Russian Civil Society Symposium: Building Bridges to the Future
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Russian Civil Society Symposium:
Building Bridges to the Future

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Introduction

In April 2014, Salzburg Global Seminar, in cooperation with the Yeltsin Presidential Center and Yeltsin Foundation, hosted the Russian Civil Society Symposium: Building Bridges to the Future to address the challenges and opportunities currently facing civil society in Russia as a means to understand the needs and perspectives of Russian civil society groups and to consider new approaches to international civil society engagement with Russia.

Since the 1990s, a more active and open civil society sector has developed across the Russian Federation. While civil society institutions and civic engagement in Russia are not new, the growth of the sector in recent years created hopes that Russian civil society could become the voice for a more effective democratic system, more efficient social services, and a check against corruption and centralized power. At the same time, the increasing interconnectivity between Russian and international civil society institutions created a sense of optimism that an interconnected “Euro-Atlantic civil society” could make positive contributions to difficult geopolitical challenges.

Of late, however, these hopes have largely been put on hold. Russian civil society institutions are facing a variety of political and social pressures, and are becoming less connected to international partners. Geopolitical relations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community have worsened, and international civil society groups and donors have become the object of suspicion as instruments of external interference. At a political level, prior optimism about a “re-set” in Russia-Euro-Atlantic relations has faltered, however, with implications for support for civil society institutions.

There is an urgent need to rebuild bridges and to reestablish a serious dialogue about the role of Russian civil society and relations between diverse civic actors domestically, as well as between Russian organizations and international partners.
The discussion about civil society in general is about the power of people to create change. The pace of change could vary; Russia is currently facing many disturbing trends that restrict the development of civil society. It is important to take a long view and think about the trajectory of moving forward. Looking at all actors of civil society – citizen groups, registered NGOs, media, individual activists, etc. – helps to create more complete picture.

The symposium explored the following questions:
- How can the public space be expanded for people to contend that there is sense of debate?
- How do we create a more robust civil sector?
- What is the framework that could encourage participation and ability of citizens to engage?
- Is civil society in Russia as a whole at threat if a small group of organizations is under threat?

The organizers, Salzburg Global Seminar, the Yeltsin Presidential Center and Yeltsin Foundation set three key goals:
1. To comprehensively review the presence and state of civil society in Russia;
2. To consider what steps can be taken to stronger future;
3. To establish what the role of international engagement such as donors and forums should be.
Perspectives on Russian Civil Society Today

Globally, civil society is a new phenomenon. It is sometimes called “civil society”, the “independent sector”, or the “third sector”. What underlies all definitions is the ability of citizens to participate and engage. The session discussed the perception of civil society inside Russia, the general environment for independent action and formal NGOs, the new trends with local activism, and the legal environment.

Perception of civil society in Russia
At large, citizens in Russia do not view civil society positively. Governmental rhetoric is increasingly anti-Western and portrays NGO leaders as spies and sources of Western influence. This is particularly relevant for human rights groups, especially if they defend political rights. Increased media censorship shrinks space for debate and information sharing. Because society is not aware of the role of NGOs and the public good they deliver, they have a negative or distorted image. Russians do not view them as an organic force from within the society. Only up to 15 percent of Russians claim to have heard something about the work of an NGO; they could name some groups but they do not identify them as forming part of the civil society sector and do not understand that they are mission and not profit driven.

Powerless society
The state of society itself is important as it sets the basis for civil society development and action. Are Russian people ready to take action? Are they ready to hold government to account? When asked if they could influence the course of events in Russia, 80 percent responded that “nothing depends on us.” They adopt a strategy of passive adjustment rather than influence. This helps the regime to achieve more autocracy. Paternalism is prospering, with society
showing a lot of sympathy with the government and little solidarity with those who dare to oppose it. Quality of society is best described as a powerless people and a strong State. Part of this is inherited from Soviet times of a totalitarian State when citizens were voiceless and punished for their actions.

Overall, state institutions, which are beneficial for development of civil society, are weak. The State apparatus is more powerful than its citizens and there are virtually no checks and balances. It is an omnipotent and lawless system and there is no way for an individual to stand against the State. Two thirds of Russians routinely respond that no court can protect their rights.

Society at large has latent nationalism and xenophobic feelings which are bred by the fact that the West is unknown as few Russians travel abroad. The blend of orthodoxy and nationalism in Russian society is overestimated in the media but still present as government increasingly partners with the Orthodox Church to achieve its political goals.

The quandary is: How can conditions be provided for human nature to change? In Russia, change will come from new social arrangements that will set new rules of behavior. While in the West often the demand for new arrangements is coming from civil society and interest groups, in Russia at the moment the state is setting the rules, and independent actors can barely influence them.

Tightening space for independent action
The legislative environment in which groups must operate has been persistently tightening. The so-called “foreign agent” and “homosexual propaganda” laws are in place and used to intimidate groups. Deprived of a possibility to work openly with Western donors, many human rights groups, independent think tanks struggle to remain independent. Most registered groups remain silent and loyal to the state. The government achieved its goal by making the sector more vulnerable, dependent on state funding, and with the wide spread self-censorship. The legal work of NGOs to defend their cases in courts diverts attention and resources from focusing on their key purposes. On the positive side, this has created some solidarity within the sector.
Following the Ukraine crisis, the Upper House of the Russian Duma is drafting legislation that might tighten laws for NGOs even further. There was no clear agreement among the Salzburg Global Fellows about whether or not the legal environment will actually deteriorate. It will also depend on the Constitutional Court’s ruling on amendments to the foreign agent law and how the notion of “political activity” for NGOs will be defined.

Another squeeze on civil society is the deteriorating media situation in Russia and the increasing use of propaganda. Federal TV is distorting the situation, while private media has been taken over by groups loyal to the Kremlin. Popular mainstream media outlets such as Lenta.ru and Rain TV as well as some websites have been blocked.

**Growth of civic activism and philanthropy**

In the last four to five years, and after the anti-Putin political protests of 2011-13, Russia is facing a rise in civic activism. These newly emerged groups and initiatives, often led by the urban middle class, know how to organize and achieve results. They engage in charity and are forming a generation of critical citizens. They represent a non-Soviet, autonomous force in Russia, which is the hope for civil society development. Private giving also opens up new resources for civil society development. There are a lot of talented people working in private foundation sector.
This segment could be a threat to the system of President Vladimir Putin. There is a growing crackdown to suppress this development and symbol of generational change. It remains to be seen what forces will prevail.

This growing activism provides an opportunity for registered NGOs which could help ordinary people to become the main stakeholders for the civil society sector. This should be done with new language that would provide them the chance to influence the world around them.

Weakness of registered NGOs and appropriation by the state

Formally registered groups are the backbone of civil society. In Russia there is growing over-dependence of these groups on the state. The funding from governmental programs is increasing at the federal and regional levels. NGOs are a weak partner to the state and only engage with the state in the means and on issues that are permitted. Russian state authorities make a very clear distinction between advocacy and service provision. It is becoming increasingly difficult to conduct any advocacy work. For example, Soldiers Mothers in the 1990s were able to combine both service delivery and advocacy; they helped young men in the army but also worked with the lawmakers in Russia to improve the conditions of military service. However, since 2001-2002 they have started to complain of restricted access to law makers. This current split between advocacy and service is artificial, and when service organizations mature they turn to advocacy. That is why civil society groups need to show real solidarity and not just verbal support.
The rhetoric about civil society increased during the second Putin term when he repeatedly stated that without a mature civil society there can be no effective solution to people’s pressing problems. Civil society should be here to serve the need and be “societally useful”. This approach of state appropriation of civil society means that the government is defining the space for what it deems useful. This creates confrontation by dividing civil society into those who are “good/useful” and those who are “foreign agents/fifth column”. Recently the state created pseudo voluntarism, “independent” think thanks, and human rights defenders who are supporting governmental positions. Non-state actors are also increasingly being used for mobilizing support for governmental action. For example, before the annexation of Crimea, many NGOs participated in pseudo patriotic actions for Crimea.

Conclusion

Russian civil society is going through turbulent times. The increasingly assertive role of the state and criminalization of foreign funding tightens the space for independent action. Media censorship and propaganda presents Western values (civil society, tolerance, non-traditional values) as foreign and hostile toward Russia. Despite the tightening space and rather negative image of civil society groups, participants in Salzburg agreed that hope is coming from the new generation of critical citizens who are newly active. Civil society development can be delayed and obstructed by the state but no iron curtain is possible and democracy will eventually take root.
Taking the Measure of Russian Civil Society

Civil society sector is an integral part of society-at-large, and as such key questions are raised around the environment in which it operates and the characteristics of its interaction with the media, citizens and business community.

Under increasingly controlled media, the key question is: how can the sector change the negative narrative projected by the state and get its story across? How can civil society deal with the influx of new activism and possibilities that open up from cooperation with small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?

Shrinking media space

The shrinking media space is the key challenge for civil society. 90 percent of Russians receive news from the state TV and only 25 percent from the Internet.

The crackdown on media started after the 2004-05 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. The state undermined independent media by proposing two choices to the protesters: “Either you [media outlet] die or the State will feed you.” This was done by restricting advertising options, through which companies were discouraged from cooperating with the opposition or independent outlets. When Putin came to power the pressure on opposition media strengthened, such as on Itogy, NTV and Echo of Moscow. For example, after increasing pressure on satellite networks, Rain TV lost 85 percent of its audience and New Times magazine cannot get any advertisements.

Now the only independent media outlets that exist are online but even here restriction is growing. Access to websites that allow oversight and increase transparency are blocked in Russia, such as online public records of ownership in Miami, FL, USA, where many of the Russian political elite own property. A new state order in March 2014 blocked the site of opposition leader Garry Kasparov, the Daily Journal and
Grani.ru – all sites that routinely carry content critical of Kremlin policy.

Due to increasing media pressure, citizen and data journalism is coming to the forefront, such as opposition activist Aleksei Navalny’s investigations of Russian elite ownership and the tracking of plagiarism of Russian dissertations by Disernet.

State undermining of high-profile groups

The State is seen to undermine the most visible civil society groups, by withdrawing independent sources of funding, imprisoning high-profile Putin opponents such as oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, aimed at discouraging businesses from financing pro-democracy groups, and restricting the work of foreign foundations. As the result, many Westerns donors (such as USAID and Soros) have moved out of the country.

A recent example of crowd funding online called “Like and Pay” developed by Vladimir Lebedev closed down. The platform collected over 1 million RUB but was forced to shut down due to refusal of Russian banks to provide services.

Growing radicalism

Radicalism is growing in Russian society. New civil society groups that promote patriotic, nationalist, orthodox and anti-Western groups are more appealing to society and are prospering. Russkiye
Vstrechi (“Russian Meetings”) and Parents Resistance of Russia are just a few recent examples of this trend. Large Russian companies are financing these groups and support various patriotic marches and demonstrations, but they are also often supported by smaller, local business that believe that such cooperation could buy them some guarantees and favors in the eyes of the federal authorities. The increasing revanchist rhetoric towards Western values requires a response from well-established NGOs.

**Young civic activism**

Civic activism is gaining more attention among the Russian youth. They work on issues such as improving their local environment and regional election observations. The young activists that emerge are not focusing on wider issues such as civil or political rights and see it often as a form of social entertainment. Studies show that their motivation is to improve their communities and have some meaningful purpose. In some cases these urban groups cooperate with the government but only until these groups become too strong or too powerful. The government wants to remain at the steering wheel to set goals of such cooperation. Trust between the capable experts and the state is absent.

Interaction between these groups and well-established NGOs is limited. The NGOs need to democratize more and open up to this new generation. This means showing them the possibilities that exist in civic engagement and providing participation in decision-making.
SME engagement

Russian small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) are playing an increasing role in civil society. Being under the radar in comparison to larger companies, they can help with an in-kind services and technology, participate in crowd funding, provide “symbolic” and cover-up jobs for the activists so they have some income, create free open spaces such as co-working places, cafes and book shops. In the Altai region, one business is even financing a popular civic organization to conduct election monitoring.

With the absence of large-scale crowd funding (there is only one major platform for crowd funding in Russia: Planeta) SMEs should not be treated merely as the “money sacks” for the sector but more like partners. SMEs are the best manifestation of pro-Western value in Russia, they are a home-grown zapadniki. They understand competition, which in their mental framework means freedom to act. The sector can give back to SMEs by working on better regulations and providing platforms for discussion with local elites, experts, and citizens. Overall, however, business is not ready yet to invest in long-term projects and long-term impact.

Conclusion

The picture of Russian civil society should not be painted in black and white. There are several measures that should be taken with regards to the sector. The primary need is to find communication channels to society-at-large. A new vocabulary needs to emerge to tell its success stories to the wider public. Another need is to build bridges between well-established groups and newly emerging activists. Activists should be involved in NGOs and receive leadership training as to why Russia needs reforms. The sector needs modern civil society literacy: how cities are managed, how open data works, and so on. The sector should “stop preaching to the converted” and engage new audiences and partners. A closer look is needed into the existing labor strategies in civil society, including how NGOs recruit labor, salary levels and structure, and who are the employees of NGOs. This would help explain the role of NGOs in society and the type of human capital it attracts.
Improving the Key Markers

What strategic choices can well-established NGOs make in order to work and succeed in a complicated environment? What are the gaps and weaknesses in adapting to this reality? Do new trends such as volunteering, charity and local activism open up new opportunities for more experienced groups?

New strategies and models

Increasing state pressure forces many Russian NGOs to make new strategic choices and adopt new models. Choices include whether to launch an initiative, adopt a new business model, join associations of NGOs, close down, or merge with other groups. There are many myths about the ways of operation. Many human rights groups believe they cannot get private or corporate donations. In reality there are new opportunities and operational models for NGOs, such as:

1. **Finding a sustainable economic model** of operation, including expanding the local resource base and seeking crowd funding;
2. **Coalition building**: many groups currently work in silos and lack skills to find new partners outside of the sector such as local government, initiative groups, and SMEs.

To address these strategic choices, **NGOs should increase professionalism** and invest in capacity building (fundraising, governance bodies, and strategic planning). Fundraising is important as NGOs increasingly depend just on State funding, including residents’ grants, grants from the Ministry of Economy, and regional programs. These are easy funds and groups shy away from the more complicated corporate fundraising. Strategic planning is a good tool for choosing the right model. NGOs need institutional support for new strategic planning. Financial literacy for NGOs should be improved.

Developing a new social entrepreneurship model for service provision opens potential sources of income. There is demand for this and 2000 NGOs participated in an online discussion forum about social enterprise. There are also examples of functional initiatives, such as Early Intervention Institute, which deals with mental and physical
disability; they sell their trainings to government institutions. “Thank You” charity shop sells second-hand clothing to support ten NGOs in St Petersburg.

NGOs need to **leverage the growth in charity and voluntary activities**. There is a trend in Russia which is seeing more people engage in charity, election monitoring, and city/urban activism. How can NGOs find a common language and build links with these new activists? What can well-established groups offer them? How can NGOs best work with volunteers?

The sector also need to self-regulate to **ensure greater transparency**. For example, the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Russia’s competition of annual reports has been running now for six years – an initiative led by the NGOs and not donors. A closer look is needed at the dissemination of presidential grants to Russian NGOs. Transparency International has started looking into the issue.

**Connecting to local activism** means reaching to groups in small cities and combining experience with new civic energy. NGOs have to reach out first. In small villages and cities, civil society actors need help in how to be independent of local authorities. They need to understand their power. NGOs can help them show the positive results of their efforts that so far go unnoticed. Established NGOs could also benefit from building this connection, as it would increase society’s trust in them. Such local activism should not be put into the “traditional civil society box.” More thinking is needed about how
much established NGOs can really offer these groups in large cities. For example, in St Petersburg, activist groups say they do not need any NGO support. They are confident on their own and have a lot of professionals. They need specific sector knowledge (housing and architecture regulations, and legal advice) that NGOs cannot provide.

Legal Matters

Currently there are around 200,000 registered NGOs in Russia of which only 25 percent are active. The legislature for the sector dates back to the 1990s and it is not very good. The over-regulation started in 2006 and a new wave followed in 2012. As such, NGOs and the civil society sector endure a confusing and complicated legal environment.

Current challenges

Lack of system in non-profit law
There are 11 laws directly pertaining to NGOs and a further 35 laws in which NGOs are mentioned. Some of the definitions are blurred and there is no definition of what a “non-governmental organization” is, only “non-commercial” and “non-profit.”
Capacity
There are not enough lawyers well versed in non-profit-related law. For example, there is only one expert on taxation for NGOs at the International Center for Non-profit Law in Russia.

Poor NGO legal literacy
Due to the lack of non-profit lawyers, NGOs and non-profit organizations lack the correct legal knowledge on how to receive money, how to arrange tax exemption, and how to register a new NGO, among other issues.

“Foreign Agents” law
There are clear regional discrepancies with regards to regulating NGOs’ activities and implementing this law. Overall, the Ministry of Justice has proven reluctant to implement it. In some regions such as Archangels, Yaroslavl, Penza and Novosibirsk, NGOs have won few cases against the prosecutor’s office. To date, despite all the cases and warnings filed, only three NGOs have been legally declared as foreign agents: the GOLOS Association, which monitors elections (and was the impetus for the introduction of the law in the first place); the Kostroma Centre for Support of Public Initiatives; and the Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies. The LGBT rights organization Coming Out, and the Side-by-Side Film Festival both won the cases filed against them. But despite these successes, the Side-by-Side Film Festival has decided to close down its not-for-profit operation and take the ‘safer’ option of moving all its activities under the protective wing of its commercial entity. Coming Out is still being pursued through the civil courts, despite having had the case thrown out of the administrative courts.

There is no consistency in implementing this law. Judges are not professional and they make decisions based on the “word of mouth.” When prosecutors submit poorly prepared documents and when a judge has knowledge about the work of NGOs, the organization can often win.

Registration process
The quality and consistency of the registration process for new groups also largely depends on the region. There are no equal rules for registration and the list of required documents varies.
Future trends in legislative environment

Advocacy for a better legislative environment is hardly possible, as advocacy at large is perceived as a dangerous business. The Russian Civic Chamber can only provide information about NGOs’ views on proposed laws but cannot influence them.

In Russia, the rule of law is weak, and laws and practice do not match. The law is used selectively and often for political purposes. State control over NGOs, including foreign NGOs, in Russia will continue to tighten due to the political situation. The Russian government is looking into experiences in Egypt, Israel, and other CIS States such as Uzbekistan for ideas on how to address the “political activity” of NGOs. The cost for NGOs to comply with all the procedures will grow. One possible way to exert state pressure might be tax inspections to audit Russian NGOs. Tax procedures are complicated and groups will be vulnerable.
Resourcing the Sector

How is Russian civil society coping with a sharp decrease in reliance on international organizations? Today, foreign funding is hard to access. Russia has a broad spectrum of organizations and platforms that could finance civil society work. CAF reports growth in local philanthropy in Russia. The reality on the ground shows that corporate funding is decreasing and State federal and regional level funding is increasing.

Russia has a spectrum of actors that support civil society:

**Individual donors** support local-based groups with good brand recognition and finance projects that have “impact on life.” Crowd funding is still small but works for NGOs who have strong ties in the community and visible personalities.

**Regional governments** support friends of government, especially projects related to social or youth issues or youth programs with patriotic goals.

**Corporate philanthropy** often works through corporate foundations. Companies finance projects together with the state (education, culture, social, etc.) and some regional NGOs. The issues supported depend on corporate interests; often corporate social responsibility strategies dictate the topics.

Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, Polina Filippova, James Nixey and Orysia Lutsevych
Foreign foundations want to see social and democratic change; the organizations supported depend on (the mostly private) foundations’ priorities. They look for groups who have a strong constituency and seek to reach grass roots.

Private Russian foundations are driven by the founders’ interests. They often think short-term and prefer to offer direct help (charity). NGOs that have expertise about vulnerable groups (e.g. children and the elderly) and private foundations sometimes cooperate.

Federal government takes the approach that civil society has to be created and has to be socially useful. The main goal of state funding is to implement federal policies set up by President Putin. They fund NGO resources centers that can re-grant to local groups, their loyal human rights groups, and community philanthropy. For example, the Siberian Network of 11 regions, was started with foreign funding, and is now financed by the federal budget for $2 million from the Comprehensive Civil Society program.

Among the obstacles to attracting resources to the sector, the participants mentioned defamation campaigns against NGOs, strong paternalistic attitudes in society, and the limited capacity of NGOs to work with new kinds of donors. Brain-drain from Russia of innovative and active people undermines human resources in the sector. At the same time, there is growing interest in social initiatives, and crowd funding could connect NGOs and young active people. There are Russians who live abroad who would like to give back to their society: this is excellent resource. Russian civil society should position itself as a vehicle to bring new values to Russia.

Sarah Lindemann-Komarova, Vladlena Taraskina Polina Filippova
Building Bridges to...
Where and When?

A look as to what kind of reality we have on the ground will help understand how we want civil society to develop. At this stage, Russia needs more self-reflection and self-description of its reality.

Embrace the reality of Russian society on the ground

Civil society as a society of citizens is not taking root in Russia. Societal structure is dominated by 80 percent of the people who totally depend on the state such as pensioners and civil servants. They are the resource nucleus. Russia also remains a rather closed society, where only 17 percent have foreign passports. The nucleus believes that the elite is corrupt and neglects its citizens, they are apathetic, at large, and accept this way of life. Complaining about corruption is not leading to a serious protest mood. The oil-State brings resources that are later re-distributed to various social strata. There is a large dominance of the State, including in funding for private civil society groups. The forces of market, democracy and civil society do not exist.

Analysts of civil society pay little attention to the role of informal groups, which are independent of the State (20 million people). Such social institutions as слуги (service people) such as those working restaurants, the fishing industry, and the church serve a purpose of interest groups and replace the function of the Communist party that ceased to exist. For example, the movement "Anastasias," an informal religious environmental movement, has already established chapters in 40 villages in Russia. Some of these informal groups help to re-distribute resources to marginalized groups.

Thus, Western language and approaches to civil society as a provider of a public good is not applicable in Russia. Growing anti-Western sentiments, despite travel abroad, also prevent its development. Activists could be perceived as a threat to this nucleus and to its resources.
Elites can drive change

Civil society needs to account for reality but still aim to change it. The current situation is only partly driven by Russian mentality or culture; it is a social construction. A broader approach to civil society could help. Civic activists and corporate social responsibility strategies are important but what about the role of elites? What is their social responsibility? In order to change, Russia needs to open the system of resource allocation and make it transparent. Local elites should be engaged in responsible action to support local communities. Ultimately the change will come from the community. The federal level is suppressing change but demand for open mechanisms and transparency is growing in local communities. Local elites will eventually understand that they need community foundations as their partners. Support of communities and philanthropy should become fashionable. Russia needs more independent institutions that capture the market where the State fails. Philanthropy consultants should encourage wealthy people to engage in strategic philanthropy.

A good example is the adaptation of the American model of community foundations in Russia. They build the interaction between issues and elites. For example, Taliaty Community Foundation took a direct role in mayoral elections and thus they impacted the process. This is how an alien concept could work in Russia if groups manage to develop the language to fit the community.

Oleg Kozlovkiy
Activism as a core of change

There are three types of activism in Russia:

1. **Direct aid**: service, disaster relief based on cooperative engagement with the state;
2. **Civic activisms**: advocacy that deals with cases of injustice; and
3. **Political activism**: demand for change in the political system.

Many civil society groups fulfill more than one and often all three of these life-saving roles. For example, ANNA – Centre for the Prevention of Violence, originally started as a helpline for women suffering from domestic violence (direct aid); then it started to work in local communities to campaign against the root causes of this violence, such as ‘de-romanticising’ bride abduction (civic activism); and now it is helping to draft legislation to tackle domestic violence on a legal level too (political activism).

However, despite many groups working across all three roles, they often do not view each other as friends and colleagues. There is as much distrust between the three groups as there is coming from the government and the general public. The political activists accuse the direct aid groups of being collaborators with the state, especially when receiving state funding. The political activists also think that the direct aid givers and some of the civic activists are too focused on the short-term.
In the eyes of the Russian general public and the State, direct aid groups are the most acceptable, often receiving direct support or at least co-operation from the State, given the mutual interest in the provision of services for its citizens. In reality, all activism evolves from direct aid to political activism, as there are political implications to all social problems. The authorities want to cut away this evolution. They have set a dividing wall between civic/political activism and direct aid groups, with the former stigmatized by the State in public media. In reality, Russian civil society actors should acknowledge this evolution, build partnerships and show solidarity. Engagement of the societal nucleus is needed but even a minority can affect change.

Shift the focus from government to society
NGOs are too focused on expecting preferences or positive change from government. NGOs should focus more on community. They should outreach to community leaders and engage these people to be their ambassadors. If NGOs aim to change the behavior and minds of people, they should keep in mind that this it is very long-term process. It is important to manage expectations.

Connect to issues that people care about
Legitimacy comes from usefulness and work on the ground. The famous opposition blogger Alexey Navalny’s legitimacy, in addition to political slogans, comes from his fight against corruption, which connects with many Russians.
Build awareness about new issues
Another function of civil society is to build awareness around issues. Some issues are obvious to people (such as children’s welfare) but until recently this was not the case with domestic violence. Work on political rights is also not generally supported by society in Russia. Awareness raising work should start from educating kids about these rights. Building bridges across NGO groups to campaign together could help. Those who work on local self-governance could incorporate some other rights, such environment, and family safety.

Improve the ecosystem
Civil society is part of the community system. There are the grass roots groups, the more established groups, and local leaders. In order to affect this ecosystem, it is important to pay attention to the grass roots, strengthen regional infrastructure, and show citizens the opportunity to engage. NGOs could and should play a role as opinion-makers and intermediaries between the interests of citizens and the State. It is important to connect smaller Russian initiatives to learn from each other. Donors should not be judgmental and respect all initiatives.
Specific Ideas for Change

Following the inputs from the panels of experts and the question and answer sessions that followed and have been summarized on the previous pages, the symposium participants were encouraged to propose a series of “specific ideas for change” that could lead to “building bridges” – bridges between different sectors of civil society, between civil society and Russian society-at-large, between Russian civil society and international civil society actors, and hopefully, eventually, bridges between civil society and the State.

Legal

Civil society should:
• Advocate for abolishing foreign agents law;
• Be active in contesting/litigations of court decisions and use services of non-profit layers for this purpose;
• Create platforms of associations and peer support.

The State should:
• Codify all NGO-related laws;
• Define legal terms and confirm the right of association and rights of non-registered groups;
• Establish clear NGO liquidation rules;
• Simplify registration and reporting via one process.

Political Participation

NGOs should:
• Aspire to transform the spontaneous desire to be active into a more stable structure of civil society;
• Create platforms for activists to meet, propose events to connect to other initiatives;
• Build a network of ties to get resources;
• Provide expert knowledge from NGO community to activists;
• Create new forms of participation;
• Build on motivation stirred by the last wave of protests but continue this organic spark by offering training in leadership and campaign organizing, and teaching about collective action;
• Provide neutral services (e.g. co-working space), and create public spaces, where people can meet each other and debate.

Trust and Accountability

**Actors in the non-profit community should:**

• Look for a new common language on how to present the work of the sector to the general public, clearly communicating the added value of the sector and why citizens should trust and support non-profits;
• Launch a public campaign to build trust for charities and the non-profit sector. The growing diversity of actors in Russian civil society sector (including independent NGOs, government organized NGOs (GoNGOs), civic and political activists, and social enterprises) requires thinking about common values for the sector. One possible option is the individual well-being;
• Bring in international experience on how to calculate the value of social investments. This would be particularly interesting to private philanthropy, which is looking at quick-fixes and has unrealistic expectations.
International Linkages

**Russian civil society should:**
- Stimulate technical exchanged between Russian and international civil society, looking into such areas as ethical standards, surveillance techniques, and evaluation practices that could enrich both sides;
- Bring new models of collaborative leadership;
- Build international coalitions, such as with investigative journalists working on privacy and surveillance, for example.

**Russian diaspora and elites living outside the country should:**
- Give back to their country.

**Donors should:**
- Be open to local priorities and put its own agenda to one side; the main criteria for projects should be the relevance to Russian environment;
- Listen to partners and be flexible;
- Launch more small grants programs;
- Create formats to mix support for old and new innovative groups.
Conclusion

The foundation for building a bridge for better and stronger civil society in Russia is shaky at the moment.

A difficult internal and external environment impedes connections with the West and could even be risky. However, the 20 years since the establishment of an independent civil society sector in Russia provide some lessons learned and visible positive dynamics.

The issue of an environment in which civil society can thrive is crucial and it remains unclear how specifically it can be improved in the near future, but the need for building bridges between various actors of civil society within Russia and actors internationally could help solidify its basis.
The following thought papers were produced and circulated in advance of the session *Russian Civil Society Symposium: Building Bridges to the Future* to help inform the week’s discussions. The authors were then invited to readdress their papers and update them if they wished following the session.

**Thought Paper**

By Polina Filippova  
*Director For Programmes and Donor Relations, CAF Russia*

Twenty five years have passed since the beginning of reforms in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Sadly, most traditional civil society institutes typical in the Western world have not taken proper root in Russia. Out of those institutes founded after the fall of the Soviet Union, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are among those few which have not only survived but developed and matured most.

The NGO sector has grown from a marginal phenomenon mainly supported by “Western” money into a well-established diversified sector. Many NGOs started from direct humanitarian aid. Now they provide services to vulnerable groups, some of which do not get any assistance from the state. The sector truly reflects the needs of people and introduces new concepts and values, working on creating a more humane Russian society. The sector has offered new approaches to the most pressing social maladies of Russia child abandonment (shelters, foster families), status of children and people with disabilities (integration and inclusion), assistance to sick and dying (hospices) and others. The concept of the quality of life, one of the basic ideas in developed countries, still pretty new in Russia has been introduced by the non-profit sector.

In the absence of real political life the not-for-profit sector has become one of the few areas where social problems can be voiced and addressed, and active people can express themselves. As most surveys and polls indicate, core human rights are not among the priorities of Russian citizens. At the same time socio-economic rights are understood and perceived much better. People who actively work on securing their own or their children’s rights on equal access to medicine, education, or employment inevitably become active citizens with an understanding of the supremacy of human rights and dignity. Recently, the economic environment has significantly changed and so have the sources of finance for NGOs. The economic crisis has seriously affected corporate donations to NGOs and the changes in the political situation led to a drastic reduction in the level of international agencies’ and foundations’ funds to Russia. The sector has become much more dependent on private donations and state funding. In order to get access to these funds NGOs need to learn how to communicate to these new audiences and clearly explain what they are about and what is the added value they create. Meanwhile the sector has no adequate answer to this challenge. It is not only a problem of the lack of PR skills. The sector has changed a lot in these 20-25 years. The time has come to revise its values mission and identity.

The issue of funding, though very serious, is not the only concern for not-for-profits. The most serious threat is increasing political pressure. It is being implemented on several levels. There were several new pieces of legislation adopted in recent times. The most notorious one is the law “On regulation of activities of the NGOs, which fulfill the functions of foreign agents”. Sadly, the name adequately reflects the essence of the law. It requires that all NGOs, which have
any foreign funding and “participate in political activities on the territory of the Russian Federation”, register as foreign agents. “An NGO is recognized as one if it participates in the organization and implementation of political activities which aim to influence decisions of state authorities, their policy, as well as in the formation of public opinion...”

These NGOs which are voluntarily registered, have to include this newly acquired status of a “foreign agent” in all their documents, publications and PR materials. There are quite a few other responsibilities which these foreign agents have to fulfill in order to comply with the law. They will have to submit reports on their activities quarterly (now it is once a year), will undergo annual audit (now compulsory only for foundations), etc. Those NGOs which fail to register, can be de facto closed down – their activities can be suspended by authorities for up to 6 months and their bank accounts frozen. An NGO is provided with the right to appeal to a court to overrule this suspension and prove that it has not been engaged in “political activities” using foreign money. This task seems to be impossible and not only because of the notorious corruption of Russian courts. The problem is that the definitions of “political activities” and “foreign money” are drawn so broadly that almost anything can fall under them.

Since the adoption of this law more than 2,000 NGOs across the country have been investigated by the prosecution authorities, including organizations as distant from any political agenda as charities acting in favor of children with rare genetic diseases. This law has been recently reinforced by new legislation, which allows prosecution offices to investigate NGOs any time without any special warning.

This legal attack has been reinforced by an active defamation campaign in Mass Media. NGOs have been described as a “fifth column” subsidized by the West. Even those NGOs, which are accepted by the state are being described and treated as a minor and irrelevant addition to the state welfare system.

Another challenge is of an internal nature. It is an expansion of the sector is several directions – social entrepreneurs, volunteers, pseudo NGOs inspired by the state, municipal providers of social services etc. They erode the traditional boundaries of the sector, compete with NGOs for resources, and sometimes present reputational risks. On the other hand many of these new players are natural allies for NGOs, who can bring new ideas, new blood and new resources to traditional organizations. How do we distinguish between the former and the latter? Which criteria apart from “gut feeling” can help here? In order to identify potential partners from alien structures we should clearly identify ourselves, answer the questions by which principles do we operate? Which values do we promote?

The sector urgently needs consolidation. The threats and challenges are too serious to be tackled individually. This consolidation can be based on a renewed identity. We need to articulate clearly who we are and what is the social impact of the not-for-profit sector. As it can hardly be accounted for in the GNP figures, we should formulate a positive image based on the unique role and impact of the sector.

Individual wellbeing is a concept promoted on an institutional level exclusively by NGOs in Russia. No matter what is the area of activities – ecology, assistance to vulnerable groups, education, human rights and others – all NGOs work on improving different aspects of individual well-being. It is in the core of all our efforts. This concept, along with the concept of quality of life, is well developed in other countries and has become one of the key indicators of a successful society. Individual wellbeing is not just an abstract humanitarian notion. There has been a growing body of research into what contributes to the quality of people’s experiences of their lives. This has enabled a new understanding of the factors that both influence and constitute well-being.

The science of ‘subjective well-being’ suggests that as well as experiencing good feelings, people need:

- A sense of individual vitality;
To undertake activities which are meaningful, engaging, and which make them feel competent and autonomous;

- A stock of inner resources to help them cope when things go wrong and be resilient to changes beyond their immediate control.

It is also crucial that people feel a sense of relatedness to other people, so that in addition to the personal, internally focused elements, people’s social experiences – the degree to which they have supportive relationships and a sense of connection with others – form a vital aspect of well-being.

Another strength of this concept is its measurability. New Economic Foundation, a British think-tank has designed a framework for measuring projects’ and organizations’ impact on wellbeing of their target audiences. SROI – social return on investment – allows the results of not-for-profits efforts to be presented in economic terms. This framework has incorporated approaches and findings of the Cross-National Survey on individual wellbeing conducted in more than 20 countries in 2006-2007.

The concept of individual wellbeing can become a consolidation factor to unite different NGOs. It will allow us to find new partners among the new players (volunteers, social entrepreneurs, etc.) and adequately present the sector to the general public. A consolidated sector with a clear and positive identity is a bridge to a more stable and productive future.

Salzburg Global Seminar session 531 was a great opportunity to hear from representatives of different parts of Russian civil society and to discuss existing strategies. It has become obvious that under increasing political pressure and attempts to separate “lambs from goats” the sector needs to develop a united approach to self-representation. It is getting more and more crucial that the sector stands as a force with common values and goals. If we fail to come to a joint agenda, pretty soon there will be no civil society in Russia but some formally independent organizations operating as a part of the state social welfare and some human rights and advocacy groups marginalized and driven in the underground. We will be put down one by one. It is critical that this self-representation is positive and appealing to the general public. It doesn’t mean that we should be operating familiar and recognizable notions and concepts. There is a tremendous lack of new positive concepts and ideas in Russia. The country is torn apart by intolerance, mistrust and aggressiveness. As one of the speakers of the seminar put it “we have entered the ice age”. The sector has a potential of providing some alternatives. In fact we have been doing it for the last 20 years, but we failed to present it to the society.

We have to do it now before it is too late.
Important points for understanding the new situation in citizen activity and non-political activism:

**Complications and conflict**
Over the last three to four years, in contemporary Russia, many new and different ways of being active as citizens have appeared. At the same time, these practices are being put into effect. They are active alongside older non-profit organizations and community groups. As a whole, these groups consist of different generations of who organized and united themselves for various causes and even varying rules. They focus on a variety of issues with differing styles of representation, sometimes diametrically opposed. Attempts to find within this diversity some or potential leaders speaking a language that is common to the civil society sector or representing the whole of civil society is extremely misguided.

**Self-organization of traditionalists**
There has been a change in the relationship between those in activist groups in the public form and non-profit organizations representing citizens who are oriented to preserving the past or to modernization. What is most noticeable is that new “preservationist” or “traditional” citizens’ associations have arisen and have begun to make noise in public. These associations see a threat for an increase in street violence in the events after December; also they see a challenge to traditional cultural and sovereign values and so forth. Moreover, in their activity, they make use of the same contemporary technologies and approaches as those whom they oppose (political satire, Internet activism etc.).

**Rejection of the language of “democratization package”**
The new players, both those who are acting in the direction of renewing certain aspects of life (social, economic, community, artistic and so forth), and also those who are acting in the interests of preventing “improper changes”, do not use the “buzzwords” from the traditional vocabulary of civic activists. Instead, they prefer a language, public gestures, tools and ways of identifying and presenting themselves that are unconventional for the milieu of community activists that has grown up. Attempts to take the pulse of the essential Russian civic identity have had as a result that the language of “human rights and democracy” is increasingly no longer the specialized non-governmental language for civil society activists, even if, from an objective standpoint, these activists are engaged in practices of democratization.

**The Crisis of western-oriented non-profit organizations**
A partial “encapsulation and tendency toward fundamentalism” has occurred in the activity of Western-oriented non-profit organizations (which have existed 15 to 20 years). On the one hand, this has been conditioned by government (and public!) pressure on the activity of non-profit organizations that receive foreign funding, in connection with the increasing strictness of Russian laws. On the other hand, this is a result of the absence of real public discussion about the strategy and meaning of non-profit activity outside of reaction to actions by the government. This is also the result of the marked reliance of these non-profit organizations on values and forms of activity that are not open to critique or doubt, not to mention the use of appeals to international institutions and foreign states as a form of pressure on the Russian authorities as something that is always justified.

**A crisis of confidence and in the culture of activity in solidarity**
With extreme difficulty, new coalitions and cooperative links are forming among non-profit organizations and groups. Frequently activists (usually new players) are very concerned about preventing their reputation from suffering from public
interaction with organizations (including non-profits, parties and agencies) and the (not always positive image) that is created. Moreover they tend to be suspicious of partners with intentions of “using” a new initiative (by assimilating it organizationally, taking credit and using it for enhancing their own image, and so forth), while remaining indifferent to its content, its motivation and the rest. In addition, a limitation on the formation of coalitions is the fact that a practice of self-regulation has not developed in non-profit organizations, which could support the unity of the association through formulating transparent rules for joining the association and rules for dismissal for failing to meet general obligations. Periodic discussions of self-regulation always come up against the unwillingness of the associated non-profit organizations to apply strict rules to their “own” people.

A new citizen style
The style of civil society activity has changed and has become extremely diversified in a broad spectrum, ranging from “civil feats” to “civil diversion.” First, in some cases, activists make use of such hi-tech or specialized and fashionable activity (with a large amount of communications technologies or professional artistic elements), that it is difficult to distinguish it from professional creativity or entertainment. As a result, it is becoming increasingly common to encounter a new style of public presentation of the public interest and self-organization, for example various creative forms of public satire, civic and cultural education, street demonstrations and performances and so forth. Secondly, within activist groups and participants in public demonstrations, there is the development of a group of “quasi-consumers” – people who are ready to join an already existing initiative for a “couple of hours” in the event they have free time or means.

The diversity of attitudes to the public activity of the population, government agencies and the mass media
There has been a change and frequently a radicalization of the attitude of the population, government institutions and the mass media to non-profit organizations. On the one hand, a crisis of political participation, growing dissatisfaction with “life with an uncertain future,” and also increasing irritation in the form of semi-official and popular anti-Americanism and anti-western attitudes, has led to a partial shift of public dissatisfaction away from the “professionals” (government agencies, political parties, theoreticians and missionaries) and toward non-profit organizations and the publicly active “urban class.” The resources that non-profit organizations receive are not directed to investments in human capital, but are regarded as a form of funding any activity “on demand.” On the other hand, “reform of public governance” in Russia is getting officialdom involved in interacting, on an increasing scale, with non-profit organizations and activist groups. All this is under the heading of “open government,” “open budget,” “boards of trustees,” independent evaluation of the activity of agencies, and so forth. There is already some completely successful practice of such interactions in the common interest. At the same time, the population is moving in the direction of supporting community initiatives. True, this has been only in the form of coherent humanitarian action and volunteerism in crisis situations. However, this occurred on a scale that was unusual prior to 2010. Also, with public recognition of such initiatives as being for the public benefit. Something that was less noticed included initiatives on the level of cities and villages to create additional services for groups and communities. Such initiatives – collecting trash, veterans’ groups, services for families and children and the like – are forming community service autonomously, without resorting to a budget and decision-makers and enhance the quality of local life through self-organization that can stand alone. Moreover, the local communities understand and acknowledge the usefulness of this.

Radicalization and pseudo-radicalization in the public sphere
In equal measure, anti-western and anti-American rhetoric are constantly splitting society, forming a kind of “civil society cold war.” The public sphere is increasingly distorted. The decrease in the spectrum of formalized mass media is being supplemented by the growth of discussion platforms and information hubs on Internet sites. Moreover, under the circumstances of informational “noise,” there is also a lack
of position papers that present non-profit activity outside of a conceptualization of “persecutors and victims defending themselves” and that take into account all the conflicts in the mutual relations among the state, the population and the members of associations. The clash of opinions surrounding the changing laws on non-profit organizations has not even partially become a campaign to clarify the meaning of civic activity and the formation of its supporters. The widespread rhetoric in defense of non-profit organizations is resulting in partial symbolic solidarity with non-profit organizations on the part of those who experience discomfort from the black-and-white characterization of non-profit organizations as “fulfillers of orders.” Overall, however, in the presence of constant informational triggers such as “patriotism and anti-terrorism,” the banality of relations is tilting toward civic activeness. Sympathizers are drifting into indifference; those who are indifferent are drifting toward hostility, while those who have little love for them are drifting toward the radicalism of designating them as enemies. Non-profit organizations and traditional community associations have lost the battle for “commentators” (journalists, teachers and the like) and the latter have “rigidly” linked non-profit organizations with the serving of governmental or international interests and they are constantly conveying that signal to society. There is also the same kind of situation with “pro-government” associations: those in authority can suppress the “dissenter.” However, we have not learned how to preserve, in the public space, the independence of associations that concur in their views but have been organized independently of one another. Finally, the role of bloggers with civic ambitions has become exaggerated. This is because they go no further than writing texts and, with rare exceptions, do not unite in any practical way with the activity that they are attempting to reflect in their networks.

Below we will try to offer several strategies for transitioning to a “healthier” future for civil activism in Russia.

**Overcoming isolation and marginalization**

It is crucial for civil society organizations to overcome the marginalization of the issue of “community action” that is forming in the public space and the increasing isolation of such organizations in society. This is a question of efforts in several directions.

First, it is essential to have a clear, responsible, and – most important – a non-victim stance with respect to the activity of government agencies. It is extremely important to stand in opposition – publicly and with the use of arguments – wherever public organizations and initiatives intentionally discredit, parody or “skew” news about them. It is no less important to make use and once again take ownership of the various formal mechanisms – both those that already exist and those that are under development – for citizens to take part in decision making in the life of society and in public governance. The possibility of preserving a “space for common sense” in our country depends on the willingness of public organizations and groups that take initiative to engage in untiring attempts to retain and to increase, in “civil society” and “government” agendas, practices of productive mutual activity, with the possibility of finding “local optimums” for this.

Second, it is indispensable to win over the trust of the population. This does not mean only those Russians who are “natural” allies of civil society organizations. We must undertake efforts to appeal to the majority of the Russian population who “are not our own.” We must arouse interest and make ourselves understood. This requires practical involvement in solving the problems of different communities, i.e. a productive culture. It is essential to highlight, describe and disseminate “civil society success stories,” i.e. successful practices of civic activism. Finally, it is extremely important to target efforts toward developing the imagery and emotional appeal of civic activism. In the public consciousness and in the sphere of information, it is essential to broaden the spectrum of the kinds of civil society activists, their personal histories, to form “galleries of new and diverse heroes, whose journeys and intentions would be understandable for the common person.”
Seeking new language and putting together a new civil society agenda

Citizen discourse, at the present time, has been seriously devalued in the public sphere and mainly in the media. This requires a serious renewal of civil society language and the formation of a corpus of civil society texts. In order to broaden their social capital, civil society organizations must speak to the broader masses. Consequently, they must try to avoid narrowly specialized terminology and "gibberish." It is crucial to make the civil society interpretation of everyday human problems timely and genuine in cooperation with other people and with the authorities. This will be a "key" to understanding (clearing up) the "social unease" of people in real situations in local life.

Furthermore, we must overcome the deficit of programmatic texts that will make sense of the place for civic activism in today's Russia and will formulate civic values and civil institutions on the "agenda" of our country. Most of the ground-laying texts on civil society and defense of rights have become obsolescent. They speak a different language that addresses different people and they are devoted to the reality of years past. Now civil society organizations can no longer live in a state of intellectual dependency and tactical criticism of the ideological sound bites that the authorities use to hypnotize society. This means we need new texts, including those that will put together various kinds of a civil sense of identity. Furthermore, such texts must circulate and find resonance far beyond the limits of the circle of activists.

There is a need for texts to create new ranges of meaning. These may give rise to answers for real-life problems, which now are cut off only to disappear into the shadows through the action of propaganda machines and are even hidden within civil society organizations. It is extremely important, to have a public discussion about the issues surrounding civic patriotism and Russian national identity in civic culture. There is a need to deal with the effectiveness of using the "pressure of the international community" in order to support international rights standards and so forth.

In addition, the radicalization and revanchism that are developing in Russian society require preserving possibilities for civil society organizations to act as mediators in areas of conflict and moderators of new discussions. This will pose tasks for overcoming the limitations of professional or traditional civil society language to that it will be suitable for use in different environments, but not always communicating with one another in groups of people.

Demarcation and new coalitions

Civil society organizations must make a complex choice: to demarcate themselves from organizations whose activity and values are seen as unacceptable, or to create alliances with those that are ready to espouse common rules and standards. At least in the present context, it is not a matter of dividing "the clean" from the "unclean." This assumes that civil society organizations will be able to propose self-regulation of their own activity.

Given the diversity of players in civil society, it is difficult to present a monopoly on what are the correct rules and objectives for civil society activity. However, nothing prevents us from declaring our adherence to or disagreement with certain rules. Self-regulation is not simply voluntarily taking upon ourselves heightened obligations or even self-limitations. Rather, it is also the formation of "circles of trust," a community of uniform rules, where the violation of these rules must result in expulsion from the community. The sense of civil society self-regulation does not make us conceal but rather openly show forth our differences. It means presenting to society different coalitions or systems of civil society organization and demonstrating freedom to choose and to adhere to different systems.

The possibility for self-regulation flows into the necessity for self-regulation, when the uncertainty of internal problems does not make it possible to articulate respond to objections by society to civil society organizations on account of their incomprehensibility, lack of transparency and/or closed nature. The values that civil society organizations promote must also be binding for their own everyday practices. If
we are demanding something from the government, or from business, we must place the same demands on ourselves. The public lack of transparency of the authorities or the social irresponsibility of business cannot be justified by any expediency. The same holds for the activity of civil society groups.

Civil society activism, just as any other kind of activism, must be subject to public oversight over it. Government oversight or a demonstrated practice of self-oversight as a result may be the basis for public conclusions in those respects. A public discussion of the rules, the achievement of consensus and self-oversight leads to the possibility of solving the serious problems in Russian civil activism and increasing confidence within civil society organizations. This will also foster a tolerant attitude among the population toward people making statements about self-organization and self-reliance, strengthening willingness to stand in solidarity with civil society practices and initiatives.

**The formation and support of activists**

A range of training support for activists, including in non-profit organizations, is crucial for modernizing and enhancing the quality of human capital in the civil society sector. First, this means cooperating with active participants in formation and development, which will increase their leadership potential and, in this way, will intensify processes in civil society settings. Second, a stratum of people capable of conveying their knowledge to others. In this manner, a mechanism is set in motion to create new activists. This is a fundamentally important shift from teaching project management (and other traditional non-profit organization disciplines) toward civil society technologies and contextual training approaches. The goal of such approaches is the presentation of up-to-date arguments for the renewal of civil society discourse, providing information about the changing contexts for the renewal of life in this country and the creation of an association of people with a productive civic culture. It is indispensable to make use of the library of Russian case studies for the training of non-profit organization specialists and local activists (potential activists in functional initiative-taking groups).
Thought Paper

By Marina Pisklakova-Parker
President, ANNA – Center for Prevention of Violence

The situation with civil society in Russia has to be considered within a framework of historical context of the Soviet and post-Soviet time for the last 20 years especially in the lens of current events. It is also important to remember for that reason that many NGOs on the ground have to deal with the mentality leftover from the Soviet approach, both among general public but especially local authorities.

The main issues for the Civil Society in the Russian Federation in the current situation could be defined as the following:

**Lack of clarity about a role of the civil society organizations among the general public which leads to lack of support**

There is a controversial understanding in minds of average citizens (including some authorities) what a civil society organization does. It starts with lack of clear vision what civil society actually is. There is still some memory of what is considered to be “public activity” during the Soviet times, which meant either being connected closely with the State or being a dissident. Both of these interpretations of what a civil society group is lead to lack of trust, fear, quite vague understanding of motives and as a result limited internal association among general public with most of NGOs.

For example, most of support that businesses provide to non-profit organizations is focused in the area of supporting of children in need, disabled, especially disabled and ill children, and orphanages. It is because these types of activities are in a way “obvious” vulnerable groups and do not require any extra defining of personal views and values, in other words they are easier to understand.

On the other hand, issues like political rights, women’s rights, and even environmental issues are not so obvious and require an effort for deeper understanding; people need to not only experience discrimination personally but also understand that it was a violation of their rights.

**Tightened legislation on operation of an NGO in the Russian Federation**

The legislation defining some NGOs as “foreign agent” affected Russian NGO community in many ways – operationally, in terms of shortage of funding opportunities, but one of the main aspects is that it made NGOs and human rights issues look like something foreign, brought by some outside influence, which undermined the reputation of different rights organizations. Many organizations went through inspections by different governmental agencies that disrupted their work and put additional pressure on the NGO community.

**Small number of professionally developed Civil Society organizations and their concentration in big cities**

There are challenges of different levels in the area of professional development of NGOs in Russia. One of them is that a significant wave of public activities of the 90s went away leaving a small number of organizations that are committed to continue their activities.

Their further professional development may be focused in the following areas:

1. Situation evaluation and strategy planning;
2. Developing and delivering messages especially within local communities and among governmental agencies;
3. Building support within local communities;
4. Providing services (social rights NGOs) – empowering centered approach in service development;
5. Coalition building and networking (including cross-issue and strategic partnerships);
6. Relationship with governmental agencies – balance of cooperation and criticism

Weak understanding of gender equality and equity among both governmental authorities and non-governmental activists, as well as general public

Women’s rights are even less obvious factor for people in Russia including governmental agencies and some NGOs. Lack of knowledge on women’s human rights and system of response contributes to impunity for crimes committed against women. Our study has revealed widespread refusals to register women’s complaints, as well as insensitivity and inaction on behalf of law enforcement agencies, which still view domestic and sexual violence as private matters, not criminal offences and women’s human rights violations. According to ANNA statistics (2013), 60% of women called the National help line for women suffering from domestic violence never sought help from the police. Of those women who did, 76% were unsatisfied with police response. When women were assertive in trying to file a complaint, the officers often delayed the filing process, or made it difficult. This results in underreporting, further minimization and invisibility of these crimes, and the reinforcement of the continuation of violations of women’s human rights.

Millions of Russian women live in conditions of abject deprivation of, and attacks against, their fundamental human rights for no other reason than that they are women. Such UN human rights Treaty Bodies as CEDAW and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in their concluding observations on Russia, have both expressed concern about the high rates of domestic violence and the lack of legislative protection.

Despite major efforts and many successful practices in the field of the prevention of VAW in Russia over the last 20 years, no comprehensive strategy for solving the problem has been adopted and measures taken by the Government of Russia on combating violence against women have been insufficient.

Lack of knowledge on women’s human rights and of public monitoring contributes to impunity for crimes committed against women. ANNA Center monitoring reports reveal widespread refusals to register women’s complaints, as well as insensitivity and inaction on behalf of law enforcement agencies, which is also a result of insufficient legislative measures.

At the same time, Russian Federation is a State Party to international human rights and women’s rights treaties, including (1) The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its 1st Optional Protocol; (2) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; its Optional Protocol, which recognizes the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to receive communications submitted by individuals and groups of individuals; (3) The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its protocols. Russia is also a member of the Council of Europe. These treaties’ obligations require Russia to respect, to protect, to promote and to fulfill the human rights of everyone within its jurisdiction. It must act with due diligence to prevent and investigate violence against women and to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. Nevertheless, many Russian citizens are not aware of the
obligations of the Russian Federation, and they do not demand
their rights to be declared. Most of NGOs working in the area
of VAW do not use human rights instruments in their work
because they lack needed level of knowledge and training.
Governmental agencies do not understand the issues of
women’s human rights as a foundation of their approach to
response to cases of gender-based violence.

In the early 90s, there was a significant rise not only of
public activity in the area of women’s rights, but also in
that of the state. This was particularly noticeable during the
Beijing Conference in 1995, which stimulated the adoption
of the Beijing Platform for Action for the advancement of
women at both the regional and Federal levels. This led to
the establishment of national and regional mechanisms for
monitoring the status of women and to the development of
effective interaction between public organizations and various
government agencies. At the same time, there were the first
attempts to adopt legislation on the prevention of domestic
violence, which, unfortunately, did not bear fruit. But gradually,
the problem of women’s rights in general, as well as that of
violence against women, has ceased to be a priority of the
government and to be analyzed with adequate gravity.

The administrative reform of the Federal government (as of
2004) – accompanied by structural changes and staff changes,
– has effectively destroyed the previously existing national
mechanisms for establishing equal rights for women. To date,
virtually all-state agencies dealing with gender equality have
been liquidated or have ceased to function.

The National Action Plan for the advancement of women and
enhancing their role in society (2001-2005) ended in 2005. In
2004, the Commission on Women in the Russian Federation
under the leadership of Deputy Minister of the Russian
Federation suspended its work. The Commission on Women,
Family and Demographics under the auspices of the President
of the Russian Federation in the Federation Council was also
eliminated.

Work on a wide range of gender issues at the state level
is supposed to be handled by the State Duma Committee
on Family, Women and Children and the Ministry of Social
Development and Health. Lately the Head of this Committee
became quite conservative and women’s rights are not on the
agenda.

The insufficient action of the State is also beginning to be
noticed by the people of Russia: according to a Gallup survey
(2008); 73.3% of the respondents stated that the State has not
taken the necessary measures to combat domestic violence.
Lately there has been some progress and as a result of the
CEDAW Committee recommendations based on shadow reports
of women's NGOs in 2010 the Minister of Labour and Social
Development established a Gender Equality Council with
representatives from each Ministry and leaders of women’s
NGOs as a form of the National Machinery in advancing gender
equality in Russia.

In the last 20 years there has been achieved a significant
breakthrough in raising awareness on the issues of violence
against women. However, despite this success, a systemic
approach at the governmental level still does not exist.

There is also still quite poor response of law enforcement
agencies to violence against women based on attitudes
towards the victims that lies in the mentality of law
enforcement officers who tend to accuse the victim of sexual
violence. In conversations with the Commission members,
police officers repeatedly stated that women provoke rape
by dressing provocatively, drinking alcohol or walking in the
streets late at night. A typical public comment by Professor
Victor Gladkikh JD, a fellow of the All-Russian Research
Institute of the Ministry of the Interior confirms this stereotype:
“Women often provoke rapists. They walk alone at night, barely
dressed and drunk.”

Another myth that persists among law enforcement officers is
that the victim benefits from accusing someone of rape. The
myths of ‘provocative behaviour’ and ‘false accusation with the
aim of revenge or some benefit’ are reinforced by the lack of
special training for law enforcement officers concerning rape-related cases. The attitudes of state officials are aggravated by a lack of targeted training to overcome stereotypes.

These are just examples that represent a “tip of an iceberg” in lack of awareness of women’s human rights especially violence against women.

The main reasons for that are:

• Although violence against women is recognized as a problem the State still does not fully aware of all the serious consequences for the society as a whole and that is why it is not considered to be publicly significant issue; on the other hand the remains of the soviet mentality focus mainly on children as the most vulnerable group which again underlines lack of full understanding of the problem where children witnesses also suffer when their mothers are target of violence;

• The other factor is lack of the mechanisms of the pressure from the society when citizens (voters) demand reports from the elected officials on the measures for the prevention of violence; one of the important parts of the response system – involving communities -- was always a missing part in building an effective system of response to violence against women in Russia;

• Women’s NGOs are often acting alone and have weak connections with groups representing other types of human rights;

• Women’s NGOs are often underfunded and lacking a long-term strategy and self-evaluation;

• At the same time for a long time women’s NGO activities were mostly focused on addressing violence against women among representatives of different professional groups, and it is effective in terms of improvement of the state response to the issue. On the other hand violence will continue regenerate itself inside communities until it is addressed at the local level. In other words, one essential part cannot exist without another;

• In Russia today the population in general has a certain level of awareness of the problem of violence against women as the problem of the society but NGO activities in the area of violence against women is mostly focused on the assistance to women-survivors and/or general awareness campaigns where there is no connection to the local communities and opportunities for community participation.

Suggestions/recommendations:

• Capacity building of women’s NGOs as women’s human rights organizations especially focusing on long-term strategy and including their position within local communities;

• Building Regional Networks of women’s NGOs;

• Development of cross-sectorial rights approach and joint activities (for example women’s rights and political participation);

• Cross-sectorial best practice sharing among different human rights groups and inter-regional cooperation;

• Community centered approach in human rights activities.
Thought Paper

Russian NGOs: What Makes Us Stronger

By Elena Topoleva-Soldunova (and Olga Drozdova)
Director, Agency for Social Information (ASI)

The history of Russian civil society is quite short, it started its active development since the end of 1980s. Its institutional base consists of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). With a population of approximately 150 million people there are about 220,000 registered NGOs. But less than half of those are actively working, meaning accomplishing their missions: such as providing social services, protecting rights of citizens, solving problems, exercising independent control, etc. Another important function, which is common to all NGOs regardless of what they do, is civil education and unification of people.

Specialists recognize that Russian civil society sector is not very powerful nor influential: the number of NGOs that can affect the development of the society is extremely small. But many organizations and informal civil groups have considerable potential to become active members of civil society, even though this potential can be realized only under certain favorable circumstances.

Current government policies in regard to civil society are ambiguous. On one hand, the state has paid attention to the sector and, starting from 2011, unprecedented measures of state support to socially-oriented NGOs are visible, including federal and regional programs, subsidies, informational and property support. The government also understands the need to support the development of infrastructure of NGOs, financing education and exchange of experience. Besides that, it works on expanding access of NGOs to the market of social services: new laws are being developed, and "roadmaps" are being created – there is considerable discussion and expert attention in this direction.

These positive trends are related to the process of "de-authorization" in the sphere of social services which is starting in Russia: the state recognizes the fact that by itself it cannot accomplish all promised social commitments and wants to give some of them to non-governmental institutions, including NGOs. This process is perceived positively by both NGOs and officials. At the same time both sides understand existing limitations. These include low "starting positions" of NGOs, weak financial and technical bases (which are necessary for providing high quality social services over extended periods of time), and public opinion about NGOs. These problems are weakening the competitiveness of NGOs and not allowing them to realize their potential even in the sphere where favorable conditions do exist.

Simultaneously, the authorities move in the opposite direction. Since the end of 2012 the law about “NGOs as foreign agents” has been implemented in the country. This law requires that organizations which receive foreign financing and engage in political activities have to register as a special organization. In the Russian language, “foreign agent” has a negative connotation and is related to concepts of betrayal and espionage. At the same time, the law doesn't give a clear definition of political activity, and as practice shows, it is often treated as any interaction with authority or an impact on public opinion. Therefore, the majority of affected organizations, especially human rights and environmental ones, find themselves under the threat of persecution, or, at least, receiving extra attention from the authorities, additional checks or sometimes legal persecution. But many organizations refuse to register as foreign agents, protesting against the absurdity of this law. To date, there were checks in more than a thousand organizations because of this law. More than 20 legal cases were initiated. In cases when organizations were forced to register as foreign agents they preferred to stop...
operations. Legal cases still continue. Now the constitutionality of this law is being considered by the Constitutional Court.

Even though these efforts affected just a small percentage of the organizations, they really damaged the reputation of a whole sector. First of all, because the most active and well-known organizations suffered; and secondly, because there were negative reactions from authorities and media. But in those difficult circumstances, the manifestation of solidarity and consolidation of the sector could be observed, with organizations supporting those being persecuted.

The borders of the sector are not clearly defined: in addition to registered NGOs, new players have appeared. Already for 7-8 years there have been informal volunteer groups that are active in emergency situations, demonstrating huge potential of civil involvement. In addition to traditional NGOs, there are "competitors" such as state non-commercial organizations that are providing social services, pseudo-NGOs that are formed because of the opportunity to get state financing, and so forth. It is obvious that not all new players share the same values that are the foundation of democratic civil society, such as solidarity, activism, democracy. But it's also obvious that between those new players it's necessary to look for allies, search for common language and unite efforts.

This is already understood by leaders who are working at federal, regional and local levels. But for the majority of organizations, the main stakeholder, donor and partner is the state. They are connecting their future with the state. Their primary expectation of the state is to ensure fair ‘rules of the game’ that will be understandable and designed for long term sustainability. Under these conditions, and if the process is clear and fair, the organizations will get favorable conditions for development and will be able to thrive. Under these conditions they will be able to easily find partners within businesses, NGOs and common people.

Until this time the importance of creating communication directly with citizens was underestimated. It is not a coincidence that few citizens participate in the work of NGOs and few sympathize with the sector. According to a Higher School of Economics study, 73% of the population are not involved in NGOs work. This can account for their lack of information about the nature of the sector and benefits it brings. These studies confirm that those few people who are involved in NGOs’ work (donors, volunteers, practitioners) are better “quality” citizens of their country. They show their social and political activity at different levels more often, feel a shared sense of responsibility for what’s happening, and most importantly they feel that they can influence today’s reality and they can improve it. Unfortunately, the majority of Russians do not get involved in public life.

One of the main reasons for social passivity is a feeling that a person cannot influence the current situation. There are statistics available about the dynamics of a sense of responsibility for what’s happening in the country, region, or at home which illustrates the situation well. From 2006 to 2011 a sense of responsibility was slowly growing at all levels: a change from 78% to 87% feel responsibility for their homes; a change from 52% to 72% feel responsibility for their cities; and from 33% to 60% feel responsibility for their country. In 2011, the number that shows the level of responsibility for cities and the country dropped (4% and 8% respectively) but the indicator of responsibility for one's own home is still growing and in 2013 was 89%. People increasingly create their own initiatives, work together with neighbors for their realization, and quite often these efforts are successful. There is a chain reaction: from small activities to making decisions.

What is left for NGOs? They can and must get involved in this chain reaction, helping people to unite around important issues and thereby helping their activity to be more visible and appreciated by people. What can they enforce?

The further development of the non-commercial sector in Russia depends on internal and external factors. In the current situation, the external factors are least predictable. In case the situation around Ukraine will follow the worst case scenario, it is difficult to expect that the thriving conditions for NGOs’ development that exist now will be preserved. At the same
time, the negative factors which inhibit development will most probably only worsen. In such conditions with these external barriers and without strong internal force the sector will suffer.

If the current political crisis can be successfully overcome, and if there isn’t sharp deterioration of internal political and economic situation in the country, then there will be a possibility of favorable development of civil sector. That will be possible with the following internal and external conditions

External conditions
1. Preservation at the same level or expansion of state support of NGOs.
2. Maintenance, or increase, of involvement of NGOs in decision making at different levels (participation in work of public and boards of trustees, working groups of ministries, public chambers, etc.)
3. Further development of the recent trend of involving NGOs in work of social protection of people, education, health and culture.
5. Decrease in repression of human rights and ecological NGOs that have foreign financing and prove to be “inconvenient” for authorities. For example, through cancellation of, or considerable changes to, the “law about foreign agents”.
6. Termination of media persecution of NGOs that get foreign financing.
7. Termination or at least reduction of “over-regulating” of volunteering activities.

Internal conditions
1. NGOs leverage the growing popularity of charitable and public activities of the population. Continue to involve citizens as volunteers, members, allies, donors and participants in their activities.
2. Increase self-organization of NGOs, through the creation of internal rules to govern their work, form unions and associations, and strive toward more openness and transparency.
3. Continue to increase their professionalism as suppliers of services for people, and compete, together with state and private organizations, for contracts as service suppliers.
4. Expand their relationships with informal civil activists.
5. Improve their abilities to raise funds from private and corporate sources.
6. Further develop the infrastructure of the non-commercial sector.

One of the most important assignments now is to show the value of NGOs, their contribution to the development of civil society, solidarity and improving quality of life of people. It could be done through the combined efforts of leaders of the non-commercial sector, and such efforts are being organized by several NGOs that feel some responsibility for the whole sector.

If the above mentioned conditions are actually realized, it is possible to expect a significant growth and stabilization of the non-commercial sector.
Thought Paper

Dealing with Problems of the Russian Civil Society

By Denis Volkov
Analyst, Levada-Center

Recent social trends
Citizens’ initiatives are becoming more and more visible in Russia. Back in 2010 as one journalist once told me in private conversation it was very hard to publish a story about activists and volunteers. Editors were not interested. Now such stories are rather frequent and popular with Russian media. Cases of defending Khimki forest, observing elections, and of volunteers helping victims of the floods become well known in Russia and abroad. Apart from well-known cases there are hundreds of smaller initiatives all over the country.

Yet people, ready to act and help others are still a minority of population in Russia, even in big cities. Russians are rather aware of different civic initiatives. According to the Levada-Center’s poll in March 2014 in big cities with population over 500 thousand: most noticeable initiatives are known about homeowner associations (TSZh) and cottage cooperatives (57% know about them), charitable initiatives (43%), civic monitoring of elections (40%), religious schools and organizations, labor unions (36-37%), initiative to preserve cultural heritage, ecological and human rights initiatives (33-34%), and so on. Only 19% of respondents of this poll didn’t know of any such groups and initiatives. Yet only few participated in the their work and events, most popular were: homeowner associations (TSZh) and cottage cooperatives (9-10%), charitable initiatives (5%), labor unions (4%), leisure and recreational associations, different parents associations (3%), preservation of cultural heritage, ecological, electoral monitoring (2%). 77% do not participate in any of such activities.

At the same time the support of civic initiatives is much more frequent. In five years’ time (according to the same poll in big cities) 18% donated money to support surgical operation of a child, 13% donated goods within some charitable campaign, only 4-5% worked as volunteers. According to another question about activities people undertook within last 12 months asked both in national poll in March 2014 and in the cited poll in big cities, the most popular charities people were engaged in were giving alms (31% of Russians, 42% respondents in big cities), collective work in the yard or park, often known as ‘subbotnik’ (22% and 16%), donation of goods to the needy (17% and 21%), donated to charitable institutions (6% and 9%). Only 2% according to both polls worked as volunteers. As it seems from our data women (rather than men), people with higher education (rather without it), middle-aged (rather very young and old) and well-off people (rather than poor) are more likely to help, donate, participate and take action. Thus it is possible to say, that autonomy of individual, in no need of the state support is crucial for the development of the civic sphere.

At the same time people in Russia are not very well aware of NGO activities. Only 16% of Russians and 23% people in big cities understand what NGOs are all about. Another 52% and 57% respectively had only vague ideas about, 29% and 15% didn’t know anything at all. Interestingly according to the big cities survey only 5% of respondents personally knew somebody working in any NGO. Overall attitudes towards NGOs was rather positive, the ratio of positive and negative responses on the national level being 50% to 19% (in June 2013), in big cities (March 2014) it was 73% to 10%. But only 11% of people in big cities think they can count (“fully” or “largely”) on the support of NGOs of civic initiatives in dealing with difficult life problems and situations. In this sense civic sphere in Russia is still failing to offer an alternative to state support, only strong family and friendship ties make any difference for the majority of population in Russia.
Internet obviously also contributes to such independence. The internet audience in Russia is growing rapidly. Now about 60% of Russians are using internet regularly, and this figure nearly doubled in last 3 years. Social networks are popular among 45-50% of Russian, and with younger Russians in big cities this figure reaches about 90%. So young people in big Russian cities are all potentially connected to each other through networks such as “Vkontakte” and “Odnoklassniki”. Facebook is much less popular. Thereafter social networks are used more and more frequently used by the civic activists in Russia. As one of them told me in the interview, “I don’t know whether there are a lot more active people in Russia now, but today it is much easier for us to find each other and to coordinate our work”. Proliferation of the internet and social networks alongside with the growing incomes in recent couple of years resulted in the boost of the various crowd funding schemes, Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation and Colta.ru being only the most vivid examples. Yet it should be notices that different variants of online fundraising are acceptable for only few per cent of (technologically literate) Russians, overwhelming majority of population can be reached currently only through conventional ways (fundraising in the public spots, and through the banks, etc.). With the spread of online databases and social networks it is now possible to conduct serious anti-corruption investigations. There are several civic groups of this kind, as well as many individual civic journalists and bloggers operating all over the country and even from abroad.

It is possible to speak about the development of several major areas of civic activism in Russia. Many of them experienced inflow of participants and increase of activities during the protest mobilization in big Russian cities, primarily in Moscow and St.-Petersburg in the end of 2011 - 2012. Environmentalists are among these activists. They are fighting for preservation of wildlife and parks in Sochi, Moscow, Kaliningrad, and elsewhere. Many organizations and informal groups are campaigning to preserve cultural heritage, or making the urban environment friendly for ordinary people, or adopting it for the use of the people with disabilities. Quite a number of initiatives, again many of them outside of Moscow, emerge to deal with helping homeless people, search for lost children, find home for stray animals, etc. In a noble impulse people came together in 2010 to fight devastating wildfires and in 2012 to help victims of the flood in Southern Russian town of Krymsk.

A bunch of activities were inspired by the last parliamentary elections and the following protests. There is an observer’s’ movement that at some point in 2012 united more than 25000 participants across the country. Again most of action took place in the capital, but there were also teams of observers working in several big cities of Yaroslavl, Astrakhan, and Ekaterinburg. The police violence during the mass protests in Moscow lead to creation of several new human rights groups, such as 6th May Committee, Rosuznik, and OVD-Info. They now monitor the arrests during the rallies, deliver legal support free of charge, raise money for it and campaign for release of political prisoners. Surprisingly December 2011 protests became an opportunity for the Russian LGBT-movement to organize their first gay-pride in the capital as a column inside larger protest rally. And as the gay community severe pressure from the government, it became more active and vocal in defending LGBT rights in Russia, and achieved worldwide recognition of the problem.

**Organizational problems**

Despite the variety of topics (and problems) addressed by Russian civic groups and NGOs many of them experience similar organizational problems. You may often be amazed how smart, business minded and innovative the civic activists are, nevertheless it seems quite often that they are reinventing the bicycle. There can be the lack of managerial skills in old organizations as well as in the new ones. It is not uncommon that people are learning from the scratch how to deal with media, dig for data, present their cause to the public, raise money, and campaign for change. The question is how to do it effectively. This issue is now given more thought within the civil society. I guess it partly because efficiency attracts supporters, and also because (as one activist from Perm put it) management is now on the university curriculum and managerial ideas are slowly adopted by the people. I guess some assistance in transferring these skills through
trainings, meetings or long-term partnership between Russian organizations and initiatives and their Western counterparts can make difference. Some Russian activists, primarily from big cities, already have connections with colleagues abroad, yet these are rather personal, inconsistent and sporadic contacts and experiences. But truth be told, achieving efficiency is not entirely in the hand of the organization itself. It also depend on the whether the government is ready to cooperate with the civic sphere or rather try to block people’s initiatives.

Another challenge that Russian civic activists deal with is how to find balance between “hierarchical” and “network” (or in some sense “anarchical”) approach towards their organization or group. Recently there was much disaffection with strong leadership both in politics and civic sphere. Growing inflow of volunteers and new members into NGOs and civic organizations put pressure to make decision making process more open, leadership more accountable, initiatives more participatory. The question is how to introduce more internal democracy within organizations. Otherwise people won’t come and won’t help. At the same time there is a concern, that without established hierarchy, planning, delegation of responsibilities, and control it is hard to deliver efficiency (and thus again to be attractive to volunteers). This problem, as well as others, is often aggravated by the generational gap and misunderstanding, both within organizations and between old and newly established initiatives.

Strategic planning is a problem in itself. When speaking with Russian NGO and civic leaders you will seldom meet a person who plans over a year ahead. It is simple to say that here is no culture planning in Russian NGOs, yet this situation is more or less determined by the circumstances. Usually there are no “long-term” investments in the Russian civic sphere. It is possible to get some funding on the project-to-project basis, but the number of available donors is shrinking. The socio-political environment, that of legal basis and attitudes of the state towards the civic sector is constantly changing. For instance many organizations had to suspend or entirely cancel their projects with international donors after the introduction of the new “Foreign Agent” NGO law in 2013. Furthermore, crowd funding is legally risky for NGOs and is not recommended by the lawyers. So this way of funding is commonly used by small and not formally registered initiatives. It is really hard to plan in advance, when you are not sure that funds will be available or your organization won’t be closed next month.

Existential problems

The fund development for civic organizations in Russia is also the issue of securing independence and autonomy form the state. The fact is that most of the resources are controlled by the Russian state in one way or another. The funding from the foreign donors has been decreasing since mid 2000s, when the state took rather hostile attitude towards overseas grants for NGOs. After Khodorkovsky’s imprisonment big business became cautious of support of any activities that can be perceived as contradicting interests of those at power. Major Russian foundations, often related to big business, are cautious as well. Small and medium businesses are more favorable towards the activists, but still the majority of businessmen do not show much interest in charity. There was major increase in governmental spending lately in the form of so called “presidential grants”, but the grant awarding process still remains highly politicized and opaque 8 years from the start. Interviews with NGO leaders conducted in 2010 highlighted “community foundations” as a successful form of supporting local activities, but I do not have any update on what is going on with them now. Crowd funding is rather new in Russia, but already it is restricted by the new legislation. Thus the lack of independent funding creates a real challenge for civic organizations and initiatives that want to stay self-determined.

Actually there is only two modes of operation for civic initiatives in Russia. You can either serve the government, or sooner or later you find yourself in opposition and under pressure. Parallel existence is possible only for small, young, and uninformal initiatives. One can observe, how the slow growth of civic activities and determination of people to resist highhandedness and corruption is increasingly leading to the conflict with political system. As Vaclav Havel once put it in authoritarian system any civic activity, any autonomous
and self-determined act becomes political and oppositional. You may remember, that among the general public there is only tiny percent of people that are ready to organize to help others, donate money, and work voluntarily. But among the participants of the protest rallies in Moscow, according to Levada-Center polls, such people prevailed.

This didn’t come unnoticed by Russian government and now the whole independent sphere in the country is under the tough pressure from the state since the end of 2011. Alternative opinions are strongly discouraged. Influential independent media are being closed down, internet censorship is hardening and non-profit organizations are being checked by prosecutor’s office and defamed by state-owned TV. The whole sphere is being discredited to deprive it of the support of the general public.

It is hard to make recommendations when situation is still uncertain, yet some suggestions could still be offered for international community.

1. It should be fully aware of the gravity of situation in Russian civil society, the attention and moral support of the international community can be important in itself.
2. The support should come along the already existing trends, to vigorous and rapidly developing initiatives that has already demonstrated at least limited success and efficiency.
3. International community could be the source of organizational skills, managerial and high-tech know how and experience, that can be useful for the civic sphere. Russian civil society should not reinvent the bicycle.
4. The emphasis should be put on assisting organizational development of the civic sphere, as well as on human development of the activists.
5. The long-term partnership, rather than short-term, project-to-project interactions may encourage strategic planning within Russian NGOs and civic initiatives.
Features and Interviews  
openDemocracy Russia

When charity should begin at home  
Civil society development in Russia has been hampered by restrictive laws and apathy or suspicion on the part of the public. What is needed so it can start again? 
www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/alex-jackson/when-charity-should-begin-at-home

Trusting in Russian civil society  
“We are from the same sector; we want the same things!” was the result of one discussion at the Salzburg Global Seminar Russian Civil Society Symposium. But how to achieve them?  
www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/alex-jackson/trusting-in-russian-civil-society

Russian civil society and the law  
Russia’s foreign agents law caused a great deal of controversy when it was introduced late last year. But the woes of Russia’s NGOs don’t end there...  
www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/louise-hallman/russian-civil-society-and-law

Building bridges in Russian civil society  
Direct aid givers, civic activists, and political activists spend as much time arguing amongst themselves as they do building civil society. With such divisions, it is clear that bridges need to be built not only between civil society and the state.  
www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/louise-hallman/building-bridges-in-russian-civil-society

Russian civil society is a 25-year-old work in progress  
Building Bridges to the Future: no easy answers, more questions. But that does not mean it was a failure.  
www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/sarah-lindenmannkomarova/russian-civil-society-is-25yearold-work-in-progress

SalzburgGlobal.org

“So what?”  
Making Russians Care About Civil Society  

“Civil society is the society of citizens”  
The more active citizens we have the stronger and better civil society and the country at large will be  
www.salzburgglobal.org/news-media/article/civil-society-is-the-society-of-citizens

Oleg Kozlovsky: “People are waiting to display their fear and their anger and their rage”  
Seasoned political activist discusses why protests are so difficult in Russia, and why he will fight for the civil society, even in other countries  

Marina Pisklakova-Parker: “If you beat your wife, beat her quietly”  
Women’s rights worker on how her organization has been instrumental in gaining visibility for women’s rights in Russia  
www.salzburgglobal.org/news-media/article/marina-pisklakova-parker-if-you-beat-your-wife-beat-her-quietly

Vladlena Taraskina: “10 Euros can make this process work!”  
Founder and CEO of rusini.org is well accustomed to overcoming the challenges that face her in Russia and beyond  
www.salzburgglobal.org/news-media/article/vladlena-taraskina-10-euros-can-make-this-process-work
## Session Participants

All positions correct at time of session (April 2014)

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<td>Denis Volkov</td>
<td>Analyst, Levada-Center, Moscow, Russian Federation</td>
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Guest Speaker

Gennady Burbulis
President, Humanitarian and Political Science Centre, Russian Federation

Dr. Burbulis delivered The Annual Henry Brandon Memorial Lecture on Contemporary European History

Rapporteur

Orysia Lutsevych
Research Fellow, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, United Kingdom

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Kevin Mersol Barg, Global Citizenship Program
Daniel O’Donnell, Program
Report Author: Orysia Lutsevych is an innovative leader working on social change with 15 years of experience in the United Kingdom, United States, Ukraine, and Georgia. She is a research fellow at Chatham House Russia and Eurasia Program looking at the role of Russian-funded civil society groups in Ukraine, Armenia, and Moldova. Currently, Ms. Lutsevych is consulting donors, international NGOs, and foundations on program development and evaluation, citizen engagement, and high-impact strategies. From 2009 to 2011, she led the start-up and regional development of Europe House in Georgia. Prior to that, she served as executive director at the Open Ukraine Foundation established by Arseny Yatseniuk and as country director for Ukraine at the Polish-Ukraine Cooperation Foundation PAUCI. Ms. Lutsevych has contributed to CNN, Financial Times, New York Times, Open Democracy and other major publications. She is an author of a Chatham House briefing paper How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Ms. Lutsevych holds an M.A. in international relations from Lviv State University and a second M.A. in public administration from the University of Missouri-Columbia, USA.

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Salzburg Global Seminar

Salzburg Global Seminar was founded in 1947 by Austrian and American students from Harvard University. Convinced that former enemies must talk and learn from each other in order to create more stable and secure societies, they set out to create a neutral international forum for those seeking to regenerate Europe and shape a better world. Guided by this vision, we have brought over 31,000 participants together from 160 countries for more than 500 sessions and student academies across cultural and ideological barriers to address common challenges. Our track record is unique — connecting young and established leaders, and supporting regions, institutions and sectors in transition.

Salzburg Global’s program strategy is driven by our Mission to challenge present and future leaders to solve issues of global concern. We work with partners to help people, organizations and governments bridge divides and forge paths for peace, empowerment and equitable growth.

Our three Program Clusters – Imagination, Sustainability and Justice – are guided by our commitment to tackle systems challenges critical for next generation leaders and engage new voices to ‘re-imagine the possible’. We believe that advances in education, science, culture, business, law and policy must be pursued together to reshape the landscape for lasting results. Our strategic convening is designed to address gaps and faultlines in global dialogue and policy making and to translate knowledge into action.

Our programs target new issues ripe for engagement and ‘wicked’ problems where progress has stalled. Building on our deep experience and international reputation, we provide a platform where participants can analyze blockages, identify shared goals, test ideas, and create new strategies. Our recruitment targets key stakeholders, innovators and young leaders on their way to influence and ensures dynamic perspectives on a given topic.

Our exclusive setting enables our participants to detach from their working lives, immerse themselves in the issues at hand and form new networks and connections. Participants come together on equal terms, regardless of age, affiliation, region or sector.

We maintain this energy and engagement through the Salzburg Global Network, which connects our Fellows across the world. It provides a vibrant hub to crowd-source new ideas, exchange best practice, and nurture emerging leaders through mentoring and support. The Network leverages our extraordinary human capital to advise on critical trends, future programs and in-region implementation.