

RUSSIAN NGO COMMUNITY: A NEW PLAYER ON RUSSIAN NONPROLIFERATION AND ARMS CONTROL SCENE

The voice of the third sector of the Russian society cannot be suppressed. But to make it stronger and to help it preserve its independence, the civil society needs support.

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In the early 1990s the phrase “Russian non-governmental organization in the area of international security, arms control and nonproliferation” sounded, like an oxymoron. Russia seemed to inherit from the Soviet Union quite sensitive approach to security, which had always been the domain of the state and its institutions, rather than NGOs. For a long time many Russian officials could not believe that any organization or institution, beside officially controlled, may be allowed to cover such sensitive issues.

Fighting for the Independence and the Right to Exist

However, liberalization of social life during Boris Yeltsin’s era and some democratization empowered Russians (both legally and practically) to establish independent research institutions, to set up academic media, including the field of WMD nonproliferation.

For instance, in January 1996 the Russian Federation adopted the *Law on Non-Profit Organizations*. This law is effective and provides a fair legal basis for the activities of Russian NGOs (although, as it happens, the legal acts, instructions and clarifications approved later have exacerbated the situation). Publishing and work of mass media are regulated by one of the most liberal (at least, so far) Russian laws.

Obviously, any complacency would be dangerous. Under the current domestic political circumstances in Russia, it is no longer fashionable to speak about democracy; some regard this word as something nearly obscene. Though it is not the matter of returning to totalitarian regime, the society is in the period of long transition. And it is not clear yet whether the principles of freedom of speech and expression laid down in the late 1980s - early 1990s will endure this transition, for nowadays some consider them to be unnecessary.

In this context, the attitude towards NGOs is characterized by certain ambivalence, or even suspicion. Sometimes the nature of the third sector is not understood; its existence is called into question... Attacks against NGOs in Russia sometimes turn into organized defamation, whose objectives may be to destroy, to shut down, to place under control, to transform into go-NGOs (governmentally controlled NGOs), or to oversee financial flows under disguise of granting formal independence. Therefore, Russian NGOs

attempting to promote public awareness of nuclear safety and security issues and environmental problems, to perform independent analysis of the Kremlin's activities (domestic and foreign policy, defense and security matters) find themselves in quite difficult situation.

According to a saying, "not all criticism is a thought, but any thought is criticism". Evidently, if NGOs refrain from critical analysis, their intellectual activities will hardly make any sense. What is needed in Russia now is not further big numbers of NGOs founded (several hundreds of thousands of NGOs have already been incorporated), but *critical* and *analytical* NGOs.

I often have to answer the questions of my Western colleagues: how do you manage to preserve and develop a nonproliferation NGO in Russia at present? To be honest, it is a difficult task. We manage it, thanks to the enthusiasm of the people, who have to work hard, regardless of the external situation and possible pressure, even if they cannot bear such pressure.

Hence, it would be a mistake to resort to the other extreme and to argue that NGOs in Russia cannot survive at all. This would be simply not true. NGOs do act in different spheres, including nonproliferation and arms control, do implement research projects or do work as activist movements, they do convene conferences, disseminate freely their publications, have access to major mass media, educate the young generation and influence the opinions of the executive and legislative branch.

Moreover, it may seem paradoxical, but more and more government officials, Duma's deputies and parliamentary staff open their minds for new ideas and independent assessments conducted by NGOs. There is no secret that the authorities are overfed with information and analysis, which are produced within and are not always unbiased. Large academic institutions – once powerful think-tanks of the Soviet science – are losing their positions.

Probably, in the recent decade we have succeeded in convincing many government officials of our usefulness, thanks to our persistency and quality of analysis, we have managed to make them respect us and sympathize with us, sometimes contrary to the sentiments of their superiors.

Thus, one may assume that despite numerous obstacles and challenges, such NGOs in Russia exist, develop and have impressive prospects for the future.

My organization – the PIR Center – was founded in 1994, like many, by a small group of enthusiasts with different professional and life experience, age, political beliefs, but having common views on the development strategy of the organization with special emphasis on the adjective "non-governmental". Some of my colleagues had already worked for the state and sought freedom of expression. Others, who were younger, were inspired with the opportunity

to build something new beyond traditional patterns. In the next few weeks we will celebrate the seventh anniversary of *Yaderny Kontrol Journal* – the first major project of the PIR Center. When we started we had a few hundreds of readers; nowadays we have thousands. We began with a single project; today we have seven different periodicals and two dozens of research projects. The number of personnel has increased ten times. Is there any external force that can stop this progress?

Nonproliferation Watchdogs

What are the major present-day tasks for the Russian NGOs working in the area of security, nonproliferation, and arms control?

Firstly, NGOs should and are able to participate in formulating Russia's nonproliferation policy. We should not wait for the authorities to work with us, to restrain our activities and cut the opportunities for independent research. We should take up the initiative, to work with the authorities, to convey our position and our concerns – through conferences and seminars, through dissemination of our publications, through direct inter-personal communication.

Secondly, NGOs should contribute to shaping public opinion and hence, to prevent the ideas and attempts of WMD proliferation in Russia. It is quite difficult to work with the Russian public opinion, but this should not become a reason for abandoning education and training for wide audience – through educational projects, press, the Internet.

Thirdly, NGOs should continue to provide independent expertise in the area of nonproliferation and arms control (especially, with respect to nuclear weapons), to draw public attention to urgent nuclear safety and security matters, to the shortcomings of MPC&A, to the brain drain and illicit trafficking in nuclear material, to the violations of export control regimes. Investigations and research are impaired and though we enjoy legally-binding right to gain access to information, the authorities hand them in reluctantly. But we should be persistent.

Fourthly, NGOs should not forget that any debate about “strategic stability”, “balance of interests”, etc. cannot overshadow Russia's (and P-5) unequivocal commitment to move towards general and complete nuclear disarmament. When we say “security” we mean “disarmament”. This is why our key mission is to facilitate US-Russian dialogue in the area of strategic and tactical nuclear arms control, so that nuclear arsenals of the parties keep diminishing and other nations may join this process.

Ten Conditions of NGO Survival and Progress

Although the third sector in Russia survives and hopes for the better, no one can guarantee sustainability of this development. Presumably, there are

certain conditions, without which the chances for success of NGOs in such spheres, as international security (including arms control and nonproliferation), would be slim. What are these conditions?

(1) Above all, an organization should be incorporated and conduct its activities on the territory of Russia. This is a crucial factor for success and it facilitates the accomplishment of many aforementioned tasks. This factor will probably preserve its significance in the future.

(2) Such organization should be completely independent of the Government, lobbyist groups associated with the Government, and of political parties. This independence should be both legal and financial. Now that the authorities (and large political players, as well as big businesses) feel the temptation to control everything that is controllable, it would be a mistake to seek favors from the authorities (in the form of founders or *funders*), since such attempts are fraught with political engagement. And it would be difficult for the organization to ensure unbiased analysis. NGOs should avoid two extremes – groundless criticism and appeasement. They should strive to achieve independence, high-quality analysis and critical approach to the developments.

Meanwhile, influence of NGOs on decision-making depends on their ability to maintain fruitful contacts with the branches of power and affect their policy.

(3) Such organization should evidently be non-profit. It is known that the Russian legislation does not prevent the NGOs from commercial activities, unless they run counter to objectives and tasks stated in their statutes or founding charters. Russian NGOs should strictly comply with the letter of the law.

(4) The organization should be financed from more than one source. It would be better to procure grants from several foundations than to seek one large grant from a single donor. Certainly, it is more complicated to administer several grants from different sources, but these difficulties may be justified – they will help to avoid dependence.

For mature Russian NGOs with sound financial record it is important to obtain two- or three-year grants, for they facilitate strategic planning and personnel management.

(5) In the long run, people with their intellectual abilities, enthusiasm and devotion to the organization are more decisive than other factors. There can be no universal remedy for this problem, but it seems efficient to bring together representatives of different generations. This makes an excellent combination of experience and practice with energy and fresh concepts. It

would be useful to encourage inflow of young specialists and university graduates from the regions (including closed nuclear cities). There are many problems in this sphere, but some of them can be solved if the system of fellowships and internships in nonproliferation for young Russian specialists is approved, as I have already proposed this before.

(6) High-quality analysis requires a combination of social sciences and technical expertise within the NGO. Arms control, nonproliferation, or projects aimed at reducing threats of international terrorism are interdisciplinary subjects, and political scientists, military, or physicists by themselves cannot give a comprehensive and balanced picture. Not all NGOs can afford to recruit specialists in different areas. In this case, it is important to maintain close ties with the university community and to turn to it for consultations. We often underestimate academic capabilities of universities and other Russian higher educational institutions, although they may become true scientific partners for the NGOs in Moscow and in the regions, without affecting their independence, contributing with rich expertise and paving the way for the educational programs of the NGOs in these universities.

It is noteworthy that a Moscow-based technical university (MEPhI), in cooperation with the PIR Center, has become a pioneer. Its efforts resulted in a new educational program in Russia – “Security and Nonproliferation of Nuclear Materials”, which has become an operational model for a number of universities, including regional institutions.

However, NGOs in Russia may hardly afford such luxury, as pure science. They need a certain activist and outreach component in their work.

(7) This is why research activities should be combined with wide outreach – in the form of publishing (journals, newsletters); work with mass media (the latter often prefer to do without expert assessments, but the situation slightly changes for the better); and finally, through the Web site and electronic newsletters.

A number of target audiences (such as government officials and legislators) still require traditional methods of coverage – conferences, seminars, or round tables. However, as far as most of other audiences are concerned, cheaper and more efficient options are available, thanks to technological progress, and should be widely used. I mean online conferences, video conferences, CD-ROMs, Internet libraries, etc.

(8) Anyway, an indispensable element of outreach is well-established feedback, which enables the organization to evaluate its efficiency.

(9) NGOs should strictly comply with the Russian legislation. I could tell a lot about the attempts of the Russian bureaucracy to diminish the effects of

equality granted by the law to the third sectors. There are dozens of examples of inefficiency of the laws. My colleagues from other NGOs would add dozens of own examples and finally, we would have the notion of Russian practices with respect to the NGOs. These practices are far from the norms of the state governed with the rule of law. We express our discontent. A number of lawyers make recommendations to the legislators, proceeding from these practices and demanding for their abrogation. This will presumably be a long process before Russian NGOs are able to defend themselves from the arbitrary actions of the officials, ignorant or corrupt tax collectors, etc.

Nonetheless, the existing laws should be observed, otherwise we will never achieve the rule of law.

This also indicates that Russian NGOs need constant and available legal assistance. To a certain extent, this role of a law clinic in Russia has been played by the Charity Aid Foundation (CAF). But Russian NGOs have more questions and concerns than the small number of CAF lawyers can physically bear. At the same time, even the most successful NGOs cannot afford to have professional and skillful lawyers in their staff. This issue is one of the most urgent ones. It also relates to the problem of accounting in the non-profit sector. The risk of falling the victim of arbitrary actions of the officials is high, the experience of defending the rights and freedoms is still limited.

(10) An indispensable condition for sustainable development of the third sector in Russia is interaction and mutual assistance of the NGOs, including both research and activist organizations. We fight for the common cause. We have nothing to quarrel about. Now that trends for control of human rights and freedoms and controllable democracy are growing in Russia, the Russian NGOs working in the area of nonproliferation and arms control should coordinate their efforts. They should jointly resist attempts of the Russian authorities to guide the activities of the NGOs, to stimulate public distrust in the NGOs. Such coordination should primarily lead to regular exchange of information about activities and projects, exchange of legal experience, implementation of joint projects and eventually to the establishment of the Russian Nonproliferation and Arms Control NGO Network.

As the first step, I would support the proposal of my senior colleague Amb. Roland Timerbaev that already in 2002 the collection of articles by the leaders of Russian NGOs in this sphere should be published. The articles may be devoted to their vision of the role and prospects for the third sector and their organizations in present-day Russia and in Russia of tomorrow. The PIR Center could coordinate the editorial process. I would like to invite to participation my highly respected colleagues from the Center for Disarmament, Energy and Environment (Anatoly Dyakov), Center for War and Peace Journalism (Mikhail Pogorely), Committee of Scientists for Global Security (Mikhail Vinogradov), Center for Political and International Studies

(Alexander Nikitin), Movement for Nuclear Safety (Natalya Mironova), and others.

Russian NGOs and the West

Today I often hear the following question: does the partnership with Western NGOs hamper activities of the Russian NGOs, taking into account growing suspicion of the Kremlin? There are even rumors that some Russian NGOs are already curbing such cooperation.

I must say that such contacts are absolutely necessary. No one has curtailed this interaction. On the contrary, now that Russian NGOs passed the period of adolescence, we have a unique opportunity to collaborate with Western NGOs in the spirit of true and equal partnership, which may enhance mutual respect and efficiency of such cooperation.

Russia is a part of the Western world. At present, one can feel this trend for more integration with the civilized world and this course is of strategic importance.

In this connection, the experience of the third sector in the West is particularly valuable for us. Russian Cooperation with US partners was the key element of activities of the Russian NGOs at the dawn of this movement in Russia and it is still the case. Meanwhile, Russian institutions expand their ties with other countries – the UK, Germany, Italy, Norway, France, etc.

One cannot help mentioning the contribution of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies to nonproliferation training since 1991 and to forming the community of nuclear nonproliferation experts in Russia and the CIS.

At present, many Russian and US NGOs have established long and sustainable cooperation and carry out joint projects, hold seminars and conferences. Such joint projects have been launched by the PIR Center and the CNS, the Center for War and Peace Journalism and the Center for War, Peace and News Media at the New York University, the Committee of Scientists for Global Security and the Stanford University, by the Center for Export Controls and the Center for International Trade and Security at the University of Georgia, etc. RANSAC comprises representatives of both states. The Carnegie Moscow Center is a representative office of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, but it may well be regarded as a Russian-US “joint venture”.

Thus, the channel for bilateral nonproliferation dialogue at the expert, non-governmental level has been established. This dialogue is not sensitive to changes in official bilateral relations. On the contrary, when these relations deteriorate, when diplomats do not hear each other or get distorted

information, contacts among the NGOs enable the countries to exchange more accurate information, to make a calm analysis, to find ways out of the stalemate.

Joint activities of the Russian and US NGOs in the area of nuclear nonproliferation resulted in the establishment of the Moscow Forum for Nuclear Nonproliferation. This forum emerged during the Moscow International Nonproliferation Conference held jointly by the PIR Center and the Carnegie Moscow Center in October 2000. The conference brought together more than 200 representatives of 24 states. The opportunity to share ideas was granted not only to experts from North America and Europe, who normally dominate such international forums, but to specialists from Iran, Pakistan, India, Israel, and Cuba.

The Moscow International Nonproliferation Conference played an important role in shaping international environment conducive for promoting nonproliferation values. Besides, it was the first time when Russian NGOs were united within one forum.

It is common knowledge that Western nations (notably the United States) make not only the source of strong contacts with research partners, but also the major (and sometimes the only) source of funding.

The generally negative attitude of the Russian authorities to the fact that the third sector in Russia is mostly financed by US foundations is known. However, there is a lot of myth-making about it, too. Even when such irritation takes place, it is mitigated with the fact that even some important programs of such sensitive state structures, as the MOD, the Minatom, Gosatomnadzor, depend on foreign (above all) US assistance.

In any case we do not have to be shy about the sources of our funding, regardless of the location of their headquarters. We are proud of this list and display it prominently in our publications.

We would be happy to add to this list some Russian foundations. But new Russian entrepreneurs have not yet been inspired by examples of US donors and prefer to immortalize their names in building ugly palaces for themselves rather than in supporting Russian science. I still hope that the situation will change one day for the better. So far we will try to include in the list of our educational programs the training program for business, which is supposedly interested in strengthening peace and promoting disarmament, as well as other sectors.

The involvement of big and respectful Russian business in supporting the third sector is the matter for the future. Nowadays it is important to preserve the financial independence of Russian NGOs, to strengthen it without

dubious commercialization. Perhaps, in the future one may think about forming an endowment for leading Russian NGOs in the area of nonproliferation. Anyway without attention and backing of large US foundations, the self-confidence and dynamism of NGOs may suffer. We count on this support.

In this connection, many in Russia follow the developments concerning the activities of the newly established foundation – Nuclear Threat Initiative. The leaders of Russian NGOs bear in mind Vladimir Putin’s letter to Sam Nunn and Ted Turner stating that “Russia is open for broad cooperation with the United States” in the area of nonproliferation and further arms reduction “both at the governmental and non-governmental levels. I assume that there are good prospects for your work with Russian partners.”

Obviously, development of cooperation between Russian NGOs and Western partners requires equality and transparency. The nonproliferation community is a small village. There should be no rivalry and attempts to distinguish between big brothers and younger brothers, albeit financial capability of US NGOs will differ from the potential of Russian NGOs, as the economies of two nations differ. It is important to ensure that the foundations encourage such equal and transparent cooperation.

And this interaction may have bright future. Many NGOs working in this area are mature and competent organizations, so we assume that they will be able to protect their independence, freedom of analysis and expression, opportunities for broad dissemination of information for the sake of nonproliferation.