for national branding: 1) 'self-exotization' and 2) 'hyper-Western strategy.' The first strategy seeks to present the national brand as Western ('I am like the West' – the representation of the national state as European, cosmopolitan and hypermodern as possible). The second strategy is to present itself as an alternative to Western competitors (Eastern consumers) in the production of a 'Western' cultural product, who will not vote for Western countries for political, cultural and historical reasons. The 'hyper-Western strategy' of national branding is simple, recognizable pop songs that in trying to please everyone, losing any deeper sense of cultural belonging (Meijer 2013).

Stephen Coleman (2008), Professor of Political Communication at Leeds University (UK), writes about this: '... to write songs for an unknown audience of hundreds of millions of people, all traces of ingrained experience must be erased. This leads to a template non-creative expression...' (Coleman 2008; Meijer 2013: 54).

Music and musical performance at the Eurovision Song Contest do not only represent national identity, but are also part of the processes of nation-building. It is obvious that international music competitions give the national state an opportunity to discuss politics within non-political environment (Meijer 2013). Thus, in the category of the issue of demonstrating national identity, 'peaceful competition' helps countries to hold themselves out at the forefront of European liberal values, acting as a catalyst for dynamic development linking gender and sexuality with culture, ethnic and religious identity in modern Europe.

During the period of rapid global technological growth, the musical competition turned out to be at the threshold of contradictions between the conservative south-eastern paradigm (the patriarchal rural tradition), on the one hand, and the aggressive postmodern transesthetics articulated in the ideology of sexual minorities, on the other hand (Shestakov 2013). The reflection of liberal cultural values within the ESC is evident by the example of winning a competition either by freaks⁵ ('Lordi', Finland, 2006) or representatives of sexual minorities (Duncan Laurence, the Netherlands, 2019). However, one should not assume that sexually provocative recordings were a characteristic feature of the resonant 59th European song contest. Liberal sexual values have been spread through the emerging cultural and media industries since the very foundation of the contest (Motschenbacher 2020).

From the very beginning, the competition was a scene for expression of liberal political and social attitudes, so the attempt to create unity through competitive selection reflecting a dynamic, multicultural society (as the principles set out in the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions suggest) is unrewarded by success. The ESC puts the main political and cultural structure of Europe into the voting matrix (Gad 1995: 150). Voting patterns reveal deep-rooted alliances and hostility between participating countries.

For many years, voting based on a combination of televoting and expert evaluation by a professional jury to determine the method of distributing points has led to specula-

tion, discriminating against some participants, causing prejudiced attitude in the final results (Blangiardo and Baio 2014). The voting system was supposed to guarantee fair results, and should not be associated with national conflicts and local coalitions. However, the countries participating in the competition and voting formed a tribunal of arbitrators of cultural value, where the voting process established a sociometric matrix of mutual artistic sympathy. It reflects more complex connections between socio-cultural processes.

According to the results of the study by Marta Blangiardo and Gianluca Baio (2014), the performers who sing in their native language tend to receive lower scores than those who sing in English.

In addition, the research results show that singers who perform solo usually receive higher scores than group performances. At the same time, it is obvious from the study that the migration effect is positively associated with higher scores. In other words, successful countries tend to be highly valued by their neighbors, where their populations tend to migrate. The study also confirms the absence of obvious negative bias in the entire set of voters and performers; therefore, no evidence was found to support the hypothesis that two extreme types of behavior are possible in a competition situation: negative (which may indicate ‘discrimination’) and positive (which may suggest ‘favoritism’) (Blangiardo and Baio 2014: 2321).

As a result of a statistical study by Marta Blangiardo and Gianluca Baio, it turned out that there is no significant negative bias in the tele-voting in all combinations. In some cases (and in accordance with previous data in the scientific literature), the authors found a moderate or significant positive bias, which can be explained by strong cultural similarities, for example, due to the common language and history and to a lesser extent due to geographical proximity and migration (*Ibid.*).⁶ If two countries vote for a third country, then the probability that they will also vote for each other will be higher (Gad 1995).

The results obtained indicate that the relations between countries assume a certain degree of ‘clickability’, since individual pairs of countries exchange votes between each other, so the correlation between the voting models of countries is related to their geographical proximity. If we take into account that geographical proximity leads to cultural proximity, it is likely that neighboring countries will have similar cultural tastes and sociological ties, and therefore will support each other's songs.

The enjoyment of songs is a function of confrontation of national and cultural tastes. The evaluation of music can hardly be objective, since the songs reflect the national taste, rhythm and meanings. Analyzing the distribution of voices in the Eurovision song contest, one may distinguish the current political and cultural differences, coalitions and factions among European nations. The voting matrix of this contest will show one common structure in European international relations (Gad 1995: 148–149). The non-random voting structure in the contest indicates a bias in the assessment. The bias reflects the fundamental political and cultural structure of Europe, where European unity and solidarity, national differences and ethnic conflicts are reflected in the results of the competition (Gad 1995: 150).

Due to the dispersion of stories related to the phenomenon of the contest, we propose a hypothesis based on the idea that the media event is not a mechanism for gener-

ating new products of popular song culture, as the contest implied, while the victory of a song or performer is closely related to diplomatic relations between countries and the political situation inside the country.

3. Data and Methods / Methodology

The idea about the politicization of the choice of a winning song is confirmed by our empirical observation aimed at identifying the economic and cultural value of the winning song for the music industry in general. We found that the first lines of the leading places in the competition do not reflect the same success in the international charts (Table 1), and respectively, do not reflect the worldwide success of a song, its popularity or mass commercial success.

Table 1

The most famous Eurovision hits in the world and their position in the contest

№	Year	Title	Place at the Eurovision Song Contest
1	1958	'Volare' ('Nel Blu Di Pinto Di Blu') Domenico Modugno (Italy)	3
2	1959	Piove' ('Ciao, ciao bambina') Domenico Modugno (Italy)	6
3	1961	'Al Di La' Betty Curtis (Italy)	5
4	1967	'L'amour Est Blue' Vicky Leandros (Luxembourg)	4
5	1969	'Boom-Band-A-Band' Lulu (United Kingdom)	1
6	1970	'All Kinds of Everything' Dana (Ireland)	1
7	1972	'Apres Toi' Vicky Leandros (Luxembourg)	1
8	1972	'Beg, Steal or Borrow' New Seekers (United Kingdom)	2
9	1974	'Waterloo' Abba (Sweden)	1
10	1976	'Judy Et Cie' Pierre Rapsat (Belgium)	8
11	1979	'Dschinghis Khan' Dschinghis Khan (Germany)	4
12	1980	'Theater' Katya Epstein (Germany)	2
13	1983	'Hi' Ofra Haza (Israel)	2
14	1985	'La Det Swinge' Bobbysocks (Norway)	1
15	1996	'Ooh Aah... Just A little Bit' (United Kingdom)	8
16	2005	'My Number One' Elena Paparizou (Greece)	1
17	2005	'Chacun Pense A Soi' Marie Ortal (France)	23
18	2006	'No, No, Never' Texas Lightning (Germany)	15

For the first time, the song ('Volare' (ital. 'Fly') performed by an artist from Italy – Domenico Modugno) that became a hit, appeared at the third contest in 1958. This is the only song in a language other than English, sung by an Italian singer and reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100; it was awarded a Grammy Award in the category 'Record of the Year' (1958).

In the early days of the contest, the song could become popular regardless of its language, the melodic complexity, the chosen musical style, and the image of the artist.

However, over time, as the rules of participation changed, and the technological aspect developed, when political and cultural events started to be taken into account, the success factors changed.

On the basis of empirical observation of the content and functional component of the competition, with application of general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, comparison, description, generalization, interpretation of data and with the use of content analysis, discourse analysis, it is possible to identify a number of interesting trends.

4. Experimental Section / Results

As a result of the review of the position of a song in the international charts (Figure 1), it turned out that the winning Eurovision songs remain recognizable and popular, as a rule, only in the national charts of their country and are forgotten about three months after the premiere at the Eurovision contest. Popular ESC songs are recognizable a little outside their country within the borders of the countries of friendly blocks. Among the 65 winning songs, only three compositions were included in the American charts.

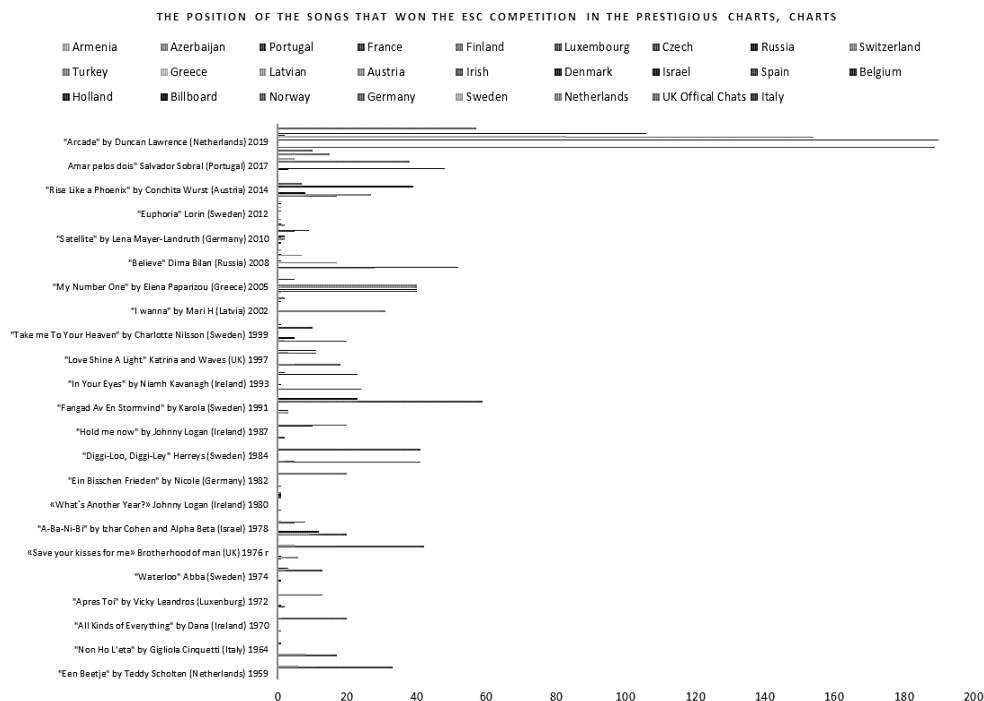


Fig. 1. Position in the prestigious charts, charts, winning songs in the ESC competition (Source: Author's calculations)

5. Results and Discussion

A study by a group of scientists⁷ at the University of Oxford suggested that all songs, at first glance, are equally 'good' – in other words, they have equal musical quality and, therefore, any differences in preferences expressed by a particular country are com-

pletely related to the question of taste. This 'national taste' is based on the idea that a country can collectively have clearly defined preferences (Fenn *et al.* 2008: 11).

Based on the content analysis of the song content of the contest of semi-finals and finals, we have identified the following trends.

In the first five years after the foundation of the contest, different image formation strategies were used, but most often they focused on the heterosexual component. During this period, songs about romantic love predominate. Perhaps it was also due to the fact that in quantitative terms, the advantage in the competition is given to female participants.

During the same period, a patriotic song for the contest was a rarity, which is surprising, since the events of the global geopolitical, military, economic and ideological confrontation in Europe are not so far away. An important feature of the thematic originality of the song texts of the 1956 contest is the multitude of characters in the plot of the song. This is a consequence of the display of sexual liberalization in Western Europe in the late 1950s, manifested in a frivolous attitude to intimacy, traditional relations between a man and a woman, ridiculing loyalty, *etc.* One of the reasons for the opposition between the traditional and the liberal is, firstly, the manifestation of these trends in the social sphere, and secondly, the pursuit of a commercial goal-orientation to the adolescent market ('intergenerational attractiveness'). It is also important to note that the manifestation of the division of East and West in relation to sexuality is observed in the 'national voting model' (states with the ruling Christian Democratic Party, *e.g.*, Italy, award high points to the first performance in the history of the contest that hints at homosexuality – Teddy Scholter, 1959, the Netherlands) (Hemetek 2017: 17).

In the post-war period, the northern European states were considered more liberal towards the south, so southern artists developed a career in the north and benefited from it. It is no coincidence that the performances of the northern states are most clearly represented at the competition, they, in turn, have been determining the stylistic trends of the competition for several years (Ireland – seven first places, Great Britain – fifteen second places, Sweden – six fifth places, the Netherlands – four first places, *etc.*). Thus, according to Eurostatistics, Ireland, Luxembourg, France, Great Britain, Sweden, the Netherlands are among the most frequently winning countries.

The United Kingdom is the most important and interesting player in terms of determining style trends and performing techniques. The 'Grey Cardinal' of Eurovision, the country, that occupies the second place more often than other countries (a record number of fifteen in the entire history of the contest), for a long time, until the early 1970s, indirectly determined the style and format of the 'European song.' Over time, the performance in English added a clear advantage to the artist. Referring to the reference book of the TV and radio host, commentator of international entertainment events John Kennedy O'Connor, which is the only one that is exhaustive in the analysis of the statistical data of the competition, we state that English was most often used by the winning countries – 249 times; French is in second place – 149 times (O'Connor 2009). In view of this circumstance, the aphorism 'phonetic singing of the English language' was formed in the area of the competition. Great Britain, in the context of Eurovision, did not only determine the trends of the style of a successful song, but also, in general, influenced the entire world music market. However, recently the UK has lost its influential position. For example, in the 2021 contest, the artist James Newman with the

song 'Embers' took the last place having received zero points according to the results of voting by the jury and the audience.

The year 1967 is the catalyst for changes in the history of the competition; it is caused by emergence of new trends regarding the musical style and instrumental arrangement. The recording of The Beatles' debut album 'Please Please Me' ('Please make me happy') in 1963, and the crazy success of the winner of the 1967 contest from the UK – Sandie Shaw with the song 'Puppet On a String' had a special influence on musical trends.

The appearance and use of electronic instruments at the competition led to a change in the tonal coloring of the sound, melody and rhythm. With the new technical capabilities, there was no need for live accompaniment, the orchestra's playing was gradually replaced by phonograms (for the first time – Great Britain – 1973), and the melodies became poorer and poorer in the following decades. The absence of a melody has now become an obvious trend, and the memorability of primitive sequential sounds is realized with the help of 'hypnotic repetitiveness' (endlessly repeated melodic ostinato, hook,⁸ riff⁹). Later, it will result in a situation where the technical side of the performance (vocal technique, voice capabilities) will be in the first place. The voice will prevail over the music, arrangement, instrumental accompaniment. There will be a lot of 'screaming', long-lasting notes in the upper tessitura for the female voice, and the use of the falsetto register will become a 'fashionable' trend and even the norm for the male voice.

After the break-up of the 'Liverpool Four', the trend of vocal groups continues. During this period, a large number of groups were represented on the ESC stage, unlike the previous period of the competition's history, where solo artists performed more often. The resounding victory of the Swedish quartet 'Abba' in 1974 with the song 'Waterloo' continued this trend. In the 1970s and 1980s, small forms of vocal groups often appeared as participants (duets, quartets, or vocal and instrumental groups).

Until 1973, the repertoire of the contest participants was dominated by French ballads (the triumph of the 1960s and 1970s), after 1974, it was dominated by English ballads for several years. Regarding this fact, experts and critics¹⁰ highlight the formed trend that ballads won the ESC competition, which further contributed to the unification of the format, and, accordingly, the adjustment of all performances to this 'euro-pop' standard. As before, compositions of a folk, jazz nature, or the performance of a song in classical (opera technique) at the competition are not appreciated (*e.g.*, in 1957, the UK's performance in an operatic style did not meet the trends that dominated in the world). Any attempts to demonstrate a song of a satirical (comedic) nature, with a plot, were not also recognized, and as a rule were at the very bottom of the standings.

In the 1970s, many songs of a cheerful nature appeared on the ESC, their melodies were simple (in comparison with the previous period of lyrical compositions). More often there are intonations of 'inviting' nature, 'stadium', 'final' songs, written as a rule in a major key with a gradual upward movement, an increase in dynamics. The vocal and instrumental arrangements of this period are so predictable and trite that it is not possible to single out a number of memorable melodies. Perhaps this crisis of ideas led to the fact that ESC viewers began to lose interest in the competition. At the same time, the development of cable television and the availability of video recorders began to destroy the 'monopoly of home television'. According to experts, the increase in the popu-

larity of television should be considered as one of the fundamental missions of the competition, since it was preceded by the unification of television and radio companies of the European Broadcasting Union.¹¹

The period of the 1980s for the contest was marked by the widespread use of performance with more and more sexual overtones. During this period, prizes were most often awarded to relatively weak vocal performers in terms of the technical capabilities of the voice and melodic content. The sounding voices during this period are characterized by timbre poverty; insufficiently surround sound, monotonous, unmemorable stylistics. Perhaps due to this decrease in the musical level, the winners' popularity outside the ESC also decreased.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the competition was not influenced by disco music, most likely the 'message songs' were more successful. Also by this time, with the development of sound and lighting equipment, it became possible to install more complex scenery, with complex mechanisms. Already during this period, we can talk about the competition as a show.¹² In addition to the bright architectural and artistic solutions of the stage design, bright stage outfits were added. The dresses of the singers reached a minimum length starting from 1983 and this trend continued for a long time afterwards.

During this period, in our opinion, the competition experienced the second wave of musical crisis, the lack of musical ideas and forms led to the fact that it became possible for non-professionals to perform at the competition (*e.g.*, a secretary from Austria in 1983, *etc.*). The pace became much faster. Solo singers with their own live accompaniment gradually began to be included in the savings box of director's ideas. It is of importance to note that at the beginning of the development of the competition, little-known contestants in their homeland could get a prize place, in the future, preliminary success in their Homeland contributed to further pan-European success and a prize place at the competition.

During the same period, the traditional 'la-la-la' was formed in the musical space of the competition. This tradition dates back to the very first competition in 1956, when a singer from Switzerland, Lys Assia, performed the winning song 'Das Alte Karussell' (from German. 'The old merry-go-round') forgot the text and replaced it by humming the melody with the syllable 'la-la-la'. Later, the use of this technique in the structure of the song allowed the composition to occupy higher places (because of the convenience of performance and easier memorization of the melody). The assessment of vocal skill becomes an exceptional rarity of this period. There is a feeling that during this period, most obviously since 1988, songs of a new style appear, for the first time songs in the rock style are included in the competition program. Also, the 1980s are characterized by a correlation of two groups of countries, some countries are setting the fashion for the leading musical style (Great Britain, Sweden, Ireland, France, and Germany), and the others are catching up (Yugoslavia, Spain, Greece, Turkey, and Finland).

Since the 1990s, songs with political overtones have been played at the ESC, that is, the dominant theme of the contest's songs is politics. At this time, the popularity of the artist preceding the competitive performance no longer matters, now scandalous events accompanying the artist during participation in the competition add ratings (unconfirmed facts about sexual affiliation, gender, political views, *etc.*). The professional jury is not attracted by the novelty in the performance, but with a new innovative solution of the 'audience vote', victories were awarded to modern compositions. Among the

large number of female performances of not high professional quality, male singers are becoming a rarity at the competition, and therefore they look more impressive and advantageous. However, male duets are less popular than ever before. After 1998, there is a new turning point in the history of the competition's development.

The noughties (the 2000s) are characterized by an abundance of electronic arrangements, mixing of electronic samples. The backing vocalists demonstrate plasticity and higher choreographic training than was previously observed. Stage performance is again crucial for the audience vote. In the noughties, the 'palm of victory' of the leading countries moved to the block of Slavic countries: Russia (Dima Bilan – 2008), Ukraine (Ruslana – 2004; Verka Serdyuchka – 2nd place – 2007, Ani Lorak – 2nd place – 2008, Jamala – 2016), the Republic of Belarus (Dmitry Koldun – 7th place – 2007), and the countries of the Balkan peninsula: Turkey (Sartab Ehrener – 2003), Greece (Elena Paparizou – 2005), Serbia (Maria Sherifovich – 2007), *etc.*

During this period, Great Britain lost its lasting influence, being content with the last places in the standings (in different years, 15th, 16th, 19th, 22nd, 26th place), now the 'eastern melodies' of Balkan music are increasingly attracting attention: Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, Romania, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, *etc.*

In the general musical content of the competition, there are even more 'loud' songs with poor melodic figures, as well as the use of a 'sweet' register. This indicates a desire to demonstrate your voice, instead of music (Albania, Rona Nisliu, 2012). The European song contest, as it was originally conceived, had already turned into a 'celebrity contest' by this time. The external stage image, the accompanying facts of the artist's artistic reputation, his/her nationality and the country (s)he represents, from the point of view of geopolitical influence and political events have become important. In this sense, the competition ceases to be an international competition, since there are obvious examples when a guest artist from a friendly or 'neighboring' country performs for a particular country. This circumstance also applies to the performance of music from various countries, for example, the performance in the Latin style by the representative of Belarus Alena Lanskaya in 2013 (16th place), with phonetically incorrect pronunciation of the English language and the national dialect, did not add harmony to the performance and accuracy of compliance with the musical style.

After 2014, the male performance of romantic, lyrical songs with an inflated tessitura (the use of a falsetto register) becomes currently important. There is a sense of infantilism and naivety in these performances. In recent years, since 2016, the influence of dance music has been observed; the compositions are 'club' in nature using elements of techno and electro music.

6. Conclusion

The conducted review of the song content of the contest, based on empirical observation, allowed us to draw conclusions that went beyond the political narrative; allowed us to identify some musical trends characteristic of a certain period of the competition's development. However, despite the obvious potential of studying musical trends in explaining the success of a particular song, cultural factors remain important for the scientific understanding of the 'Eurovision phenomenon', namely: 'cultural diplomacy' (international relations between countries based on historical, geographical, linguistic rela-

tionships); problems of preserving national identity¹³ in conditions of 'multicultural modernity' (over the past 50 years, the identity of 'Europe' has changed a lot, which entailed changes in the rules of the competition); political differences – stereotypical ideas of European countries about the image of power and the image of democracy of peripheral countries; marketing factors – strategies of 'national branding' as a powerful tool in 'selling the nation', *etc.*

Despite an ambitious attempt to unravel the elements of winning combinations that lead to pan-European popularity, such as: melody, harmony, vocal capabilities of performers, arrangements, visual solutions, the meanings of song lyrics, we were unable to find a significant correlation between the musical preferences of the participating countries and the cultural factors of the ESC mentioned above.

It is quite obvious that the participation of music in the dialogue between nations and cultural exchange gives reason to call music a universal political language. The diplomatic function of music in different historical periods has moved from music reflecting national interests to music promoting protest themes. Regulating the moral aspects of society's life and shaping civic values with the help of three main functions,¹⁴ music has become an object of exceptional social and political significance.

Despite the few scientific studies (Boulos 2013; Vuletic 2018) devoted to the study of the political nature of the ESC, today the most common discourse of politicization of the competition still remains obvious. There is no doubt that the influence of politics on the Eurovision phenomenon can be seen in many of its aspects.

Every year the ESC promotes its institutional policy ideas and opinions. The performers demonstrate their political relations and status in society, hidden in songs (*e.g.*, a song by singer Jamala (Ukraine) in 2016 – as a triumph of cultural 'soft power' hidden in the glamorous lights of the stage). The lyrics are sent to the international community as a political message.

Since 2002, the political aspect has been manifested in the use and demonstration of slogans belonging to the host countries of the contest. With their help, they send a 'message' to Europe, as well as to other participants (*e.g.*, 'Under the Same Sky' in 2004, 'We Are One' in 2013, '#JoinUs' in 2014, 'Celebrate Diversity' in 2017, *etc.*).

The results of various studies indicate that music is a tool for defining the elements of identity, as well as for creating a joint culture of identity by uniting different masses on the basis of a common language. The victory of the English language at the ESC is a confirmation of the 'cultural struggle' between tradition (the use of the native language signifying identity) and modernity (the participation of 'peripheral' countries gives an opportunity to express themselves in the international arena and earn a positive reputation as a proof of 'Europeanness').

Given the existing official position of the competition emphasizing the importance of cultural and economic unification of European countries, it is a mistake to believe that in the conditions of competitive 'cultural struggle' this is possible. In other words, this situation raises the question about the way in which 'unification' becomes possible in a competitive environment.

The stated idea of 'unification' is possible only for fans of the contest, since it allows a large number of people to simultaneously join the TV screens and live the online broadcasts. Within the countries, the attitude towards the participants, and therefore towards the countries they represent, is ambiguous.

Unification obviously implies cohesion of the countries of the Western Bloc. The Eastern Bloc countries remain an invisible force of opposition to liberalization. In this ‘show-off of countries,’ Russia has its own way, different from the established structure of hegemony at the European song contest. In the address of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to the participants of the Victory Parade on Red Square on May 9, 2022, the position on this issue was openly stated by in the following way, ‘... *We will never give up our love for the Motherland, our faith and traditional values, the customs of our ancestors, and respect for all peoples and cultures.*’¹⁵

The exclusion of Russia from the ESC contest in 2022 indicates that it is even more politicized. Moreover, in the final of the 66th contest on May 14, 2022, politicization reflected a geopolitical record, acquired unthinkable frank forms of expression. Political slogans were repeatedly shouted from the stage into the public space, which is a gross violation of the rules of the international competition. However, the winning country of 2022, Ukraine, was not disqualified from the competition for violating the rules. The organizers of the Eurovision Song Contest considered that other performers (e.g., the Icelandic group ‘Systur’, who publicly shouted words of support to Ukraine in connection with the existing military special operation), and the statements of ‘Kalush Orchestra’ are humanitarian, not political. The current situation completely ignores the actual musical aspect of the event. In this regard, we can safely rename the contest from ‘Eurovision’ to ‘Politicovision’. One way or another, the competition today is an important cultural phenomenon that deserves further academic study.

NOTES

¹ It is often celebrated as a festival.

² These are such blocs of friendly countries as the ‘Yugoslav bloc’, the bloc of ‘post-Soviet countries’, the ‘Scandinavian bloc’, and the ‘Baltic bloc’.

³ For example, this is more often typical for the Scandinavian and Baltic bloc countries.

⁴ A nation is an imaginary community, fueled by fictional traditions.

⁵ Eng. ‘freak’ – colloquial slang is a representative of a subculture characterized by a bright, incongruous appearance and non-standard behavior.

⁶ The victory of many countries is explained by their presence in the influential ‘Western Bloc’ (England, Ireland, France, Switzerland, Malta, Luxembourg, and Israel), the reciprocity of such a coalition supports the central role and dominance in the ‘European taste.’ Despite the fact that Europe can be considered an ‘ensemble of nations,’ the countries belonging to the ‘Western Bloc’ have almost incoherent behavior in relation to voting and assessments. The difference of tastes, in this case, is based on political and historical circumstances (Gad 1995). The countries of the ‘Northern Bloc’ (Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Belgium) are characterized by geographical proximity, common cultural and linguistic interests (the dominance of Germanic languages), and have the same right to vote (*Ibid.*). The ‘Mediterranean bloc’ (Italy, Greece, Spain, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Monaco) is marginalized, since its countries are culturally dispersed and do not reciprocate outside the near cultural space. The peoples of the Mediterranean coalition choose songs with clear traces of traditional popular music (*Ibid.*). It is quite obvious that the unity of each bloc is based on different feelings and interests: the Western one is based on historical and political interests, the Northern one is based on common cultural and linguistic interests, the Mediterranean one has a unifying factor – the sea. All this demonstrates the hidden circumstances and interrelated links between European countries. Thus, any large differences in voting may reflect some deeper social differences between countries.

⁷ Daniel Fenn, Omer Suleman, Janet Efstathiou and Neil F. Johnson. How does Europe Make Its Mind Up? Connections, cliques, and compatibility between countries in the Eurovision Song Contest/

Physics Department, Oxford University, Oxford OX1 3PU, U.K. and Department of Engineering Science, Oxford University, Parks Road (Dated: February 2, 2008).

⁸ A hook is a part of a song or composition that stands out in some way and is especially liked by the listener and 'captures' him. This term is most often used in relation to pop, rap, rock and dance music.

⁹ Aaron Copland (1900–1990), the American composer, identified four major components of music: melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre, with the first component being of paramount importance.

¹⁰ Clive James (1939–2019) was an Australian critic, journalist, broadcaster and writer.

¹¹ Eurovision was created with the help of the popularization of television. According to the rules of the contest, the song must represent the national TV-company.

¹² In 1987, a laser show was used for the first time.

¹³ The contest as a 'showcase of national identity' is able to generate a sense of community to a group, using differences to convey a common sense of belonging to Europe. The cultural event offers a platform for negotiations on European identities, which are defined mostly in terms of nationality.

¹⁴ Socratic (magical), aesthetic (artistic), and communicative.

¹⁵ Transcript on the official website of JSC 'Channel One'. <https://www.1tv.ru>.

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