

RUSSIAN NGOs IN TIME OF STRAINED FOREIGN RELATIONS

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of International Relations

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Marie-Pierre Granger

Word count: 14900

Budapest, Hungary

2016

Abstract

Russian NGOs have been subjected to a number of government measures designed to exert control over their activities, including the 2006 NGO and the 2012 Foreign Agents Laws. This paper provides an overview of the Russian civil society and its relationship with the state. It then details the ways in which the laws have limited NGOs' ability to carry out their activities. By picking out government concern regarding overseas financing of NGOs as the main driver for the strict regulation of the sector, this paper argues that Russian foreign policy towards the West and vice versa plays an instrumental part in the way that civil society is managed and allowed to develop in Russia. By viewing Russian domestic regulation in the context of and as a manifestation of wider international relations, this paper recommends the normalization of the relations as an essential step towards the development of stronger civil society in Russia.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Marie-Pierre Granger for support and continuous assistance during this long process. I would like also to thank our beautiful IR coordinators for their consistent help and valuable guidance throughout the year. Special thanks to my Diya for endless support and encouragement.

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Introduction

NGOs in Russia have gone through a seesaw ride since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, liberalizing policies under Yeltsin resulted in a period of rapid and unsustainable growth within an inconsistent and uncertain regulatory framework.¹ Under Putin's leadership in the second term, laws governing civil society have been tightened (commonly referred to as the "2006 NGO Law"), adding a burden of administrative hassle to NGOs and significant state oversight of their activities². In came Medvedev, who realized within a period of a year that the burden was unreasonable for some of the smaller NGOs and relaxed the law implemented by his predecessor³. Finally, on return to presidential power for the third term in 2012, Putin has introduced the controversial *Foreign Agents Law*, which requires the registration of NGOs that receive financing from abroad as "Foreign Agents".⁴ This caused an uproar both internally and in the international community, with many linking this move to yet another display of oppression and totalitarianism.

The impartiality backed by lack of affiliation with the state is one of the special strengths of NGOs, when viewed from the liberalist standpoint. Idealistically, they are mostly relieved from the weight of internal bureaucratic processes and conformity that governmental, commercial and some non-commercial organisations have to hurdle through. They can thus choose to devote maximum effort to causes they believe matter most, whether humanitarian,

¹ JO Crotty Et Al., 2014. Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law. Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 66, No. 8, p.1253

² Elena Klitsounova, "Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies," CEPS NO.287, April 2008, p.7

³ JO Crotty Et Al., 2014. Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law. Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 66, No. 8, p.1254

⁴ Russia's new treason Statute, Anti-NGO and other repressive laws: "Sovereign Democracy or Renewed Autocracy?" p.120

environmental, advocacy of rights, or any other.⁵ Independence allows them to look at events objectively from a neutral standpoint, free from subjective influence. They can be the voice of the under-represented; their agility and boldness enough to knock slow-reacting governmental mechanisms off their conceived path towards a better, more considered future. But in Russia, the reality is far from this concept. Through the employment of excessive bureaucratic state control over most societal functions, the state manages to diminish key fortes of NGOs and thus “insulate itself from excessive innovation and spontaneity from society.”⁶ The hybrid nature of government has resulted in policies that support some aspects of civil society, while filtering out the ones deemed unwanted. Evaluating these events from the liberalism approach in relative isolation to the international system would reveal significant cracks in the domestic structure and go some way in explaining the motives and the relationship dynamic between the Russian state and society.

Russia’s prominence on the international stage and the level of activity beyond the confines of its own borders has seen growth over the last decade. In parallel, its relationship with the West has got more turbulent, and at times, outright hostile. Shedding light on the current international relations climate brings to vision problems that are potentially hurting the image of Russia-based NGOs cooperating with foreign actors, before the domestic audience. There are deepening disagreements between Russia on one side, and the EU with the United States Democratic administration on the other arising from differences in a number of key matters, including Ukraine, Crimea and Syria amongst others.⁷ By having an iron grip on the media, the

⁵Lynn Lawry, *A Guide to NGOs for the Military* (US Department of Defense :2009), 30-40, <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/ngo-guide.pdf>

⁶Geir Flikke, “Resurgent authoritarianism: the case of Russia’s new NGO legislation,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32:2, p.105, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1034981?journalCode=rpsa20>

⁷ Maria Lipman, “How Russia has come to loathe the West,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, March 13, 2015, accessed December 24, 2016,

Russian state is able to rally public support for its actions at home and abroad, through staging effective information campaigns⁸. Thus, the Ukrainian crisis was very quickly followed by the anti-Western sentiment in Russia. According to a recent NORC Public Affairs Research, more than twice as many Russians have an unfavourable opinion of the United States in 2014 in comparison to 2012 (65% vs. 25%); and nearly half of Russians have an unfavourable view of the European Union in 2014, in contrast to only 11% in 2012⁹. At times, the western media has also been accused for igniting and spreading much of the anti-Russia sentiment, whether through not referring to facts or being selective with its coverage of the news¹⁰, and thus overall contributing to a chilly relationship and negative perceptions not only on the second (state) level of analysis, but on the micro level. Much of the civil society regulation imposed by the Russian state has been in pursuit of de-linking foreign actors from political organizations, with the intention of putting an end to their alleged meddling in Russian internal affairs¹¹. In order to be able to explain and evaluate these actions by the state and the extent to which they are in response to the international system, it has been attempted to study this topic with the employment of neo-realism theory.

This paper sets the scene by exploring the statist approach that Russia follows and how its civil society and the public are placed within it. In this setting, an overview is provided of the legislation implemented in the last decade, considering its consequences and the ways in which

http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_russia_has_come_to_loathe_the_west311346

⁸ "How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons," *The Atlantic*, April 21, 2015, accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/how-the-media-became-putins-most-powerful-weapon/391062/>

⁹ "Public Opinion in Russia: Russia's Attitude on Foreign Affairs and Social Issues," *The Associated Press and NORC*, accessed December 19, 2016, "<http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/public-opinion-in-russia-russians-attitudes-on-foreign-affairs-and-social-issues0401-6253.aspx>

¹⁰ Bryan MacDonald, "Hybrid Warfare: Anti-Russia propaganda finds a new buzzword," *RT*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/331999-western-media-russia-propaganda/>

¹¹ Elena Klitsounova, "Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies," CEPS NO.287, April 2008, p.7

it forced NGOs to adapt in order to suit the autocratic tendencies of the Russian state, whilst remaining fit for the demands of the public it serves. In the research, the government (second level) concern over association with foreign actors (third level) is hypothesized to be the main driver for stricter NGO law, as it became a sensitive topic in the state-NGO relationship. I take a special look at the underlying reasons behind Russia's discomfort over the inflows of foreign cash into the hands of domestic NGOs, in the context of broader Russian relations with the West. The key questions this paper aims to address are, *what rational thought has triggered the tougher NGO laws; and is there a connection between elements of Russian foreign policy and what the state is doing at home with regard to civil society?*

The work is organized into three sections. The first part describes the nature of civil society in Russia in order to lay out the landscape around which discussion is held. The second part elaborates on the recent developments in NGO law that have affected this landscape. Section three considers implications of poor Russia-West relations for NGOs, as well as offering analysis about ways in which the two are interlinked.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework

For this research, realism theory have been selected as the suitable international relations framework. The topic is centered on Russia, and taking into account its culture, current affairs and history point to elements of authoritarianism and autocratic leadership. It is therefore a valid assumption that the state is going to be the most powerful and influential actor regarding any domestic or international subject. The selected framework places the bulk of analysis on the state, allowing to explain the underlying motives behind its behaviour and interaction which are assumed to have been *caused*. Classical realism offers the facility to seek the causes on individual level of analysis, evaluating the leadership's character, background and most of all ambitions in rationalizing their behaviour – which in turn is reflected in the state that they build and carried through to the anarchic international system. Whilst compelling and likely to deliver convincing analysis, the value of this research is in evaluating whether it is the international system itself that is the prime motive for action by the state. Therefore, the neo-realism framework has been chosen as appropriate for the purpose, with the aid of which inter-relations between the state, another state, and state-backed foreign actors have been made the main part of the equation in understanding state behaviour.

Kenneth Waltz's levels of analysis have been applied throughout the thesis with specific reference at which *level* the analysis is being made at, defined as follows:

First level: Individual / decision maker / agent / subnational actor or group (including NGOs)

Second level: State / government / unit (including political union such as EU)

Third level: International system / external system that is the result of the global order

There interference of the state in the sphere of Russian civil society in the twenty first century has been covered in detail in the second and third chapters of the thesis, giving a balance of description and analysis. In the third and fourth chapters, the extent to which the civil society is the result of state decisions is established by applying the neo-realism framework. This permitted to test the hypothesis that those decisions and actions have been influenced by international factors in an anarchic international order, where Russia has found itself following the collapse of the stable Cold War balance. The evaluation of Russia's *Foreign Agents Law* makes the applicability of neo-realism international relations framework particularly relevant. From the title of the law itself, the motive behind it appears to originate as a response to developments in the international system. It is therefore sensible to apply a framework that allows to factor the cause and effect from the third and second levels of analysis respectively.

Neo-realism is a framework that treats the state as a single unit that behaves in comparable way in the international system as consumers do in economic theory – maximizing utility or benefit. Therefore, the state can be characterized as a unitary entity that it is naturally concerned with short and long-term survivability and power. The state exists in an anarchical system with other states, where position and power determine the extent to which the state is successful as an international player¹², and ultimately at securing its interests. In this analysis, the thesis focuses on the most important international players the EU and the US – as they accurately represent the most powerful participants in the international system with whom Russia is experiencing strained relations. Another central assumption in this theory is that states are only interested in relative gains in power (compared to other rival states), not in absolute

¹² Webber, "Levels of Analysis in International Relations Political Science," accessed December 22, 2016, <http://my.ilstu.edu/~jawebbe/Levels%20of%20Analysis%20in%20International%20Relations%5B1%5D.htm>

advantages.¹³ This has been used to explain the compromises the state has made in order to produce an overall tangible benefit.

The highly centralized administration in Russian government is another factor which indicates the suitability of this framework for analysing the inter-relationship of civil society, the state, and international actors. The age demographics of the Russian population is such that almost 75% is twenty five and over, and thus the majority of Russians has been brought up with communist ideology and principles of the largely self-contained and centrally-planned Soviet Union (see Figure A). Even after the breakup of the Union, it has taken at least a decade to re-establish the new norms for the behaviours and interactions of various actors, and therefore the younger segment of the population is also expected to have picked up and carry the influences from the previous order. Abiding by this logic, Russian society expects a state that is clearly definable, unitary, and by far the most powerful actor. It is therefore reasonable to make the assumption that the interaction between the state (second level of analysis), society and individuals (first levels of analysis) can be treated as conforming to the characteristics of realism: powerful one-unit state maximising utility, setting and pursuing the national interest on behalf of all citizens.

Other factors which align the suitability of neo-realism to the case have been summarized below, making the assumption that the Russian government viewpoint is represented by the following core tenets of the framework:

¹³ Segbers, Dyllick-Brenzinger, Hoffmann, Mauersberger. Global Politics: How to Use and Apply Theories of International Relations. <http://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/politik/publikationen/AP56.pdf>

Statism: The Russian state is the primary actor in world politics, and its internal composition is less relevant in this analysis. The high centralization of power makes it by far the most dominant actor in the country, and the public treats the state as the guarantor of many rights. It takes a statist approach in many matters,¹⁴ which often cause it to be described as authoritarian and totalitarian. The low level of democratization suggest that elections are not entirely free and therefore there is little risk of the ruling party being deposed at the general election. This stability adds to the all-powerful nature of the state.

Survivalism: Russia has experienced the break-up of the Soviet Union, and therefore recognizes that surviving as a nation is not a given. Specific measures are taken to protect it from disintegration and existence. Its military doctrine has in 2016 authorized the use of nuclear weapons explicitly in situations “that would put in danger the very existence of the state.”¹⁵ There are schemes to tackle the demographic crisis, which are designed to ensure long-term survivability of the nation in terms of its population size - such as the Maternity Capital introduced in 2007.¹⁶

Anarchic world system: The Cold War balance has been broken, and the foes have absorbed the space previously occupied by the Soviet superpower (e.g. NATO). The Russian state places value on gaining spheres of influence, and leverage through regain of great power status. An international example is the Syrian crisis, in which Russia asserts that dissolving the current government - however incompatible with the peace efforts, will result in the country falling

¹⁴ Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 344, accessed May 11, 2016, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/10270>

¹⁵ Dave Majumdar, “On the Brink: When Russia Would Use Tactical Nukes on NATO,” *The National Interest*, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-brink-when-russia-would-use-tactical-nukes-nato-15281>

¹⁶ Fabian Slonimczyk and Anna Yurko, “Assessing the Impact of the Maternity Capital Policy in Russia Using a Dynamic Model of Fertility and Employment,” *IZA DP 7705*, October 2013, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp7705.pdf>

into anarchy and lawlessness.¹⁷ It also believes in the more powerful nation dictates the move to its allies, as in its common reference to American partners influencing European ones to carry out certain actions, such as deployment of sanctions¹⁸ or military involvement - a case of “might makes right”. Regarding Europe’s response to the ongoing immigration crisis, Russia has observed the European Union Member States’ difficulties in reaching a workable agreement with each other, with Germany being the stronger player economically and politically having much more say on what happens.¹⁹ This likely went on to reinforce its view that systems of cooperation are only contextual and inadequate, and in the absence of a global “leviathan”, whatever alliance that best reflects the states’ interest at the time will prevail.

Security dilemma: Russia can be described as a country with a security dilemma. It is highly cautious on security buildups near its border. This was recently demonstrated by its agitated response to the American installation of part of the missile defense shield in Romania.²⁰ Furthermore, the NATO quadrupling of 2016 military spend in Europe has resulted in furious Russian reactions, with threats to take appropriate countermeasures.²¹ This tit-for-tat behavior increases the risk of confrontation and arms race. The Georgian and Ukrainian crises in 2014 and 2008 have highlighted the Russian need to have adequate “buffer zones”²² between itself and NATO countries wherever possible.

¹⁷ Simon Jenkins, “Why the west should listen to Putin on Syria,” *The Guardian*, September 29, 2015, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/29/west-vladimir-putin-syria-us-assad>

¹⁸ “US took advantage of EU by forcing it to sanction Russia-European PM,” *RT Question More*, April 16, 2016, accessed May 25, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/339846-us-eu-crimea-russia/>

¹⁹ Celestine Bohlen, “France Takes a Back Seat to Germany in E.U. Migrant Crisis,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2016, accessed May 23, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/22/world/europe/france-europe-migrant-crisis-germany.html?_r=0

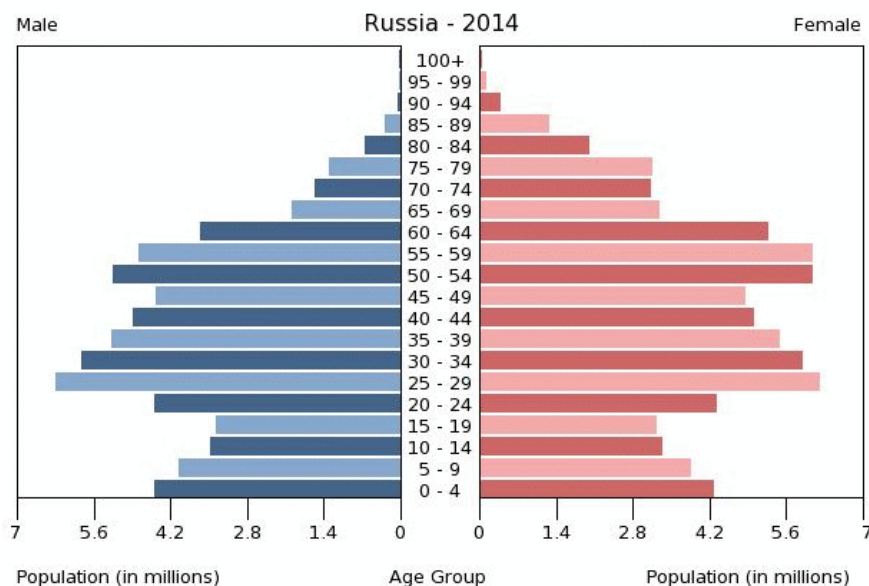
²⁰ “US activates \$800m missiles shield base in Romania,” *BBC News*, May 12, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36272686> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36272686>

²¹ “US ‘to quadruple defense budget for Europe’,” *BBC News*, February 2, 2016, accessed May 20, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-35476180>

²² Ivan Eland, “Russia Has a National Strategy that Matches the Times-Why Doesn’t the U.S.?” *HuffpostPolitics*, May 26, 2014, accessed May 21, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ivan-eland/russia-has-a-national-str_b_5029579.html

Power in this analysis is defined as: Size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence. Non-material dimensions of power are also present in his theory as manifested by his emphasis on political stability and competence.²³ Therefore, “tangible” symbols of power carry more weight in this analysis.

Figure A – Age structure of Russian population (2014)



Source: Index Mundi, 2017.²⁴

²³ Arash Heyderian Pashkhanlou, “Comparing and Contrasting Classical Realism and Neorealism,” *E-International Relations Students*, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.e-ir.info/2009/07/23/comparing-and-contrasting-classical-realism-and-neo-realism/>

²⁴ Russia Age structure. Index Mundi, 2017. Accessed http://www.indexmundi.com/russia/age_structure.html

Chapter 2 – The Nature of Civil Society in Russia

Russian civil society is a result of the dynamic that has been taking place between the state the public, and to some extent foreign actors. Predictably, much of it is the result of Soviet legacy which has left a deep imprint on the mentality of its citizens, as well as influenced the structure of the Russian government. In order to be able to assess the ability of the NGO to perform successfully in current-state Russia, it is first important to introduce the Russian civil society space and draw contrast with that in democratic societies. The background provided in this chapter highlights the forged proximity between the state, civil society and the public – with the former having the most influence and power.

2.1 Russian Interpretation of Civil Society

The research carried out by Bindman (2015) gives balanced interpretation for understanding civil society in Russia. The classical liberal view of “civil society” is of “a range of formal and informal associations that operate independently from the state”, thus being able to “act as a counterweight to state institutions, restrict its authoritarian tendencies”. This makes civil society the buffer, occupying the “space between the individual, the state and the market”. Whilst not necessarily engaging directly in activity that can be called “political”, these social organizations are nevertheless seen as “political and contentious in relation to the state”, and “a key element in the process of successful democratization”.²⁵

²⁵ Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 342–360, accessed May 11, 2016, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/10270>

On the other hand, Russia's system, which has previously been characterized as a "hybrid regime", cannot be called entirely democratic nor entirely authoritarian. Whilst featuring some elements such as a constitution and elections, this was counter-balanced with a considerable amount of executive control over the legal system, parliament, regional authorities and the media²⁶. The nature of the regime has produced some interesting observations, where the government can co-operate with an NGO on an "on and off" alternating basis. As an example of this, research by Daucé (2015) examining the relationship between a prominent NGO Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG) and the Russian state has shone light on the two sides of the state. The author claims that at times, the MHG activists were even physically confronted by law enforcement forces in the street during the demonstrations they attended, highlighting the oppressive authoritarian side of the Russian regime. But on other occasions, MHG has been invited to engage in discussion procedures as well as cooperation with the Russian administration²⁷ - giving a glimpse of the co-operative, bordering-democratic side of the state. However, the author makes clear that this is done within the legal framework established by the government. This is an evident case of the government willing to listen but under its own terms, and therefore a form of exertion of control.

Bindman also acknowledges that Russia follows the statist concept of relations with civil society. The scholar notes that state and society are interdependent and cannot function in autonomously from one another. Consequently, the outcome is that society is viewed as "completing the state rather than diminishing or challenging it". Under this arrangement, the state has significant influence over the formation and activities of civil society, including

²⁶ Ibid., 342-360

²⁷ Françoise Daucé, "The Government and Human Rights Groups in Russia: Civilized Oppression?," *Journal of Civil Society* 10:3(2009): 240, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2014.941087>

NGOs.²⁸ In the case of larger NGOs with foreign links such as MHG, it becomes necessary for the NGO and the state to reach a compromise, whereby direct conflict with the authorities is diminished and cooperation is given in *exchange for* keeping within the government-set boundaries - allowing the state to maintain political domination.²⁹ This is an indication that without a working relationship with the state, it is not possible for NGOs to sustainably function in the political sphere.

As per Bindman's elaborations, the statist concept became apparently reflected in governance under Putin from 2004 onwards, which pursued a policy of creating a "top-down" model of civil society. As a result, it rewarded those NGOs that were classed to be carrying out "socially useful" activities with grants and other support. Simultaneously, NGOs that had been found to be counterproductive to the state, especially human rights and environmental NGOs, were excluded. The NGOs which operated in the interest of solving specific social problems of children, disabled people, elderly people and other vulnerable groups in society had a more compatible relationship with the authorities, but were still subject to state scrutiny although of a different kind.³⁰

With regards to public view on areas where NGOs should be active, research in the last decade has shown that protection of women and children, as well as other socially vulnerable groups tops the list, with respectively 40% and 33% of respondents believing so (see Figure 1). Also

²⁸ Eleanor Bindman, "The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia," *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 344, accessed May 11, 2016, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/10270>

²⁹ Françoise Daucé, "The Government and Human Rights Groups in Russia: Civilized Oppression?," *Journal of Civil Society* 10:3(2009): 240, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2014.941087>

³⁰ Eleanor Bindman, "The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia," *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 344, accessed May 11, 2016

popular was reform of housing and communal services (30%), education (29%), healthcare and medicine (25%); but concerning other rights the same cannot be said - such as human rights, local self-government, environment, culture and arts, scientific research, sports, and independent mass media; where proportions of responses barely approach 5 or 10%.³¹ This is an example of where the public view matches that of the state, as both groups consider that NGOs should function in areas that specifically deliver social benefits of some kind.

Potentially, Bindman signals the classical liberal model is not going to fit in with the Russian norms. In line with the classical liberal views, in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Western aid tended to favour NGOs promoting “feminist, environmental and human rights causes” that were independent and had similar views and values to their international donor organization.³² As Bindman commented, this strategy has been unsuccessful in leading to the advancement of a grassroots NGO movement in post-Soviet Russia. Instead, the effect this had was the fostering “of a small, isolated and elitist community of professional advocacy NGOs who focused on campaigns and issues more likely to appeal to their Western donors than their domestic constituents”, whilst also being heavily reliant on foreign funding for their survival.³³ Based on the observation of fruitless efforts of Western donors, by the early 2000s, many scholars had concluded that civil society in Russia was “weak, ineffective and likely to remain so for some time to come.”³⁴

³¹ Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):5, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>.

³² Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 343-344, accessed May 11, 2016, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/10270>

³³ Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 343-344, accessed May 11, 2016, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/10270>

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.343

Bindman has challenged the view amongst scholars including Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rodgers, who consider the state is a dominant character that exercises unacceptable amounts of direction, controlling the formation and development of civil society; whilst the NGOs are simply “marionette” organizations that cannot neither influence the government decision, social policy making processes, or perform as effective advocates for rights and entitlements³⁵. The scholar emphasizes the need to put civil society in the correct Russian perspective, where much of the norms have been inherited from the Soviet Union.³⁶ Communism had provided an extensive amount of economic and social rights to citizens including security of employment, allowance for rest, free education and healthcare, as well as material security in old age and illness; albeit often “on a discretionary basis in exchange for loyalty in everyday life.”³⁷ Therefore the definition of “human rights” was something closer in nature to being social and economic rather than civil and political.³⁸ Little appears to have changed since. Despite the Russian Constitution of 1993 having delivered changes which did alleviate the limits placed on civil and political rights, it had still continued to position the Russian Federation to being a “social state”.³⁹ This is confirmed in Bindman’s (2015) interviews with Russian NGOs, where it became evident that:

“There are differences between how social rights are understood in Europe and in Russia because of the influence of our Soviet past. Lots of people expect something from the state in

³⁵ Ibid., p.344

³⁶ Ibid., p.345

³⁷ Ibid., p.345

³⁸ Ibid., p.345

³⁹ Ibid., p.345

*the social sphere, whether it's housing or some kind of social security payment. (Katya, staff member for a regional human rights ombudsman, St Petersburg)''*⁴⁰

On the other hand, 2014 survey data shows that whilst people do expect much from the state in the social sphere, they don't actually feel that they have much influence on local government decision making on matters important to them. Of those surveyed across the country, 79% have responded that they either probably or definitely don't have such influence (See Figure 2).⁴¹ This indicates a problem in the method of governance, which leaves the public feeling unable to influence their ultimate guarantor of social rights (i.e. the state), but neither convinced that it is NGOs' responsibility to fight for their rights.

One key indicator for civil society development is the public support for NGOs. There is some evidence to say that in Russia NGOs do not benefit very much from it. In one example 2006 research by the Levada Center, 68% of the surveyed nationwide sample did not feel that the law protects them, with 32% raising "concerns about serious human rights abuses in the country".⁴² Nevertheless only 4% would see NGOs as an option as a place to seek assistance in the case of such rights abuses. Knowledge about the most prominent and large scale NGOs is limited also - with only 22% and 8% being familiar with the services that Memorial Society and MHG are capable of providing. Interestingly, Russian people still expect their government to provide support to such organizations on a national, subnational and local government

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.348

⁴¹ The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p.105

⁴² Elena Klitsounova, "Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies," *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):4, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>.

level,⁴³ which seems to suggest that the public is not opposed to the idea of having such NGOs, and that civil society does have a place in Russia.

Further proof for this are the findings reported in the 2014 Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) report, which say that 41% of respondents had made a donation to a non-profit organization in the preceding twelve months.⁴⁴ This is a considerable portion of the population, suggesting that the Russian public is in principle open to support nonprofit causes, giving additional hope for successful civil society. Of the beneficiaries, it appears that those NGOs that support children, emergency cases, churches and religious organizations, families and people in difficult circumstances and generally adults have received the most frequent help (See Figure 3). Interestingly, NGOs concerned with elderly persons, homeless persons, medical cases, education and sport have not enjoyed the same contribution. This is a potential indicator that the public expects the state to be responsible for dealing with the other cases, and chooses to support areas where the state does not extend adequate coverage or have formal programmes. Unsurprisingly human rights is near the bottom of the list, which is most likely because the public does not see the urgency of resolving these matters, or feeling that it is impossible to help without state involvement.

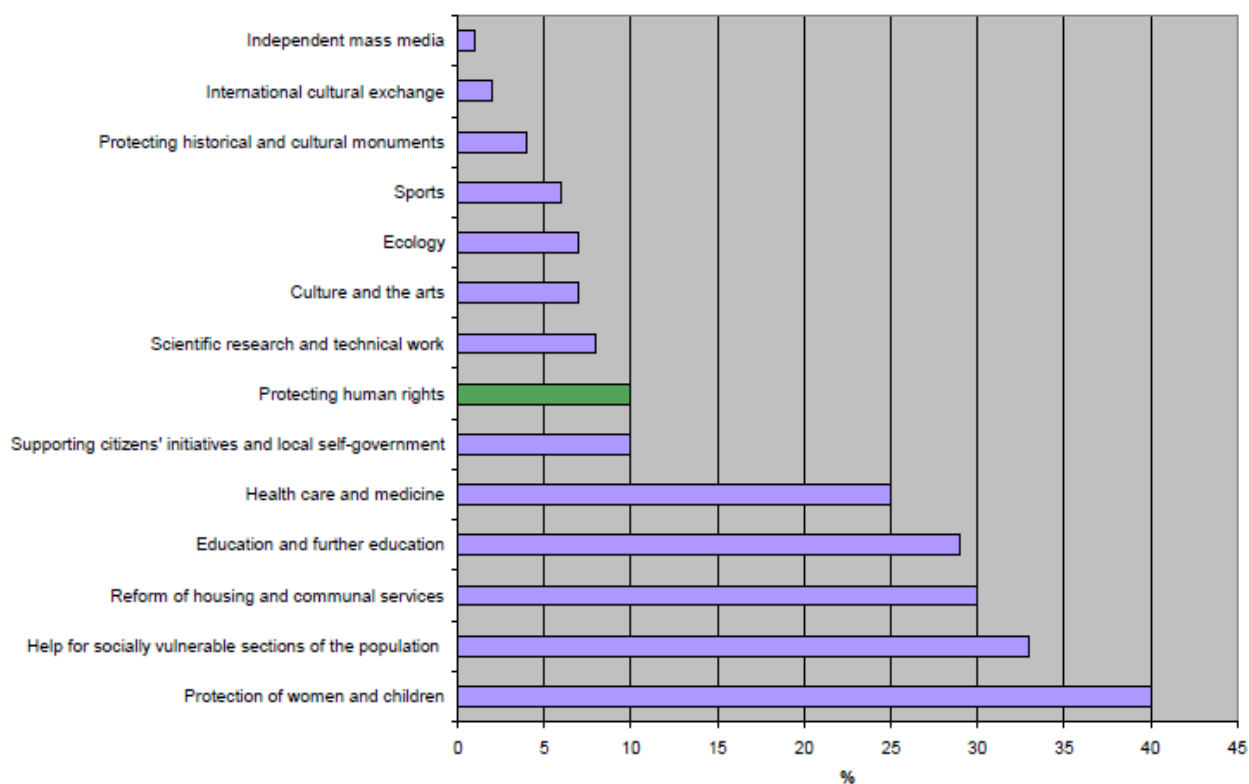
On the subject of human rights, it must be noted that Russians perceive it in three normative dimensions: civil liberties - which includes freedom of religion, association and expression; economic rights - covering the right to work, social welfare and property ownership; and individual rights - including freedom from arbitrary arrest and torture. It has been found that the 65% majority of those surveyed are most interested in the economic rights dimension, and

⁴³ Ibid., p.4

⁴⁴The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p 93

least interested in civil rights - with only 12% seeing it as important⁴⁵. This follows the principle that the majority of the public is not so concerned about the less tangible aspects of human rights, which are seen as basic ingredients of a democracy in Western countries. **Expand on tangibles**

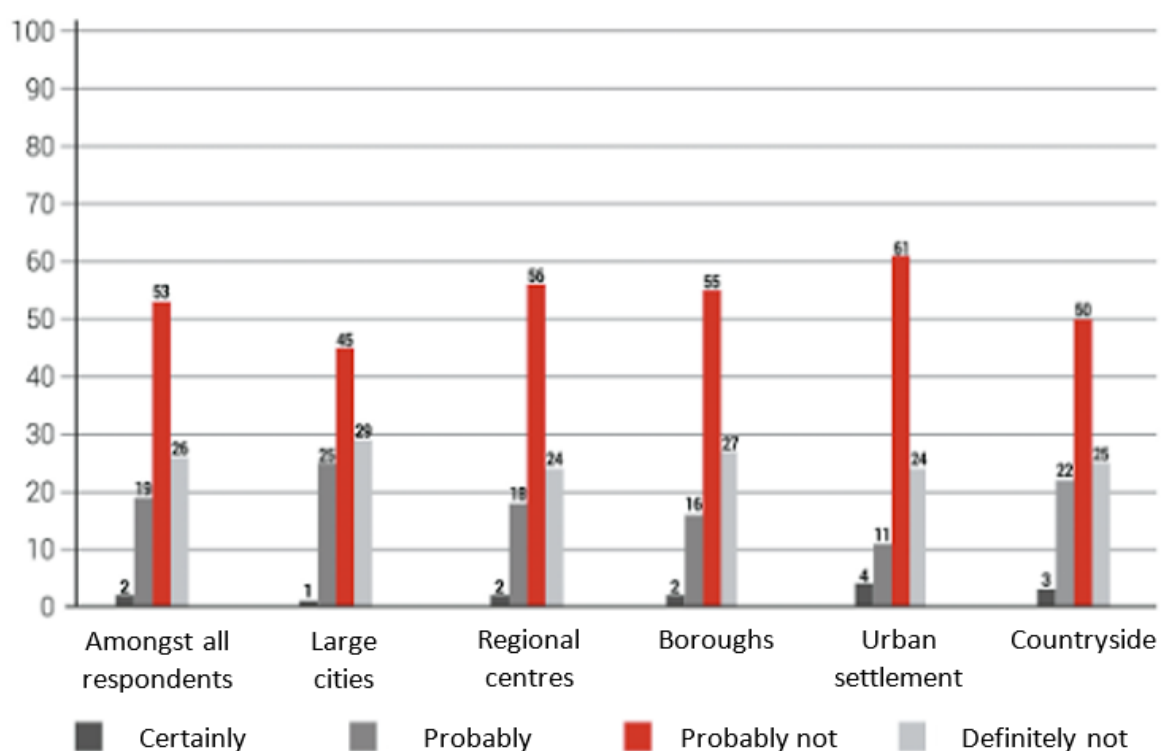
Figure 1- Areas in which NGOs should be active



Source: Elena Klitsounova, "Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies," *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):5, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>

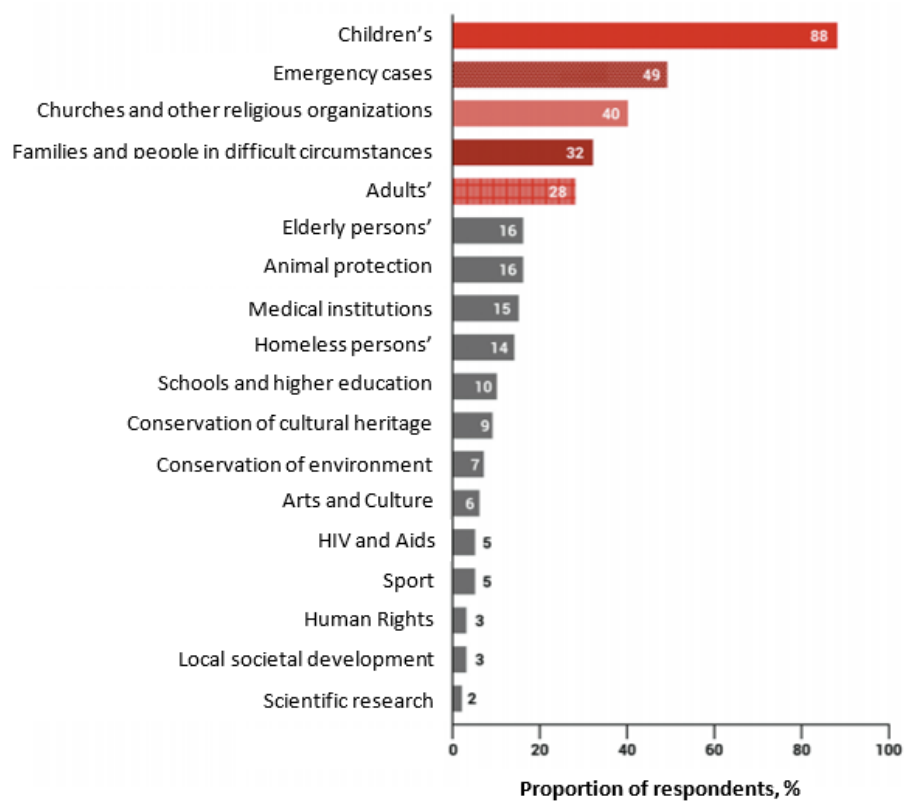
⁴⁵ Elena Klitsounova, "Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies," *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):5, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>.

Figure 2- Ability of citizens to influence local government decisions on matters important to them (%)



Source: Figure translated from The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p.105

Figure 3-What areas of charitable NGOs did you support financially in the last 12 months?



Source: Figure translated from The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p.94

2.2 Socially Oriented NGOs and the State

NGOs that take part in “social” work rather than “political” are referred to as Socially-Oriented (SO) NGOs. Bindman (2005) emphasizes that SO NGOs, which through the nature of their purpose comply with the Kremlin’s “prescribed boundaries” were being rewarded, in the sense that they have been eligible to apply for generous grants. These grants were started becoming available from 2006, and have been handed out by the grant competition sponsored by the Kremlin. The grants have been allocated for supporting projects concerning with health, youth, the improvement of civil society, socially underprivileged people, education as well as culture. Whilst in 2010 the list of eligible organizations for government funding has expanded to include human rights NGOs as well, the socially-focused NGOs were still in receipt of much more assistance. The scholar evaluates that this “funding drive” is a measure taken by the Kremlin with the aim of creating a civil society in Russia that is “coherent, ordered space where individuals assist the state in the interest of the whole”.⁴⁶ It is evident that through this grants system, combined with tax breaks and better working conditions introduced in 2010 for NGOs which provide a service that is deemed of benefit to society,⁴⁷ Russia has significantly upped its contribution to civil society. This is in contrast to the period before 2006, where the main provider of funds to Russian civil society organizations have been foreign donors.⁴⁸

It must not be overlooked that the Russian constitution guarantees an extensive range of social rights, including the right to housing, health protection, state-sponsored social security and education.⁴⁹ Bindman (2015) points out that social rights in Russia receive much less coverage than what she has defined as “civil and political rights issues” promoted by Russian human

⁴⁶ Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 344, accessed May 11, 2016, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/10270>

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.344

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.344

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.346

rights NGOs, despite what she claims are of “equal or often greater importance to the general public”. She also notes that the discussions which are held in the Western political spheres and the media on Russian civil society is disproportionately centered around human rights, with little respect for the fact that they constitute a minority of the civil society organizations in Russia.⁵⁰

Whilst it may appear so, it is not just the government, which is peddling the message that it is the guarantor for promoting and protecting social rights of its citizens, but the Russian public expectations had something to do with it as well, which in 2010 has overwhelmingly responded to a survey with a view that “the state should care more about its people”, with only 12% answering that “people should act on their own initiative and take care of themselves”⁵¹. People expect the state to be the ultimate protector and provider of welfare, and therefore are unlikely to turn to NGOs.⁵² Whenever the social subsidies for vulnerable groups of people for housing, healthcare and transport are hit - even those that predate the dissolution of USSR, the public respond furiously, as evidenced in January 2005 demonstrations.⁵³ The response of the Russian government was to implement reforms to the welfare system; albeit to a limited extent, which Bindman uses to argue that unlike the common view of the state as a “rigid and unbending regime”, the system has in fact shown flexibility to act upon strongly-held public views.⁵⁴

Taking public expectation into account, it is not surprising for the Russian leadership under Putin to have embarked on a “new strategy of re-centralization” from 2005 onwards, including

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.344

⁵¹ Ibid., p.345

⁵² Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):4, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>.

⁵³ Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 346

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.346-347

a number of “National Priority Projects” on agriculture, education, healthcare, and housing kicked off in order to deliver better social services, portraying itself as a “champion of social rights issues”.⁵⁵ An insight into the government understanding of the people is given by an extract from Putin’s speech below:

“In terms of which rights people consider to be their priorities, the right to employment (and with it the right to earn an income), the right to free healthcare and education for children are a long way ahead at the top of the list. Restoring and guaranteeing people these rights has been the key objective of the Russian state.” (February 6, 2012)⁵⁶

Assuming that Putin’s statement is reflective of the state, this shows concurrence in both the state and the public’s higher valuation of tangible, quantifiable benefits over the less tangible but arguably freedoms and rights. According to Bindman’s rationalization, Putin’s liberalizing reforms in his first term as President meant that Russia could not realistically deliver socially what it was perceived to be obligated to deliver under the “statist” approach. However, the rhetoric of the government during Putin’s subsequent terms deliberately placed the state as responsible for “improving the quality and delivery of social services in order to solve problems”.⁵⁷ Therefore, in order to meet the raised public expectation of welfare and the aims of the national projects, it was natural that Russia had transferred the provision to the SO NGOs or commercial entities. This has been referred to as “Soviet-style neoliberalism”, whereby the official rhetoric makes “socialist-sounding claims”, but does not back it up it by actual policies

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.346

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.346-348

⁵⁷ Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 346 accessed May 11, 2016, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/10270>

to improve provisions.⁵⁸ In Bindman's (2015) interview of 31 Russian NGOs, one message came across strongly:

*"Our government likes to say that we have a strong state which can provide people with social assistance but we see that those clients who we try to refer to state social services for help end up coming back to us – for the government it's all just words but in reality they do very little. (Lydia, healthcare NGO, Moscow) "*⁵⁹

Overall, the views of NGOs of cooperating with the government are balanced. In the human rights field Klitsounova (2008) claims that some NGOs oppose the principle of building cosy relationships with politicians and bureaucrats from the government, as this would "provide Putin's authoritarianism with respectable 'democratic' clothes", whilst shielding it from condemnation with regards to worsening human rights' situation. On the other hand, many recognize that being in a continuous relationship with the government is paramount for successful advocacy of rights, and everything must be done to gain access and educate decision and policy-making individuals as well as other actors about human rights ideas.⁶⁰

What is undoubtable is that government policy has had profound impact on the growth of SO NGOs, which numbered 96,000 in 2011 and expanded by 17.8% to 113,000 in 2013 (See Figure 4).⁶¹ The state has managed to attract a large volunteer base to man the NGOs, which

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.346

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.347

⁶⁰ Elena Klitsounova, "Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies," *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):6, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>.

⁶¹ The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p 105

have grown significantly in numbers as well. Given that there was none or little state funding for NGOs prior to the 2006 programmes, the fact that the support allocated to SO NGOs has peaked to 5.7bn rubles in 2014 (in subsequent years this was reduced, likely due to economic squeeze following low oil prices and Western sanctions) is an indication that the state acted with the intention to rapidly build up the influence in domestic civil society and regain the ground lost to foreign donors.

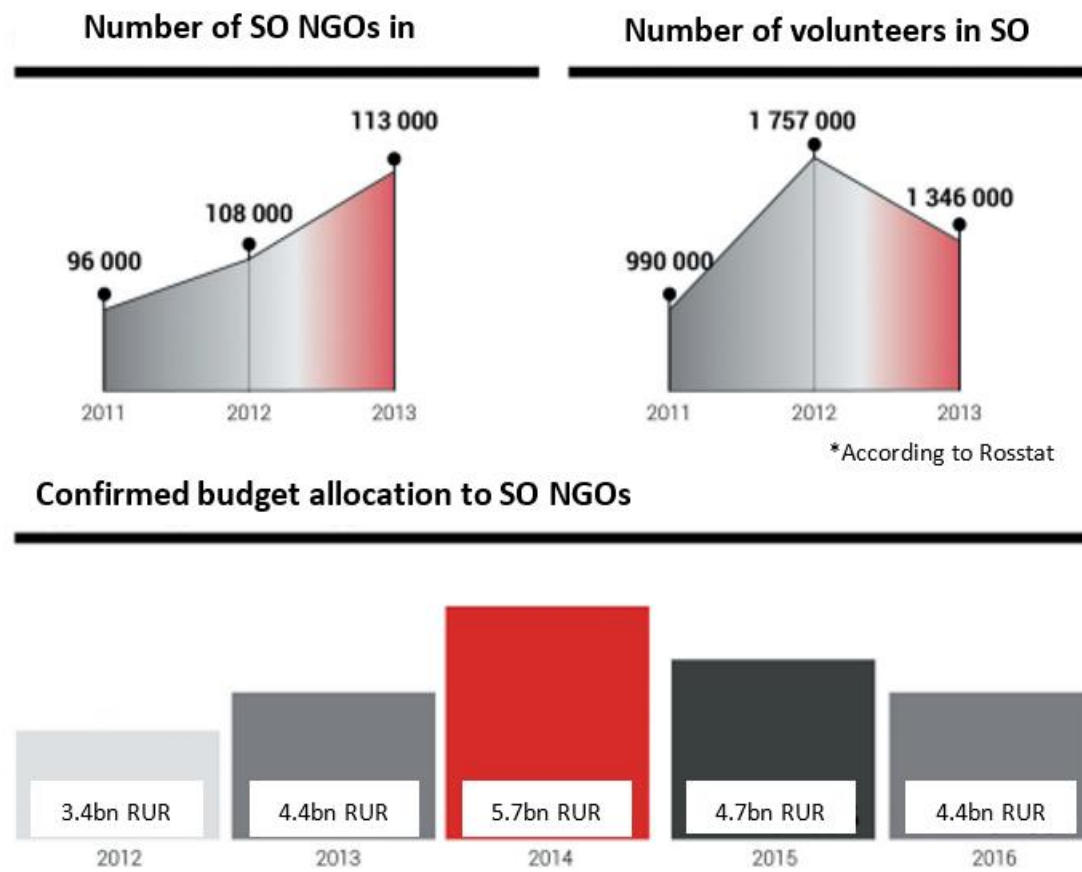
In 2012, government grants accounted for 16% of total income that socially oriented NGOs received, with 38.9% being the top contribution coming from the NGOs raising their own money through trading paid goods and services, and other operations. Income from foreign organizations or individuals has only accounted for 2.2% of the total,⁶² which could be low as a result of the introduction of Foreign Agents law and prior regulations, or the reluctance of foreign organs to fund government-prescribed sections of Russian civil society. This also shows that from the funding perspective, NGOs do not have to be over-reliant on the government or foreign aid, as statistics show that a significant part of NGO funding (combined 38.6%) came from Russian commercial and non-commercial organizations.⁶³

Judging by the facts and figures, it can be argued that the state focused on what Russians want, even if at the cost of other liberties considered essential by Western democracies, such as genuine freedom of speech and the press. Somewhat predictably, the de facto situation in Russia is that the system of governance and the public attitude have not adapted to a more liberalized way of thinking, which have been conditioned to place the more “tangible” social and economic rights far ahead than the less visible civil and political.

⁶² The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p 129

⁶³ The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p 129

Figure 4-The development dynamic of socially-oriented (SO) NGOs



Source: Figure translated from The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p 105

Chapter 3 – Recent Developments in NGO Law

Despite the lack of clear and stable laws governing civil society, the number of NGOs has grown rapidly during Yeltsin years to approximately 375,000 by 2001. This continued growing under Putin's first term, to over 665,000 registered NGOs in 2007, including both active and inactive organizations.⁶⁴ However, this was unsustainable due to the introduction of tighter restrictions and requirements, which are explored in this section.

3.1 – 2006 NGO Law

The “2006 NGO Law” was to be the first part of a broader reform to the Civil Code, which has been associated with tighter state control over civil society and even direct interference in internal operations of NGOs.⁶⁵ The main requirements and changes that were introduced have been summarized below from The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) Working Document No. 287.

Under the new regulations on registration and accountability procedures implemented with “Decree No. 212” issued on 15 April 2006 and came into effect with “Federal Law No. 18-FZ of 10 January 2006 on introducing amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation”, Russian NGOs have been made responsible for:

⁶⁴ Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS NO.287* (2008):5, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7

- Double registration by both the tax authorities and the Rosregistratsia [Federal Registration Service (FRS)].
- Informing state authorities in detail about their activities and management, the funds they receive (including donations), their assets, and the planned and current use of funds for all programs in Russia.
- Submission of annual reports on their activities by April 15 of each year

The authorities have been given the following new powers:

- To reject an NGO's registration at their own discretion based on the content of their registration documents.
- Disband an NGO for failing to submit the annual report in a timely manner.
- To demand any document from an NGO at any time, without a warrant, and be present at all NGO events.”⁶⁶

In addition, the law had placed restrictions on the receipt of overseas donor funds by domestic NGOs.⁶⁷ The justification given by officials for this stricter control over the sources of income of Russian NGOs was quite generic, citing “fight against terrorism” and “money laundering”⁶⁸. There is some evidence to legitimize these concerns, but in themselves they are not substantial to merit each of the above measures employed - and the overall analysis is that the law has been designed to further strengthen the state's hand. It is recognized that the erratic development of civil society in a period of feeble and incomplete regulation of the 1990s led

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.7

⁶⁷ Jo Crotty, Sarah Marie Hall and Sergej Ljubownikow, “Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no.8 (October 2014): 1254, accessed May 1, 2016

⁶⁸ Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS NO.287* (2008):5, accessed May 3, 2016

to a number of NGOs acting “as fronts for commercial or criminal organizations”, as well as the emergence of non-governmental individuals (NGIs) whose main goal was to win overseas grant money.⁶⁹ At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Russian state realized that domestic philanthropy needed to be encouraged in order to provide legitimate NGOs with domestic funding, the attraction of which depended on the sector having more professionalism, greater transparency and financial control.⁷⁰ Rationalizing from the state’s perspective, pressing ahead with funding programmes without reform to the poorly administered and “insufficiently regulated” civil society would add to the general lack of order not restricted to civil society, potentially jeopardizing the transition efforts to a market-driven economy. Analyzing this under the neo-realism framework (temporarily in isolation of the international system), the introduced law also served as a “reform” to increase the integrity of the state as the most important actor.

To support this thought, one consequence of the 2006 law has been the *tidying up* of the thousands of registered but partially inactive, less professional NGOs. Only 216,000 NGOs managed to re-register as per new requirements by the deadline,⁷¹ which also goes on to show that many did not have the capability to cope with the more burdensome administrative requirements. **Figure 5** goes some way to illustrate the impact of the changes introduced under this law on the administrative workload of NGOs. Majority of the sampled organizations responded to the survey that there will be no change to their economic expenses in order to meet the requirements of the new legislation, whilst 17%⁷² have said that their economic

⁶⁹ Jo Crotty, Sarah Marie Hall and Sergej Ljubownikow, “Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no.8 (October 2014): 1253, accessed May 1, 2016

⁷⁰ Jo Crotty, Sarah Marie Hall and Sergej Ljubownikow, “Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no.8 (October 2014): 1253, accessed May 1, 2016

⁷¹ Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS NO.287* (2008):2, accessed May 3, 2016

⁷² The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2007, p.71 https://www.oprf.ru/files/doklad_-engl-verstka.pdf

expenses will either increase or considerably increase. Whilst the latter number appears to be reasonably low for what was feared to be a lot of new work for NGOs, it is important to note that the changes to “economic expenses” are unlikely to have been measured consistently in first place, partly due to questionable accounting methods. For example, hiring new staff or buying new equipment may not have been required, however existing staff may have had to divert efforts from a core NGO activity to administrative tasks - thus recording no change in expenses whilst compromising operational effectiveness. The data may also be an indication that many NGOs may have already been fulfilling much of the requirement for internal purposes before the enactment of the law, making only minor tweaks to the routines.

On the other hand, Vladimir Putin had offered a glimpse of what appears to be the more relevant prompt for the 2006 Law, by stressing repeatedly that he is against foreign sponsoring of what he described as “political activities” of NGOs in Russia.⁷³ “Colour Revolutions” in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan in 2004 and 2005 have alarmed the Russian government, which has inspired its interpretation of overseas assistance for democracy-development as a threat to its sovereignty.⁷⁴ Therefore, Crotty, Hall and Ljunownikov (2014) as well as other scholars evaluate the 2006 NGO Law as “not only an attempt to impose order on what was a dispersed and underdeveloped sector but also to curb foreign support for NGOs.”⁷⁵ This motive is predictable under the chosen theoretical framework, considering the head of state’s reference to forces in the anarchic international system that are willing to sacrifice money, but overall maximizing their utility and survivability through increased political influence in a competitor’s or, an adversary’s space.

⁷³ Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):7, accessed May 3, 2016

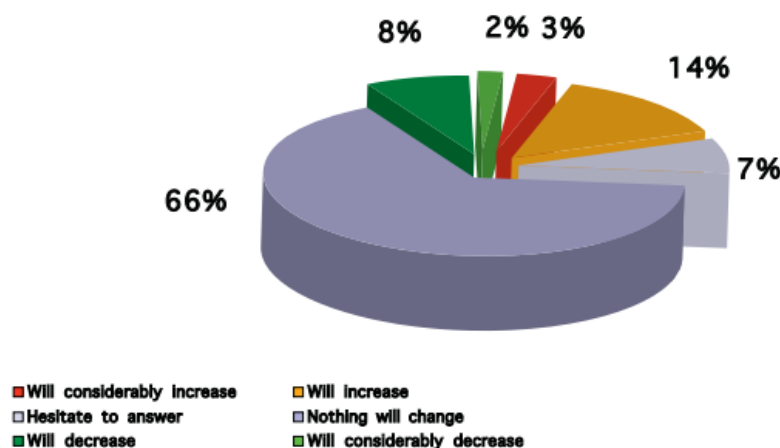
⁷⁴ Jo Crotty, Sarah Marie Hall and Sergej Ljubownikow, “Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no.8 (October 2014): 1254, accessed May 1, 2016

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1254

It is important to note that the landscape for NGOs began to be constrained even before the 2006 law was implemented. One change was the increasing difficulty for NGOs to have influence. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Klitsounova (2008) in her work on *Promoting Human Rights in Russia by Supporting NGOs* highlights that there has been a short window of opportunity for NGOs to form and get firmly on their feet. In the 1990s many human rights activists were members of federal and regional parliaments and governments, with heavy involvement in drafting and implementing legal reforms in Russia. When Yeltsin left office, radical reform became no longer possible, so human rights NGOs had very limited access to decision and policy making members, facing great difficulty in developing their networks in order to have influence on the appropriate organs⁷⁶. What is referred to as “windows of opportunity” for civil society is a lapse of control under the state level of analysis, where the turmoil of the 1990s allowed events to temporarily “free-flow” with domestic benefit perhaps, but also with undesired consequences for Russia in the anarchic international system.

⁷⁶ Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):5, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>

Figure 5-Evaluation of changes of economic expenses owing to effectiveness of the new legislation on NPOs



Source: The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2007, p.71 https://www.oprf.ru/files/doklad_-engl-verstka.pdf

As a sign of brief liberalization, the 2006 Law has been relaxed in a few areas in 2009 under Medvedev's rule. First, smaller NGOs no longer had to report their annual revenue if it was under 3 million rubles (approximately USD \$100,000 at the historic exchange rate). Second, the specified compulsory audits of all NGOs would be undertaken once in 3 years instead of on an annual basis.⁷⁷ Despite other parts of the law remaining largely intact, the breathing space created by these amendments and a large revenue threshold would have been a positive development at the society (first) level of analysis, but also hints towards a mild change of strategy from the state regarding its positioning on the international system. Medvedev's term

⁷⁷Jo Crotty, Sarah Marie Hall and Sergej Ljubownikow, "Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no.8 (October 2014): 1254, accessed May 1, 2016

has included dynamic developments on the world stage, one of which was the short-lived 2009 “Russian Reset” ceremonially completed to improve relations between USA and Russia – which may be used to explain some of the momentary changes at state (second) level.

However, shortly afterwards, further changes to Russian law have been introduced, which resulted in more regulation for civil society. Amendments have been enacted to the NCO Law which formally introduced the status of “socially oriented” organizations (“SOOs”) in April 2010. This can be interpreted as the definition of what the state considers “friendly” sectors of civil society, and thus eligible for state support under the law. SOOs, or more commonly known as “SO NGOs” have been defined as those that engage in a broad range of activities, including traditional charitable work, the provision of free-of-charge legal aid and the protection of human rights. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law also reports that as of October 2015 there are 17 types of such “socially oriented” activities, with new additions being continually made.”⁷⁸ This move suggested that the state is not against civil society, however it requires to have significant oversight and ensure that it is in line with the aspirations of the government. Analyzing this development solidifies that the state’s intention was to bring civil society under the state’s umbrella, where it can be easily controlled, modified and adapted as a tool to maximize tangible power and ensure unitary composure and survivability on the international stage.

⁷⁸ “NGO Law Monitor: Russia,” The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/russia.html#top>

3.2 – 2012 “Foreign Agents Law”

In 2012, when President Putin came back to power after temporarily stepping down into the role of Prime Minister, he toughened the NGO regulations from the position of liberalizing amendments made in 2009 by his precedent Dmitry Medvedev, but also from the more demanding 2006 position.⁷⁹ The Foreign Agents Law had the most profound implications on post-Soviet Russian civil society yet. Within two months of the President’s inauguration for the third time on 7 May 2012, the law was passed in the face of robust public resistance. Both Russian NGOs and a wide range of other organizations have fruitlessly protested, including lawyers’ associations, higher educational institutions, whilst proposals from the Presidential Council for Human Rights and Development of Civil Society (PCHRCS) have been disregarded.⁸⁰ The contents of the law have been summarized below:

*All non-profit organizations that receive financial or any other aid from foreign states, state departments, international and foreign organizations, foreign citizens, stateless persons; and that participate in political activity in Russia would be required to call themselves non-profit organizations functioning as “foreign agents.”*⁸¹

Pitts and Ovsyannikova (2014) had summarized impacts of the law on NGOs that receive foreign aid as follows:

⁷⁹ Russia’s new treason Statute, Anti-NGO and other repressive laws: “Sovereign Democracy or Renewed Autocracy?” p.120

⁸⁰ Geir Flikke (2016) Resurgent authoritarianism: the case of Russia’s new NGO legislation, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32:2, 103-131. p.103

⁸¹ Russia’s new treason Statute, Anti-NGO and other repressive laws: “Sovereign Democracy or Renewed Autocracy?” 2014, p.120

In terms of registration and reporting requirements NGOs must

- (a) register as a foreign agent in the state list of foreign agents;
- (b) provide quarterly reports on its activity, funding, and expenditures, and governing board reports in half yearly intervals;
- (c) provide audit reports annually.

As part of the requirement, all materials of foreign agent NGOs published in mass media must be marked as from a foreign agent NGO. This move was likely assessed necessary to maintain the power monopoly of the state, desensitizing the public to potentially harmful influence from alternative authorities in the external realm. In the case that an NGO refuses to register as a foreign agent, the state committee is empowered to stop the NGO's work for up to six months until it registers. The law also modifies the Criminal Code of Russia, providing two years' imprisonment for refusal to register as a foreign agent NGO as well as three years for the creation of, and two years for participation in, a foreign agent NGO whose activity is "to invite Russian citizens to ignore their civil obligations and commit unlawful acts." In addition, the state committee would be getting new power through vaguely expressed authorization, which allows it to implement unscheduled inspections if "there is information in the mass media that an NGO's activity bears the signs of extremism."⁸²

Pitts and Ovsyannikova (2014) pick out the justification given by the Russian State Duma for this law, as to "bring openness and publicity to the work of NGOs... and organize public

⁸² Chip Pitts and Anastasia Ovsyannikova, "Russia's New Treason Statute, Anti-NGOS and Other Repressive Laws: "Sovereign Democracy" or Renewed Autocracy?" *Houston Journal of International Law* 37:1 (2014): 120, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.hjil.org/articles/hjil-37-1-pitts-ovsyannikova.pdf>

control of NGOs functioning as foreign agents”. The Russian foreign minister went a step further and has drawn parallels between the newly implemented law and the U.S. Foreign Agent Registration Act⁸³, suggesting that both are a form of state-monitoring of NGOs. Evaluating the Duma’s statement concurs with the intent of consolidation of power. The foreign minister’s comment drawing parallel with US law confirms the analysis that this move was at least to some degree the state’s response to the anarchic world order. Regarding this comparison, the above-mentioned authors argue that the United States only “requires the registration of an NGO that acts at the order, request, or under the direction or control of a foreign organization or person”, and is therefore more precise than the Russian law with its target range. They contrast this with the Russian law, which disregards whether the NGO acts under foreign instructions or not; so long it receives funding from abroad, it is assumed to act “under the orders of, and for the benefit of that foreign funder” and must register as a foreign agent.⁸⁴ Whether this is true a tit-for-tat response, or simply an attempt by the foreign minister to communicate its rationale to the world, it is clear that the decision was made on the state’s assessment of perceived external threatening conditions.

The law has been criticized for stigmatization of foreign-funded NGOs. The term “Foreign Agent” itself carries more weight in Russian language. “Inostrannyi agent” resonates with the memories of the Cold War era, where the words have been used in connotation with spies and traitors, and has therefore led to harassment of some organizations.⁸⁵ For a prominent NGO such as Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG), which back in the late 1980s helped bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union through its support for Boris Yeltsin in the struggle against

⁸³ Russia’s new treason Statute, Anti-NGO and other repressive laws: “Sovereign Democracy or Renewed Autocracy?” p.121-122

⁸⁴ Ibid., 122

⁸⁵ International Commission of Jurists. Russian Federation: Report on the Constitutional Court Proceedings and Judgment on the “Foreign Agent” Amendments to the NGO Law, 2014. p.9 <http://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/RUSSIA-FOREIGN-AGENTS-elec-version.pdf>

Mikhail Gorbachev⁸⁶, the attachment of “Foreign Agent” title would have been seriously detrimental to its values, activities and domestic popularity. This is likely to have been a significant reason why the Helsinki Group chair Lyudmila Alekseeva declared categorically that the organization would never register as a “foreign agent”, however it would still abide by the 2012 law by giving up its foreign funding.⁸⁷ The bringing down of the USSR could be perceived by the public to have been the ultimate goal of such an agent during the East-West struggle, the event which more than half of Russian citizens regret to this day⁸⁸. The extent of effectiveness of MHG and its actual intent regarding the Soviet Union requires further study, but for the Russian state, it is a vivid and recent memory of how “survivability” of the state and nation is at stake from the uncontrolled external forces, and therefore the rationale for state is to isolate its vulnerable part: the civil society.

Several other NGOs expressed their displeasure with this law to the extent that many refused to follow it by not registering as a “foreign agent”. Notable examples include Transparency International-Russia and the organization countering discrimination Memorial, whose functioning relied heavily on monetary help from abroad. In response by the state, several NGOs have been intimidated with threats of closure, of which “Memorial” was one. A number of international bodies and commercial news organizations have responded with criticism, including the Council of Europe, expressing concern over the apparent crackdown on Russian civil society.⁸⁹ However, following through with the assumption that supranational entities such as the European Union and other states act with the purpose of improving their position in the world system either through gaining more power, or diminishing the power of an

⁸⁶ Françoise Daucé (2014) The Government and Human Rights Groups in Russia: Civilized Oppression?, *Journal of Civil Society*, 10:3, 239-254, p.241

⁸⁷ Alexander Podrabinek, “The Choice of Agents,” *Institute of Modern Russia*, August 8, 2013, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://imrussia.org/en/society/528-the-choice-of-agents>

⁸⁸ “Most Russians regret USSR collapse, dream of its return, poll shows,” *RT Question More*, April 19, 2016, accessed May 8, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/politics/340158-most-russians-regret-ussr-has/>

⁸⁹ Eleanor Bindman, “The state, civil society and social rights in contemporary Russia,” *East European Politics* 31:3 (2015): 342–360

adversary in some way – the Russian state would choose to not be responsive to statements of criticism from abroad.

According to the state-sponsored media outlet *Russia Today*, the first NGO to be formally warned following the introduction of the law has been “No to Alcoholism and Drug Addiction”. The non-political and social nature of this NGO demonstrate that perhaps the unaccounted-for side effect of the law was going to be harm to civil society that fulfils the very activities that the state supports. It is not entirely clear whether the state was exercising its new powers, as the Justice Ministry had stated on its website at the time that the financial documents it had requested from the NGO had been on the basis of the previous 2006 law that regulated reporting requirements of NGOs.⁹⁰ However, the overall delta when factoring in influence-lost and power-gained by the state through the introduction of tight regulation must have been assessed positive.

The School of Russian and Asian Studies (ASRAS) 2014 report summarizes the important NGOs that have been affected by the chunky fines introduced for breaking the 2012 Law: Golos, Kostroma Center for public initiatives support, Memorial, and the Side by Side LGBT organization. Golos, which stood for transparent elections and freedom of speech has been fined due to “receiving a grant from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee for work involving Russian election monitoring.” It suffered a major blow to the extent that it had to close temporarily as the fine left it without sufficient funds to continue. The Kostroma Center has

⁹⁰ “Russia issues first warning under fresh ‘foreign agents’ bill – report,” *RT Question More*, December 13, 2012, accessed May 12, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/politics/russia-issues-first-foreign-951/>

been found guilty of organizing a roundtable on US-Russia relations, to which it invited a member from the US Embassy. Memorial has been found to be in receipt of foreign funding from the Europe-financed International Federation of Human Rights without registration, which it has used towards producing a report that “detailed police abuse of ethnic Roma individuals, migrants, and civil activists” - seen as a risk to the legitimacy of the police force. Lastly, the international film festival Side by Side, which is sponsored by the US-based organization Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) published material titled "International LGBT Movement: from Local Practices to Global Politics"⁹¹ - although the fine may have been the result of other legislation, namely the federal law criminalizing the distribution of "propaganda" among minors. These observations involving politically-active NGOs are in accord with the derived intention behind the law.

Another event which is judged to be directly the result of the same outlook that underpins the 2012 law has been observed in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' order to the prominent American government agency USAID, demanding it to cease all activity in Russia after October 1, 2012.⁹² Whilst this falls out of the scope of the Foreign Agents Law, which in fact has come into force almost two months later from November 21, 2012. The involvement of the Foreign Affairs Ministry with short time proximity to enforcement of the new law demonstrates that the introduction of the law had more to do with international politics than purely internal affairs of the country – and is therefore in concurrence with analysis from the third (international) level. Moreover, the Ministry had put forward justification that it was acting in the interest of the Russian people, because USAID had attempted to “affect political developments in Russia by giving grants and financial assistance to civil society

⁹¹ Jacqueline Dufalla, “Non-Governmental Organizations in Russia,” *The School of Russian and Asian Studies* (2014), accessed May 5, 2016, http://www.sras.org/ngo_russia_west_adaption

⁹² Chip Pitts and Anastasia Ovsyannikova, “Russia’s New Treason Statute, Anti-NGOS and Other Repressive Laws: “Sovereign Democracy” or Renewed Autocracy?” *Houston Journal of International Law* 37:1 (2014): 121-122

organizations.” The prominent NGOs which were dependent on USAID money have been “Golos”, which had monitored and reported violations in the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections, and the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG).⁹³ This is a particularly useful case to include in the analysis, since the donor in this case is a foreign state entity. The direct and prompt action by the state to neutralize the threat of USAID, rather than via the 2012 NGO law highlights the state’s resoluteness for removing the slightest element of risk to its stability, which is a form of power on the international stage. In contrast, other foreign donor organizations are under this framework are classed as “intermediaries” or “useful vehicles” for fulfilling another state’s intent to adjust the power balance in favour of itself in the international system.

Overview of statistical facts helps understand the financial impact of the changes to NGO law. According to the November-December 2006 survey, Russian nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that received grants from international organizations and international NPOs made up 6.2% and 5.5% respectively⁹⁴ (see Figure 6), which was still considerably behind those that received help from the state. It is noteworthy that in a similar survey in 2013, 29.9%⁹⁵ of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) were in receipt of foreign funding - a considerable increase from the 2006 figure despite the passing of the Foreign Agents Law which was widely expected to reduce the number of civic organizations dependent on income from organizations and individuals from abroad. There are two possible explanations for this. The first is that the Russian Public Chamber report may have focused their survey on socially oriented NGOs - which cannot be classed as “political” and therefore fall outside of the new law’s coverage. The second explanation is that Foreign Agents Law is so wide-ranging in coverage and

⁹³ Ibid., p.122

⁹⁴ The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2007, p.71 https://www.oprf.ru/files/doklad_-engl-verstka.pdf

⁹⁵ The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2013, p.23

contradictory to other laws in some instances - making it difficult to defend. This may reinforce the point regarding its implementation having been “loud in the rhetoric” and in receipt of much media coverage, but rather limited in actual practice.

Comparing **Figure 6** with **Figure 7**, there are signs that the reach of federal financing has significantly increased, with only 6.8% of NPOs claiming to be in receipt of federal aid in 2006 versus 36.1% in 2013. Similar observation can be made regarding local budget financing, with 12.8% of NPOs supported in 2006 and a much healthier 52.6% in 2013. This is an indication that the government funding initiatives started during President Putin’s second term in office have been effective in terms of their implementation.

Pitts’ and Ovsyannikova’s (2014) investigations led to findings that in March 2013, officials from the Russian tax agency and general prosecutor’s office raided “223 NGOs in 47 Regions, including the Moscow offices of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Transparency International.”⁹⁶ However, examining of the underlying sources of information has led to discovery that while the agencies have been scrutinizing accounting data, they did not question why the NGOs that were in receipt of foreign cash had not registered as “foreign agents”, or pressure them to do so.⁹⁷ From the perspective of first (individual and subnational) level of analysis, this seems to suggest that there are questions regarding the enforceability of the law, given that in practice some NGOs can get away or resist, and thus the actual effect on NGOs’ ability to perform core activities as a direct result of the 2012 law is limited. The

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.127

⁹⁷ “Pravozazhchitniki: Proveryayushchie Ne Trebuyut ot Nas Stat'tinoagentami” [Human Rights Defenders: The Authorities Do Not Require us to be Foreign Agents], *RIA NOVOSTI* (April 4, 2013), <http://ria.ru/society/20130404/931009554.html>.

counterargument is that the NGOs treading with uncertainty over weaker ground has left many NGOs vulnerable to scrutiny and shut-down at any chosen time by the state, using failure to fully comply with the Foreign Agents Law as the basis for justification. Although there are signs of de facto relaxation of enforcement of this specific law, Flikke (2015) asserts on the contrary that Putin's stance toward the law has not changed, despite lobbying efforts from the NGOs and the PCHRCS. On the other hand, general inspections and scrutiny have intensified steadily, with growing coverage of NGOs, and even educational institutions.⁹⁸

In their research, Pitts and Ovsyannikova (2014) criticize the law by claiming that it breaks a considerable number of rights laws, "including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 2, 19, and 20), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 17, 19, 21, and 22), the European Convention on Human Rights (Articles 1, 8, 10, 11, and 18), the OECD Principles (Principle VII), as well as the Russian Constitution itself (Articles 17, 23, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 55)". The case they make in their overall message that Russia is turning into a more autocratic regime is that government officials now have unlimited power to "obstruct registration applications with endless requests for additional information", and permit them to "target human rights organizations, and further stigmatize and criminalize human rights activities in the country."⁹⁹ Following on from their findings, the potential for the state department to lawfully bully NGOs using a weak pretext and unfounded accusations will distract them from day to day activities and greatly reduce their effectiveness. At the state level of analysis, it is clear that hastiness and agility is preferred to enhance power and self-

⁹⁸ Geir Flikke, "Resurgent authoritarianism: the case of Russia's new NGO legislation," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32:2 (2016): 112, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1034981>

⁹⁹ Chip Pitts and Anastasia Ovsyannikova, "Russia's New Treason Statute, Anti-NGOS and Other Repressive Laws: "Sovereign Democracy" or Renewed Autocracy?" *Houston Journal of International Law* 37:1 (2014): 127, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.hjil.org/articles/hjil-37-1-pitts-ovsyannikova.pdf>

preservation, even if this results in internal legal contradictions. Although the ruling power in Russia is stable from the leadership and party perspective, there is still the challenge in making the assumption that the state is a unitary, self-contained actor – given room for inconsistency within its own legal framework. This particular point could undermine the authority of the state before the domestic audience, but on the other hand the ambiguity created hands even more cards into the hands of the state when handling domestic elements in responding to movements in the international system.

Beznosova and McIntosh Sundstrom (2009) have made a suggestion that in contrast to Western donors, the Russian “state funding to civil society is an attempt to control their political agendas”¹⁰⁰. Since political agendas of foreign actors are dangerous that could undermine the country, with this analysis it is explainable that the Russian NGO law came into existence specifically to protect the nation against those political forces that are contrary to the state – and thus the national interest.

3.3 further NGO Law

The Foreign Agents Law was not the only that was introduced during Putin’s third term in office. The NGO law has been shaken up in other ways as well. Even prior to the implementation of the Foreign Agents Law, several restrictive measures have been taken by the government. Notably, in June 2012 a 150-fold increase to the fine for violating rules on the participation and organization of public protests has been enacted for individuals. In the case

¹⁰⁰ Olga Beznosova and Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, “Western Aid and the State-Society Balance in Novgorod and Khabarovsk,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 56:6 (2009): 21-35, access May 15, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.2753/PPC1075-8216560603>

of organizations, this fine has been increased even more steeply at 300-fold¹⁰¹. In addition, the Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code was adopted that expanded the definition of treason, which the ICNL evaluated to have been made “so vague as to enable the government to brand a critic as a traitor.”¹⁰² This way, the government seems to not only have established operational boundaries for the civil society, but also in some ways handicapped it through restricting the channels and criminalization of tools that it possesses in to accomplish its tasks. This measure can be explained as action to ensure that there is no harm to the state from within the nation. If civil society acts to undermine the very state that shapes and sponsors it, then the resulting challenge is an unnecessary dissipation of state power, which is the much needed currency in the anarchic international system.

As reported by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), on February 19, 2016 the new draft Federal Law No. 1000884-6 on Amendments to Item 6 of Article 2 of the Russian Federal Law on non-commercial Organizations (NCO) Law was presented to the State Duma. Although still pending as of May 2016, the significance of this draft lies in the concern that it contains a new definition of “political activity”, which has made it even more straightforward for the government to characterize an organization’s activity as “political”, using a broad as well as vague description. This particular point is important because “conducting political activity” is one of the triggers in the 2012 law for an NCO to become characterized as carrying out the functions of a foreign agent.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “NGO Law Monitor: Russia,” The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/russia.html#top>

¹⁰² Ibid.,

¹⁰³ “NGO Law Monitor: Russia,” The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/russia.html#top>

A number of further changes were passed to the Federal Law in October 2014 that have erected taller walls against foreign influence. Regarding mass media, it became illegal for any foreign state, person or entity, or Russian person or entity that is classed to have “foreign participation” to found a media company. Furthermore, the federal law prevents these groups from acting as a media outlet or broadcasting; as well as “owning, managing, or controlling, directly or indirectly, more than 20% of the shares or capital of a media entity.”¹⁰⁴ Signaling tighter grip on information, this is a blow to a number of NGOs. Many human rights NGOs have complained in recent years that the coverage they get in mass media is very limited, which they blame on lack of press freedom. However, it must also be noted that Klitsounova’s (2008) research has found that “NGOs lack carefully designed policies of strategic interaction with the public and media”¹⁰⁵, although this cannot hide the deliberate efforts by the state to reduce exposure. The rationale here is that the state has ensured near absolute power regarding information control domestically, given that there is no global oversight of information reporting, and therefore this must mean that any information supplied with foreign interest runs the risk of being deliberately constructed to destabilize and weaken the state.

On May 23, 2014 the state has gone into even greater lengths to curb foreign influence in the country. President Putin signed the Federal Law No. 129-FZ on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation, which affects foreign and international NGOs and their partners in Russia commonly known as (“the Law on Undesirable Organizations”). According to the interpretation of ICNL of this law, “a foreign or international NGO can be declared undesirable by the Prosecutor General or the Prosecutor General’s deputies if they

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁵ Elena Klitsounova, “Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies,” *CEPS* NO.287 (2008):4, accessed May 3, 2016

decide that the NGO is a threat to national security”, and once identified, the activities of this type of organizations in Russia are prohibited and “all persons participating are subject to administrative and criminal penalties”.¹⁰⁶ The typically broad definition of the subjects to the law give the impression of a leak-proof clampdown on a wide range of foreign organizations; or as in the eyes of the government, the foreign “meddling” in Russian internal affairs.

Overall, it has been observed in this analysis that NGO laws have led to reduced activity in civil society and curtailed its development. This is in line with several scholars including Crotty, Hall and Ljubownikow (2014), who concluded that the resulting makeup of civil society largely consists of state-financed groups¹⁰⁷. There is largely consistency in the explanation that primary motives of the government have been to enhance its power and stability, which would ultimately lead to greater survivability in the international system. The cost of this has been a fully functioning, dynamic and vibrant civil society - which has been sidelined as unimportant in the mostly tangible list of definitions of power.

¹⁰⁶“NGO Law Monitor: Russia,” The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/russia.html#top>

¹⁰⁷ Jo Crotty, Sarah Marie Hall and Sergej Ljubownikow, “Post-Soviet Civil Society Development in the Russian Federation: The Impact of the NGO Law,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no.8 (October 2014): 1253, accessed May 1, 2016

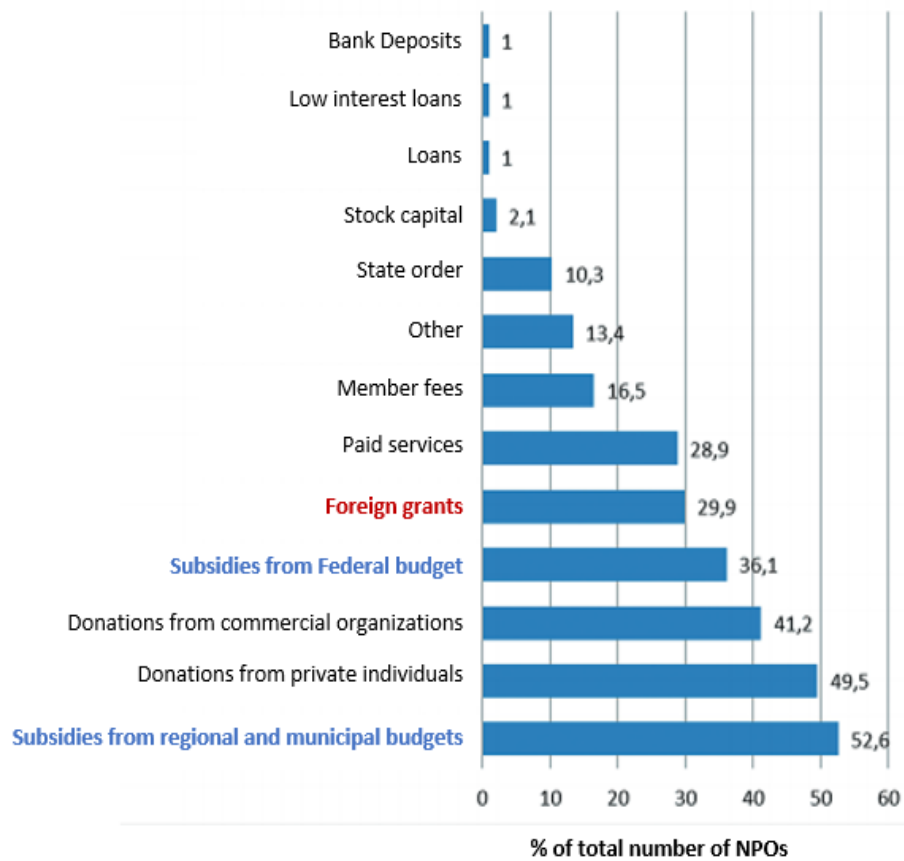
Figure 6 - Sources of nonprofit organization financing in 2006, responses as % of total number of NPOs



(state financing marked with red tick)

Source: The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2007, p.71 https://www.oprf.ru/files/doklad_-engl-verstka.pdf

Figure 7- Sources of nonprofit organization financing in 2013



Source: The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2013, p.23

Chapter 4 – Implications of Russia-West Relations for NGOs

As noted in the previous chapter, much of the Russian policy towards civil society and subsequent development of laws for its regulation has been shaped for protection against third level actors in the international system. In order to further explore the cause and effect between the system and the state levels, this section examines the ways in which the international dynamic, especially relations with the Western states have in a broad sense has impacted the governance of civil society in Russia.

4.1 Perceived threat of Subjugation

Prior to the NGO legislation from 2006 onwards, the Russian state was thoroughly inconvenienced by the constant critique of the government by some NGOs (perceived as undermining), to which Russia as a country that hasn't yet embraced democracy did not accept and felt the need to deal with. For example, according to the CEPS document no. 287, one of EU's main human rights policy instruments in its external governance agenda is to create "an international and domestic climate of opinion critical of national human rights violations" through *shaming*.¹⁰⁸ The EU funding of Russian NGOs had therefore appeared to be requiring them to ruthlessly employ this instrument within the territory of the Russian Federation, thus influencing its public to be dissatisfied with the government, and with the potential to lead to

¹⁰⁸ Elena Klitsounova, "Promoting Human Rights in Russia by supporting NGOs: How to Improve EU Strategies," *CEPS NO.287* (2008):12, accessed May 3, 2016, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/promoting-human-rights-russia-supporting-ngos-how-improve-eu-strategies>.

popular uprisings. This is clear example where the state can be vulnerable and sense threat from the actors in the international system, and be compelled to act as a result.

In addition, the EU makes use of an economic instrument that may have caused a degree of friction with the Russian government. The “positive / negative conditionality” is a way in which the bloc controls the human rights-related behavior of another nation, through offering and withdrawing of assistance and potentially other economic cooperation.¹⁰⁹ Although for a different reason, this has been evidenced in the deployment of economic sanctions against Russia in 2014. The EU, which under the applied theory in itself is a power-seeking supranational entity in the anarchic international system would have collided with the eagerness with which the Russian state and the public protect their superpower legacy and what remains of it. This renders the influencing tool itself firmly incompatible with the Russian state, which is unreceptive of the principle of being educated and having its behaviour controlled through rewards and punishment of someone who acts (justifiably or not) as a grander state in the international system. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s article following the XXII Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy in November 2014 gives a taster of this sentiment within the Russian government and public:

“...No one in history has yet managed to subjugate Russia to its influence. This is not an assessment, but a statement of fact. Yet such an attempt has been made to quench the thirst for expanding the geopolitical space under Western control, out of a mercantile fear to lose the spoils of what they

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.12

across the Atlantic had persuaded themselves was the victory in the Cold War.” Sergey Lavrov (2012).¹¹⁰

The above statement demonstrates that the Russian state places very high value on sovereignty – as it naturally would to preserve its importance. Arguably, this is different to the EU, where there is a drive for common values, common approach, and blurring of the boundaries between member states. So there are two incompatible “state units” (if the Union can be treated as one in this analysis) in terms of their values and ambitions, competing against each other in international space. In this case, the heavy-handed diplomacy as well as undesirable Western influence through employment of economic and diplomatic tools would be received with hostility by the Russian state and interpreted as the desire to control various movements in the country, and an attempt to subjugate the nation in the anarchic international system. The state being the strongest actor, it can be evaluated that in order to protect its position of power and influence, it is willing to take what it sees as rational, yet radical action against internal civil society in order to fend off what appears to be a greater evil, thus making a sacrifice. This kind of response has been mildly on display during the introduction of the 2006 NGO Law, and more aggressively with the 2012 Foreign Agents Law. Equally, the government of Russia is very well aware that these kind of comments by high ranking officials resonate well with patriotic sentiment of the public. They will thus act to strengthen the integrity of the state and achieve the national interest in form of a country that is immune, resolute and inflexible towards foreign suggestions and criticism, including from those within the domestic civil society – maximizing its chance of survival.

¹¹⁰Sergey Lavrov, “Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov: The Lesson of History. ‘No one has Yet Managed to Subjugate Russia’,” *Global Research* (2014), accessed May 6, 2016, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/russias-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov-the-lessons-of-history-no-one-has-yet-managed-to-subjugate-russia/5419325>

4.2 Suspicion of Foreign Motives

Russia has long been suspicious regarding motivations of overseas actors with regards to its domestic affairs, and there is evidence has gone to great lengths to shield its civil society from undesirable effects. Undoubtedly, these concerns also contributing factors towards the shaping of its foreign relations with the West.

Foreign espionage is legitimate concern that the Russian government have used to justify tougher regulations on NGOs receiving money from abroad. In 2006, a rock has been identified on the pavement of a Moscow street, containing electronic equipment, which has been proven to be used by British diplomats to receive and transmit information.¹¹¹ Whilst the technology used was modern, espionage itself between Russia and the West has been taking place for decades. What makes this case particularly relevant is that Russian security service, the FSB connected the event to allegations that British security services were making undercover payments to pro-democracy and human rights groups. To this, the British ambassador in Moscow responded by stating that all of their activities with the NGOs are on the public website.¹¹² Shortly afterwards, Putin brought in the Foreign Agents Law, and made the following statement:

¹¹¹ “UK spied on Russians with fake rock,” *BBC NEWS*, January 19, 2012, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16614209>

¹¹² *Ibid.*,

"We have seen attempts by the secret services to make use of NGOs. NGOs have been financed through secret service channels... This law has been adopted to stop foreign powers interfering in the internal affairs of the Russian Federation." (Vladimir Putin, 2012)¹¹³

Whether or not the claims of the FSB regarding secret NGO funding were true and justified is difficult to assess given the information available. However, it is likely that the incident has been shelved in 2006 until the right moment in 2012 when it has re-emerged in order to deliver a well-timed convincing story to the Russian public that foreign-inspired NGOs are malicious organizations and cannot serve in the interest of the Russian citizens. The concept of espionage itself interesting, because it happens even between the closest of allies. Revelations by Edward Snowden, the whistleblower on the activities of the US National Security Agency (NSA) have pointed to widespread spying on Germany by the United States.¹¹⁴ This can be explained by the anarchic, constantly evolving international system where no alliance is permanent or definite, and that states in the absence of leviathan oversight will gain whatever advantage they can over another to further their interest. Under this framework, contrary to shock within some sections of the public, the states themselves see this as "business as usual".

On the other hand, if there is a deep level of distrust between two states - as in the current climate, neo-realism is under strain to explain how one state would have interest to finance a politically-active NGO in another without wanting to influence some political changes in its favor; through gain of leverage, or weakening the opposing state in some way, such as by

¹¹³ Ibid.,

¹¹⁴ Germany demands public promise from US to end spying. Accessed July 2016.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/11/germany-us-john-kerry-talks-espionage>

causing the replacement of government or the undesirable adversary within it. Wishing to change the government, induce democratization, and actually achieving this goal either covertly or militarily in another state is nothing new to Western politics, as has been done in Iran in the 1953 coup d'état, in Iraq following the war in 2003 and Libya in 2008, amongst other examples. The clever reminding of historical extracts is what makes it relatively easy for the Russian state to get away with drastic measures to the public that in fact have the side effect of curtailing Russian civic rights. Although, if the threat painted by the Russian government did exist, Maxwell (2006) insists that the 2006 NGO Law was unnecessary in order to clear the unwanted organizations in Russia.¹¹⁵ Whether by this law or another, the action would have been forced by the state and at least introduce some form of limitations to civil society. The Russian state itself has been accused of getting politically involved internationally, in support of far-right political parties and swaying public opinion both in Europe and the United States¹¹⁶. Evaluating this within the framework, this rationale is fully aligned with the Russian state's desire to survive both politically and economically by gaining relatively more influential position in the international system among Western neighbours, and seeking removal of 2014 sanctions imposed on it for its actions in Ukraine.

Spying on another state is a case that usually points to the involvement of another state and the work of its intelligence agencies. However, it is not always the foreign state itself that initiates action, and there are ways in which the state can distance itself from such involvement. An article published by the Russian journal *Observer* offers an insight into the thoughts and suspicions likely to be shared amongst Russian policy-makers. Minasyan and Voskanyan

¹¹⁵ Michael P. Maxwell, "NGOs in Russia: Is the Recent Russian NGO Legislation the End of Civil Society in Russia?" *Tulane Journal of International and Comparative Law* 15:1 (Winter 2006):262, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/tulic15&div=12&?collection=journals>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/trump-putin-alt-right-comintern/506015/>

(2013) - the former of which is a senior inspector in the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center, elaborate that in the middle of the 20th century CIA secretly carried out activities for creation of cells of political parties and organizations. Years later, the decision has been made that this type of activity will be given transparency and become public. As indirect confirmation of this theory, the authors rely on the words of the first president of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) Allen Weinstein, which they claim are concerning NATO tactics of penetration into zones of its interest: "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA".¹¹⁷ It then becomes the Russian interest to not only actively protect itself by devoting efforts to uncover various malicious plots, but also employ passive protection in form of heavy-handed domestic NGO activity regulation as it has already done. This is in line with the core assumption of the theoretical framework that the state is the main actor, and its need to protect its interests in order to survive, whether directly or via an intermediary.

Furthermore, the authors convey the process via which civil society can be stimulated by international actors in order to organize revolutions. At the initial stage in the country, where change of government is supposed, a pretext symbolizing goodwill (such as democratization of society) can be used in order to set up the network infrastructure for NGOs, each of which acts in strict accord with one of the four directions. The authors then detail those directions as, first, work with opposition parties and youth organizations. Second, work with the representatives of local self-government bodies, aimed to help the regional development with regards to self-sufficiency, but in practice easing their controllability from Moscow. Third, development of alternative mass media that is under the control of NGOs. And finally the fourth

¹¹⁷ G. Minasyan and A. Voskanyan, "Zarubezhnie NPO - Mehanizm Vliyaniya na Vnutrennyuyu Politiku v SNG," [Foreign NGOs - the Mechanism of Influence over CIS Internal Politics], *Obozrevatel – Observer*, № 3 (278), (2013):8, accessed May 17, 2016, http://www.observer.materik.ru/observer/N3_2013/006_019.pdf

direction is creation of new and strengthening of existing civic organizations, and through them the realization of nonviolent methods of battle with the state.¹¹⁸ The significance of this is that none of the four directions under which NGOs are supposedly mobilized towards change of regime appear as a great threat, and would be considered “business-as-usual” in a democratic society. They are hard to justify building preventative mechanisms against. Whether the above techniques are exactly valid or have been uncovered is highly questionable and must be critiqued. However, in the Russian or another authoritarian context, the vulnerability of the state is clear and paranoia-driven unpopular “blanked-ban” type solutions in response to above-style beliefs cannot be excluded.

Lebedeva (2013) gives an example where direct state involvement is almost entirely lacking, showing that it is no longer essential in order to mobilize large-scale political changes. This is a case where an individual actor (first level) has been able to have a profound impact on the international system (third level). In 2001 the Goldman Sachs analyst John O'Neill has effectively created the group of the countries with rapidly developing economies – Brazil, Russia, China and India (BRIC). At the time, these countries then didn't see themselves as a group and only began engaging in the coordination of activity following the association. The group began to “officialize” its processes by holding regular meetings, as well as expanded by inviting South Africa. Whilst it is difficult to predict in which direction BRICS will go in the future, and whether its relevance will remain - the important takeaway point that the author emphasizes is that a non-state actor has been able to initiate an international political process through the use of its influence. Moreover, the commercial organization did not so much use economic resource, but has in fact made effective use of its "analytical-informational"

¹¹⁸ Ibid.,

capability.¹¹⁹ The positive effect this has had on the state was the country's assertion of position of importance on the world stage. Although this case is not directly analyzable by the neo-realism framework, as there is little deliberate state involvement on both sides, it is useful in demonstrating the ability of an external organization, commercial or non-commercial to assume the role of a political actor and catalyze transnational movement is the type of concern that motivated the state to closely control civil society.

4.3 The Ukrainian Crisis and NGO Law

The ongoing Ukrainian crisis - which began in November 2013 as an upheaval over government and *Maidan* demonstrations¹²⁰ provides a rare glimpse into how civil society has been used by Russia in order to assist the management of its foreign policy throughout the complex geopolitical event. Whilst civil society belongs in the first level of analysis, given how it has been shaped, financed and controlled by the Russian state, it can be assumed for the following analysis to be an arm of the state, i.e. the second level. This makes it a deployable asset in the international system, on the third level.

On March 7, 2014 following the results of public hearings about a situation in Ukraine, the statement of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation made an appeal to all civic, charitable and volunteer organizations, businessmen, state institutions to unite efforts on rendering a wide range of humanitarian aid to victims of crisis in Ukraine. One of the important

¹¹⁹ Marina Lebedeva, "Aktori Sovremennoy Mirovoy Politiki: Trendi Razvitiya" [Actors of Modern World Politics: Development Trends] *Vestnik of MGIMO University* 1:28 (2013): 40, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/aktory-sovremennoy-mirovoy-politiki-trendy-razvitiya>

¹²⁰ Iryna Stelmakh and Tom Balmforth, "Ukraine's Maidan protest – one year on," *The Guardian*, November 21, 2014, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/21/-sp-ukraine-maidan-protest-kiev>

measures has been the creation of the headquarters within the Public Chamber for coordination of assistance to residents of Ukraine who have been adversely affected during the crisis, together with a web portal and telephone hotline.¹²¹

During 2014, the Public Chamber claims that the headquarters have processed hundreds of inquiries, thousands of calls and applications from the Russian NGOs to express their readiness to help in the humanitarian, legal and psychological dimensions to residents of Ukraine. The civil society organizations which have joined efforts with the headquarters carried out monitoring of human rights observance in Ukraine. As a result of this initiative, it is claimed that more than 150 cases of legal action have been filed in the Ukrainian courts and dozens of claims have been filed in the European Court of Human Rights.¹²² What is significant about this report is that (a) The civil society action has been organized by the state, and (b) it does not mention where the assistance was focused, which is likely to have been primarily to the pro-Russian Donbass region in Eastern Ukraine. The State-NGO relationship where the former is by far the most dominant actor has enabled the government to gain assistance from domestic civil society in a specified location abroad. Moreover, the activities have been managed in a manner that conforms fully with its interest.

Following the annexation of Crimea, the international community had expressed concerns about its ethnic resident minority - the Crimean Tatars, whose rights were feared to not be

¹²¹ The Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, *Report on the State of Civil Society in the Russian Federation*, 2014, p.8

¹²² Ibid., p.9

adequately protected by Russia.¹²³ In addition, international donor support for NGOs operating in Crimea has been very difficult as it now comes under Russian jurisdiction, which makes it equally subject to the 2012 law on foreign agents.¹²⁴ In effect, Russian NGO legislation can be said to have assisted the Russian state at the international level to swift and take over Crimea, minimizing the potential hurdles and hindrances that foreign-funded organizations could have placed in the way in the period of occupation. Under the neo-realism framework, this development suggests that the state has increased its material power in form of territory, population and other resources that came with the invasion of Crimea, and in doing so has used SO NGOs that it has itself invested in cultivating and regulating. Therefore the framework aids to explain why this event was received as a triumph by the Russian state, and as a blow to the West. On the other hand, it does not explain in what way this invasion counts as Russia's fight for survivability as a state on the international stage. A more convincing approach would be to treat this incident as a manifestation of the ambition of its leadership - as would be explained by the classical realism framework.

¹²³ "UN Calls On Russia To Respect Crimean Tatar Rights On Key Anniversary," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, June 2, 2016, accessed May 18, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/un-calls-on-russia-respect-crimean-tatar-rights-anniversary-stalin-deportations/27742101.html>

¹²⁴ Mridula Ghosh, "In Search of Sustainability: Civil Society in Ukraine," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* (2014):5, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/10862.pdf>

Conclusion

Overall, the research concludes that there is an inseparable relationship between NGO laws in Russia, and the state's relationship with foreign governments that hold a stake in its NGOs. In addition, it is in agreement with most scholars that on the whole, the tightening of NGO legislation has had a detrimental effect on civil society in Russia. The implications of this are narrowing of diversity within civil society, loss of creativity and motivation brought about by fear of punishment. The rigid stance of the state on these matters destroys any chances of democratization for foreseeable future, whilst suppressing dynamism in society. The winners of this policy are socially oriented NGOs that have gained access to billions of roubles in state grants, however their level of cooperation with the government leaves their independence under question. It may be that the Russian public is receiving more or less what it expects from the state and the SO NGOs that help to deliver these services, but the flip side of the coin is that Russia has not got the economic structure and power the Soviet Union, and continued delivery of the quantity and quality of welfare and social services is unlikely to be sustainable.

This contrast between what the state emphasizes its roles and responsibilities to be in society, and what is actually achievable brings under question the sustainability of public perception of state responsibilities as it stands - pointing towards potential change in landscape in favour of NGOs. This change can only happen if the Russian state becomes comfortable enough with foreign actors, and thus the conditions become right for it to give up more power to civil society voluntarily in order to offload some of its comprehensive burdens. When or how this takes place is difficult to predict, but if applying the neo-realism framework, this will take place only when the world order is such that it is beneficial for the Russian state to take this course of action. As it stands, Russia will pick the option of minimum damage to the state, and initiate

bold and swift actions which result in costly domestic sacrifices - in this case clampdown on foreign cash inflows into its NGOs.

The application of classical realism would further complement this analysis with the bottom-up approach of evaluating the motivations of state actors, which undoubtedly were also at play in guiding domestic and foreign policy involving the civil society. The broader definition of power, including the “soft power” would bring what was previously categorized as “intangible benefits” into the analysis, and evaluate how the position of the Russian state in the international system would be altered based on its developments in NGO law.

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