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# NGOS AS A TOOL FOR RUSSIA'S PROJECTION OF INFLUENCE



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This report started off as a study about the government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) operated by Kremlin to promote its views and pursue its interests. But in the course of the research, it became clear that the network of these Kremlin-run organizations is much more complex and diverse, stretching far beyond Russia's borders. It also became clear the term "GONGO" does not fully describe the variety of these organizations. While it is true that the Kremlin is using GONGOs to manipulate civil society in Russia and abroad, there are many other organizations that it is relying on to achieve its goals. To address this issue, the author initially suggested a broader term—"GONGO & Co."—but eventually rejected it as it failed to fully reflect the complexity of the phenomenon examined in this report. The author's discussions of the term with various experts in the field provoked lengthy debates about the formal status of the pro-Kremlin NGOs, all the while distracting from a much more crucial problem—their impact on the third sector and the civil society as a whole. This report, thus, attempts to give an outline of a complex and sophisticated system of NGOs, unregistered and informal groups, created and supported by the Kremlin to "manage" the third sector.

*Olga Shorina*

**Abstract:** The Kremlin uses NGOs to achieve its goals both inside and outside Russia. Domestically, pro-Kremlin NGOs help shore up support for the government and suggest the presence of an active third sector. In the international realm, they are a key part of the Kremlin's kleptocracy network, as they lure in foreign actors and fund local partners. Furthermore, pro-Kremlin NGOs manipulate open societies in order to promote the Kremlin's views, stir divisions and distract international communities from more pressing issues.

Regardless of their primary goals, pro-Kremlin NGOs take resources away from independent NGOs, marginalize discussions of human rights, and erode democratic norms, serving as a key tool for disseminating the Kremlin propaganda and disinformation.

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## INTRODUCTION

**In January 2016, a controversy surrounding an alleged kidnapping of a young Russian-German girl by a refugee erupted in Germany. Although the story—now known as the “Lisa case”—was later proven to be false, it sparked a media storm rife with disinformation and mobilized the Russian-speaking community to protest against the German government. All these developments caught German authorities by surprise.**

It turned out that the story was concocted by the Russian state media, whose audience in Germany amounts to about 4 million Russian-speakers. The aggressive coverage of the story resulted in street protests in a Berlin district where many Russian- and Soviet-born residents live. Protests were organized by local communities and NGOs that had previously been supported by the Russian Embassy as promoters of the Russian language and culture; they accused the German authorities of failing to control immigration and provide security. This “Russian” grievance originating in the Marzahn neighborhood of Berlin was then exploited by a new political force, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). In 2017, the party achieved surprisingly good results in several regional elections by running on an anti-immigration platform. Shortly after the Lisa case, it came to light that the AfD had also received financial support from Moscow. Its quick response time also suggests that the party’s activities had been directed or coordinated by the Kremlin. Representatives of this party were the first ones to come to the Marzahn district during protests and interact with the Russian community. Similarly, AfD was also the first to print and distribute election leaflets in Russian.

NGOs have become an integral part of Vladimir Putin’s authoritarian regime. They are used to achieve the Kremlin’s goals in both domestic and international politics.

This paper examines the Russian government’s practices involving NGOs and provides analysis of the following issues:

- The Russian government’s usage of funding to control civil society inside and outside the country. The Russian state budget provides some data regarding official spending in the third sector, such as the range of activities that these funds may support.

- The actual activities of the pro-Kremlin NGOs. Such activities have gained experts’ attention in recent years, and this report seeks to add to this growing body of work. In order to present the overall picture of how the Putin regime uses such organizations, the report examines their activities, goals, and the roles they are supposed to play.

In order to evaluate the impact of the pro-Kremlin NGOs on international organizations, this report analyzes activities of the Russian and pro-Russian NGOs at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meetings (HDIM). It also attempts to determine the correlation between Russia’s declared foreign policy objectives and the activities of its pseudo-NGOs.

### HIGHLIGHTS:

The Kremlin’s NGOs form a complex system of groups coordinated and funded by the Russian government or loyal businesses. Some of them are openly GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organization), while others claim to be independent. Some have been created upon the initiative of the Kremlin or pro-Kremlin actors for specific purposes, others have mutated from the independent organizations, which had been hijacked by the government in ways similar to the Kremlin’s takeovers of the traditional media.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of how they emerge, these organizations are used by the Kremlin to carry out specific tasks, which typically fall into three categories: propaganda, kleptocracy, and intelligence and security services.

While classical GONGOs were initially created to promote the Russian state, they now seek to influence and exert control, both domestically and abroad.

1 The first high-profile and well-documented takeover of an independent TV station by the Russian state took place in 2001, only one year into Vladimir Putin’s presidency. See, for example: Susan Glasser, Peter Baker, “Russian Network Seized In Raid,” Washington Post, April 15, 2001 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/04/15/russian-network-seized-in-raid/e9679fb0-31cb-4b9c-b07f-204b488f40ad/> (Retrieved on January 10, 2019).

## TERMINOLOGY AND TIMELINE

**“GONGO” is a special term that describes state or government-organized NGOs. Essentially, GONGOs contradict the very concept of NGOs, which are supposed to be independent from the government and not-for-profit, all the while acting in the service of the common good.<sup>2</sup> GONGOs also refute the idea of the third sector or civil society as situated between the public and private sector or between the state, market, and family. They showcase a more complex relationship between governments and civil society [that has emerged in recent years].<sup>3</sup>**

Governments may have legitimate reasons for creating such structures within the third sector where grassroots’ organizations do not emerge naturally due to several factors. For example, GONGOs can be created as part of the state policy toward the civil society; or in cases when the civic activities are new for the local civil society; or when boosting these activities requires special resources. This holds true for democratic and non-democratic governments alike. Within democratic states, typical examples of GONGOs are Germany’s political party foundations, which receive federal money based on vote percentages and work domestically and internationally in development, political party work, and democracy-building. Another example is the U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which was created by the U.S. Congress in 1983. GONGOs also emerge in countries with limited or no experience in having an independent civil society; or, in particular, in sectors where no grassroots activities could emerge without state initiatives. The main case illustrating the point is China, where, as in other illiberal states, GONGOs are often the only entities that can embody the functions of a civil society.<sup>4</sup>

GONGOs are, therefore, neither new nor extraordinary phenomena, and they are not

2 Sabine Lang, *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p.12

3 Annette Zimmer et al, “The Third Sector and the Policy Process in Germany,” TSEP Working Paper #9, London: The Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics and Political Science, 2005.

4 Lang, NGOs

necessarily a matter of concern when operating in a democratic, competitive environment and when they are transparent about their relationship with the government. An increasingly worrisome development, however, is the emergence of GONGOs that act as a government’s agents, purporting to be independent while aiming to sideline or supplant genuine non-governmental entities. Simply put, GONGOs become dangerous the moment they are used as a tool or a weapon by an authoritarian government.

*The acronym of GONGO is one of an expanding assortment of terms that also includes MONGO (my own NGO), PONGO (parliamentary-organized NGO or, sometimes, personal NGO), FINGO (financially-interested NGO), GANGO (gap-filling NGO), BRINGO (brief-case NGO), (DONGO (donor-organized NGO), DINGO (donor international NGO), BONGO (business-organized NGO), BINGO (business-interest NGO), BENGO (bent, in the sense of crooked, NGO), CHONGO (city hall NGO), GRINGO (government-run or inspired-run NGO), PANGO (party-affiliated NGO), RONGO (retired-officials NGO), COMENGO (come-and-go, or here-today-and-gone-tomorrow NGO) as well as MANGO or MONGO (Mafia-affiliated or Mafia-organized NGO).<sup>5</sup>*

However, this report takes a broader look at Russia’s practices and identifies other third sector organizations that are manipulated by the Putin regime, such as unregistered civil organizations and informal groups. Such organizations are not only government-organized, but also government-operated, government-captured, or simply government-funded. This description also includes organizations that work to carry out a government task. A more apt term for all of these organizations could be, in fact, the British term “QUANGO”—quasi-NGO—as it highlights their “quasi-ness,” namely, their lack of autonomy and the mere fact that they represent not the interests of independent civil society but those of the government.

The use of NGOs to pursue the state’s interests is not new, nor is it specific to Russia. Other non-democratic states and authoritarian regimes have been using these organizations to control civil society domestically and to support regime

5 Lawrence S. Cumming, “GONGOs,” *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, eds. Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler, New York: Springer, 2010.

apologists internationally. Azerbaijan's use of GONGOs to influence the Council of Europe is a key example, thoroughly analyzed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and currently under investigation by the Italian and Spanish law enforcement agencies for the possible corruption schemes involving local politicians.<sup>6</sup> GONGOs are an essential part of China's strategy to influence Australia and New Zealand.<sup>7</sup>

Historical examples hail from the early 20th-century Russia with its *Zubatovschina* — a system of government-organized labor trade unions set up to prevent any real labor mobilization. Contemporary Russian GONGOs emerge from the authoritarian nature of the Putin regime, which has become increasingly repressive over the past 18 years<sup>8</sup> and will most likely survive for the next five years or longer.<sup>9</sup>

Targeted attacks on Russia's third sector began in the early 2000s and have since grown incrementally. At first, the government sought to influence the third sector inside Russia, expanding its practice of imposing control and eventual takeover of the

6 For details, see: "Report of the Independent Investigation Body on the allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly," Council of Europe, April 15, 2018 <http://assembly.coe.int/Communication/IBAC/IBAC-GIAC-Report-EN.pdf> (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).

7 "New Zealand agonises about Chinese meddling," *Economist*, November 8, 2018 <https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/11/08/new-zealand-agonises-about-chinese-meddling>; Joshua Kurlantzick, "Australia, New Zealand Face China's Influence," Council on Foreign Relations, December 13, 2017 <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/australia-new-zealand-face-chinas-influence>; Jason Scott, "Australia Weighs the Cost of Resisting China's Meddling," *Bloomberg*, May 9, 2018 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-09/australia-weighs-the-cost-of-resisting-china-s-meddling> (All retrieved on January 11, 2019).

8 Examining developments within the third sector in Russia helps to understand the evolution of this authoritarian regime. Some accounts of the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Putin regime in Russia could be found in: Yulia Gorbunova, *Laws of Attrition: Crackdown on Russia's Civil Society after Putin's Return to the Presidency*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013; and "Table Illustrating Legislative Crackdown on Rights and Freedoms of the Civil Society in Russia since 2012," Paris: International Federation for Human Rights, 2012.

9 Human Rights Watch, "Destructing Law-making. Attack on the Civil Society After May 2020" (in Russian: «Разрушительное законотворчество. Наступление на гражданское общество после мая 2012 года»), April 2013. <https://monitoring.mhg.ru/sites/default/files/files/hrwdoklad.pdf>; International Federation for Human Rights, "Table Illustrating Legislative Crackdown on Rights and Freedoms of the Civil Society in Russia since 2012" [https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/tableau\\_russie\\_web\\_paysage\\_v2-2.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/tableau_russie_web_paysage_v2-2.pdf) (Retrieved on December 18, 2018).

Russian media space. According to Harley Balzer, this early period of the Putin regime can be described as "managed pluralism":

*Managed pluralism entails both encouraging and constraining civil society... the managed pluralist regime seeks both to orchestrate and to arbitrarily limit that activity. The emphasis on "seeks" is important. The leadership in a managed pluralist regime is sophisticated enough to realize that stifling all independent expression and political diversity is neither possible nor desirable.*<sup>10</sup>

"Managing" eventually gave way to control, as it has in many other authoritarian regimes. The Putin regime's attempts to control civil society did not stop at the Russian border; today, "authoritarians go global".<sup>11</sup>

The early period of Putin's presidency was fairly free for the nonprofit sector. Human rights organizations were able to criticize his regime and participate in public discussions in the parliament. During this short period of time, the media also enjoyed relative freedom in its ability to criticize Putin, as most of the media outlets were independent from the state. But the coverage of the *Kursk* disaster,<sup>12</sup> in which Putin came across as a weak or ruthless leader who cared only about his ratings, triggered the rollback of media freedom, beginning with the launch of the state-controlled organizations, such as Radio RSN, as a counterweight to the *Echo of Moscow* radio station, an influential asset of what used to be Vladimir Gusinsky's media empire. It was only a matter of time before the state-controlled Gazprom Media, a subsidiary of the Gazprom gas monopoly, acquired all of Gusinsky's media assets.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, other influential outlets and publications were forced to accept the new "red

10 Balzer, Harley, "Managed Pluralism: Vladimir Putin's Emerging Regime," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 19, no. 3, 2003, p. 191

11 Diamond, L., Plattner, M., Walker, C., eds. *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

12 K-141 *Kursk* was a nuclear-powered cruise-missile submarine of the Russian Navy. On August 2000, it was lost and later sank in the Barents Sea, killing 118 people on board. During the rescue operation that lasted several days, Vladimir Putin stayed in in Sochi and remained silent. He was consequently harshly criticized by the media.

13 Vladimir Gusinsky was one of the most influential Russian oligarchs who accumulated his fortune in the 1990s. He was the founder and owner of the Media-Most holding, which included the NTV television channel, the *Echo of Moscow* radio station, the *Segodnya (Today)* newspaper, and some other outlets. In 2000, the Kremlin-authorized attack was launched against him and his assets by the law enforcement agencies resulting in the government's takeover of Media-Most and Gusinsky's fleeing Russia..

lines,” which have only become more rigid since then. The Kremlin gradually took control over most of the high-profile outlets with a large reach—TV6 (closed under government pressure), Kommersant Publishing House (acquired by Alisher Usmanov, an oligarch with close ties to Putin), REN-TV, *Gazeta.ru*, *Lenta.ru*, RBC (forced to change ownership and editorial policy). Eventually, Russia's leading internet companies, such as Mail.ru and Yandex.ru, have also been pressured into censorship (or self-censorship).

Just as the *Kursk* disaster catalyzed the government takeover of independent media, a series of other crucial developments in early- to mid-2000s led to increasingly repressive actions by the Putin regime in the nonprofit sector. The 2002 Nord-Ost siege in Moscow provoked the Russian president (or was used by him as an excuse) to take control over the country's parliamentary system. The 2004 Beslan school siege resulted in the abolition of the direct gubernatorial elections justified by the need to consolidate state control to fight against terrorism.

In 2005, at the beginning of his second presidential term, Putin created the Civic Chamber. Officially chartered as a consultative civil society institution with 168 members, its mission was to analyze draft legislations and monitor government activities.<sup>14</sup> Only a handful of genuine Russian activists were admitted as members of the Chamber, while the majority came from the pro-Kremlin pseudo-NGOs. The Chamber's activities focused on providing support for the government's policies and actions. For example, it publicly voiced approval of the United Russia primaries during the parliamentary campaign in 2016.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, the Chamber's creation in 2005 signaled that from that point forward, civic activists and human rights defenders in Russia would be grouped into “good activists” and “bad activists.”

A number of international developments also changed Putin's approach to foreign policy. In his 2018 interview with NBC News anchor Megyn Kelly, Putin cited the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty as a pivotal moment for his understanding of the world, admitting that it was,

14 “The official website of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation” <https://www.oprf.ru/en/about/> (Retrieved on December 18, 2019).

15 In 2017, Committee for Civil Initiatives (KGI), a Moscow-based think tank led by Russia's former finance minister Alexei Kudrin, published the report that criticized the activities of the Civic Chamber. See: “Approaches to Improvements of the Russian Federation's Civic Chamber institution” (in Russian: «Подходы к совершенствованию института Общественной палаты Российской Федерации») <https://goo.gl/m2hc2M> (Retrieved on December 18, 2019).

in fact, the starting point of his anti-Americanism. The NATO expansion to include several post-Soviet countries and the events of the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine were also perceived by Putin as an escalation by the West.

The timeline below highlights how external and internal events correlated with more repressive actions from the Kremlin, particularly in the non-profit sector.

## TIMELINE

In his 2004 book *Cold Peace: Russia's New Imperialism*, Janusz Bugajski analyzed the Kremlin's increasingly assertive foreign policy and argued that the Kremlin sought to dominate four major subzones in the eastern part of Europe: the European member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Baltic region, Central Europe, and Southeastern Europe. Bugajski argued that the Kremlin followed six principal objectives in terms of its foreign policy toward Europe and European interests:

- To achieve primary influence over the foreign policy orientations and security postures of nearby states;
- To gain increasing economic benefits and monopolistic positions;
- To convert Eastern Europe's overwhelming dependence on Russian energy supplies and economic investments into long-term intergovernmental influence;
- To limit the scope and pace of Western institutional enlargement and integration;
- To use this region for rebuilding the global status of international player;
- And to undercut or damage transatlantic relations.<sup>16</sup>

Over the past 14 years, the Kremlin has expanded its zones of influence abroad and modified the goals of its activities. These priorities have been detailed in the official documents, such as “Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation” (2000, 2008, 2013, 2016) and the “National Security Strategy” (2000, 2009, 2015), which claim that Russia has interests not only in the CIS countries, the Baltics, the Balkans, and Central Europe, but also in the Middle East and Latin America. Russian activities in these areas were launched under the banner of providing “support for compatriots abroad”—the main slogan of

16 Bugajski, Janusz. *Cold Peace: Russia's New Imperialism*, New York: Praeger, 2004.

the Russian foreign policy during Dmitry Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012)—with a number of events aimed at promoting the Russian language and culture. Among these activities were the creation of Rossotrudnichestvo (2008), the mobilization of the Russian cultural centers affiliated with the Russian embassies (e.g. the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute became the key vehicle for promoting the Russian language), and the launch of the Russian media centers. Today, there are 14 media centers located mostly in post-Soviet countries but also in China, India, United Kingdom, and France.<sup>17</sup> Numerous cultural events, exhibitions, exchange visits, educational programs were held over the years, however, many of these activities have since evolved into covert and overt operations aimed at positioning Russia as a decision-maker inside the target countries.

It is noteworthy that supporting compatriots in the former Soviet republics was a policy pursued by various political forces in the 1990s, especially during electoral campaigns. Nationalists and proponents of a strong Russian state, such as Dmitry Rogozin, the current head of Roscosmos, who emerged on the political arena in the 1990s as one of nationalist politicians backed by Kremlin, and Yuriy Luzhkov, the former mayor of Moscow (1992-2010), have been long-time supporters of these policies. Luzhkov had even appropriated funds from the Moscow city budget for projects in Crimea, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia by introducing in the budget special expenditure categories—international cooperation and support for compatriots. Putin has expanded the idea. Originally, the Kremlin sought to influence only the Russian community in target countries, often through the Russian media propaganda. Since then, however, entire networks of NGOs, media outlets, and Kremlin sympathizers, including local politicians, experts and academics, have been created and coopted by the Putin regime.

Today, these networks operate with relative efficiency inside target countries, influencing their domestic policies and political processes. The variety of the Kremlin's methods, its choice of target countries and organizations have recently drawn much scrutiny in the West resulting in an array of media reports and investigations.<sup>18</sup> According to

17 "The list of the foreign bureaus of the Russian state news agency Russia Today," Official website of the International Information Agency "Rossiya Segodnya" <http://pressmia.ru/docs/about/filials.html> (Retrieved on December 18, 2018).

18 See, for example: Yaroslav Shimov, Aleksy Dzikawicki "E-Mail Hack Gives Glimpse Into Russia's Influence Drive In Eastern Europe," *RFE/RL*, March 11, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-e-mail-hack-belarusian-usorsky-piskorski-dugin/28363888.html>

these reports, the number of pro-Kremlin NGOs operating abroad amounts to hundreds. In response to Russia's meddling in Europe, the European Values Think-Tank launched a strategic program called "Kremlin Watch," whose goal is to "expose and confront instruments of Russian influence and disinformation operations focused against Western democracies." It monitors the Kremlin's activities in Europe almost 24/7.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime, Russia's own civil society operates under harsh conditions created by the tough government regulation. Following the 2012 Foreign Agent Status Law, the number of NGOs in Russia was slashed by one third in just three years.<sup>20</sup> While in 2017, it has bounced back to the 2012 levels, according to the Russian Ministry of Justice's data, with many new NGOs being registered, the current number of 223,000 is still dramatically lower than 359,000 that existed in 2007.

The "foreign agent" law forces the NGOs that receive foreign donations and engage in what is vaguely described as "political activity" to accept the status of a "foreign agent" and publicly label themselves as such in all official communications. "Political activity" can be understood very broadly and may include organizing anticorruption campaigns, environmental protection actions, or even defending human rights.

(Retrieved on January 19, 2019); Oren Dorell, "Alleged Russian political meddling documented in 27 countries since 2004," *USA Today*, September 7, 2017. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/09/07/alleged-russian-political-meddling-documented-27-countries-since-2004/619056001/> (Retrieved on January 19, 2019); Kerin Hope, "Russia meddles in Greek town to push back the West," *Financial Times*, July 13, 2018 <https://www.ft.com/content/b5728090-86b0-11e8-96dd-fa565ec55929> (Retrieved on January 19, 2019).

19 "Kremlin Watch: Everything you need to know about Russian influence operations in Europe" <https://www.kremlinwatch.eu/#welcome> (Retrieved on January 19, 2019).

20 For details, see, for example: Alexei Kozlov, "Russia's 'foreign agents' law is bankrupting campaigners and activists," *OpenDemocracy*, November 10, 2017 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/alexei-kozlov/russias-foreign-agents-law> (Retrieved on January 19, 2019).

## CONTROLLING CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH FUNDING

**Analysis of the funding of GONGOs and NGOs offers an insight into the Kremlin's practices of controlling civil society. The Russian state budget is the most transparent source for such information, even if it reveals an incomplete picture. However, some concrete data can be extracted: for example, the 2018 Federal Budget allocated more than \$1.2 billion in grants to NGOs and civic initiatives.**

Much of this funding goes to classic GONGOs, such as Rosnano (a government-owned joint-stock company created for venture funding), the United Transport Directorate (originally created as the Olympic Games Transport Directorate, it was consequently re-organized to accommodate the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia), Skolkovo Innovation Center, the Monocities Development Fund, and the WTO Expertise Centre.

Another group that receives government funding is the media—the federal television networks, such as the First Channel and VGTRK, as well as the Public Television of Russia.

The federal budget also appropriates funding for the so-called “patriotic organizations,” such as the Russian Military-Historical Society chaired by the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, whose father serves as an advisor at the same organization.

*“The Russian Military Historical Society (RMHS) recreated by the Edict No. 1710 of the Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin of December 29, 2012 as a successor of the Imperial Russian Military Historical Society, which was created by the Decree of Emperor Nicholas II in 1907 and ceased its activity in 1917. The objectives of RMHS are: to consolidate the forces of the state and society in the study of Russia's military historical past, to promote the study of Russian military history and counteract attempts to distort it, to popularize the achievements of military-historical science, raise the prestige of military service, and patriotism education.”<sup>21</sup>*

21 “Reference about the activities of the Russian Military Historical Society.” <https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news-en/item-4711> (Retrieved on December 24, 2018).



June 20, 2017: Vladimir Putin meets members of the Russian Civic Chamber in the Kremlin. Photo: kremlin.ru





## LINE ITEMS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERAL BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR THE THIRD SECTOR

Agencies and ministries	Item line	2018 (in thousands, USD)	2019 (in thousands, USD)	2020 (in thousands USD)
Ministry of Industry and Trade	International cooperation	574.14	639.09	649.60
Ministry of Energy	International cooperation	1,590.67	1,644.76	1,671.80
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	International cooperation	8,775.53	5,613.35	5,705.64
Ministry of Culture	International cooperation	2,825.72	2,921.81	2,969.85
Ministry of Health	International cooperation	16,808.98	17,394.66	13,233.95
Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities	International cooperation	403.12	416.82	423.68
Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media	International cooperation	6,445.90	6,649.25	6,754.53
Ministry of Education and Science	International cooperation	99,508.95	118,943.40	120,740.59
	Subprogram "International Cooperation in Science"	5,153.84	5,329.09	5,416.71
	Grants for education projects of NGOs in CIS	12,280.39	12,422.19	12,760.77
Federal Agency for Fishery	International cooperation	1,228.90	1,270.68	1,291.57
Ministry of Agriculture	International cooperation	1,194.76	587.68	597.50
Ministry of Finance	International cooperation	1,790,942.45	1,864,247.46	1,485,677.24

## NGOs as a Tool for Russia's Projection of Influence

Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo)	Total	53,678.16	54,814.20	55,577.07
Ministry of Transport	International cooperation	4,380.29	4,075.99	4,143.01
Federal Road Agency	International cooperation	0.00	99.47	99.47
Federal Agency on Press and Mass Communications	International cooperation	867.71	897.21	911.96
	Subprogram "Participation in the International Information Exchange" (1)	702.76	709.07	727.48
	Subprogram "Participation in the International Information Exchange" (2)	299,069.46	275,812.92	276,048.88
	Subprogram "Security in the Information Society" ("Prevention of the Information Technological Threats")	2,708.97	2,704.15	2,704.15
	Russia Today	105,919.00	105,832.43	105,832.43
	ITAR TASS	34,374.88	30,141.36	30,141.36
Ministry of Economic Development	International cooperation	92,560.09	87,441.57	88,711.02
Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (Mintrud)	International cooperation	12,261.53	12,678.46	10,059.45
Federal Service for Labor and Employment (Rostrud)	International cooperation	22.00	22.75	23.13
Federal Customs Service	International cooperation	16,988.52	6,633.83	6,643.19
Federal Archival Agency	International cooperation	21.16	21.88	22.24

Federal Service for State Statistics	International cooperation	2.02	2.08	2.12
Federal Antimonopoly Service	International cooperation	4.71	4.99	5.07
Federal Accreditation Service	International cooperation	43.93	45.43	46.17
Federal Service for Intellectual Property	International cooperation	476.89	493.10	501.21
Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring	International cooperation	3,162.44	3,253.10	2,345.21
	International liabilities	36,962.73	26,761.58	0.00
Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology	International cooperation	1,443.82	2,059.83	2,093.70
Federal Agency for Tourism	International cooperation	317.64	353.07	385.79
Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies and Disaster Relief	International cooperation	1,404.62	1,450.95	1,448.80
Federal Tax Service	International cooperation	56.90	58.84	59.81
Ministry of Defense	International cooperation	136.15	140.78	143.10
Ministry of Interior Affairs	International cooperation	1,185.08	1,246.50	1,267.00
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights	International cooperation	8.92	9.22	9.37
Accounts Chamber	International cooperation	61.58	61.97	62.99
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Total	1,417,049.62	1,470,838.63	1,462,088.81
Ministry of Justice	International cooperation	116.56	120.53	122.51
Russian Academy of Science	International cooperation	2,015.35	2,085.00	2,119.28
Federal Service for State Registration, Cadastre and Cartography	International cooperation	63.76	66.12	67.19

Federal Bailiff Service	International cooperation	81.43	84.20	85.58
State Duma	International cooperation	1,196.28	1,236.96	1,257.30
Council of Federations	International cooperation	242.71	242.71	242.71
Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs	International cooperation	169,536.29	173,886.76	116,034.27
Prosecutor General's Office	International cooperation	10.08	10.42	10.59
Federal Service for the Supervision of Environment, Technology and Nuclear Management	International cooperation	3.35	3.46	3.51
Cinema Foundation of Russia	International cooperation	2.31	2.31	2.31
National Research Center "Kurchatov Institute"	International cooperation	6,207.98	6,533.69	6,641.12
Federal Service for Financial Monitoring	International cooperation	271.14	255.31	255.95
Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation	International cooperation	45,544.97	52,119.70	57,853.74
Federal Space Agency	International cooperation	115,895.64	119,836.45	121,806.85
Ministry of Sports	International cooperation	1,517.32	1,568.92	1,594.71
<b>Total</b>		<b>170,495</b>	<b>168,202</b>	<b>152,348</b>

Source: Russian Federal Budget

There are also expenditures that are placed within the category of "International Cooperation" with a purpose to promote Russia's influence abroad. For example, there is a special line in the Ministry of Culture's budget for grants allocated for humanitarian cooperation with Poland (40 million rubles, or \$600,000, annually, for 2018-2020).

Additionally, it is noteworthy that Russian pensioners living abroad receive their pensions through the system of the Russian embassies and consulates. These pensions have been turned into an instrument of tracking Russian citizens internationally and influencing them in election campaigns.

The total official funds allocated for influence activities in the federal budget are estimated at over \$2.2 billion. However, there are other funding sources as well, including regional budgets that provide money and services to NGOs, and personal assets of the Russian oligarchs and members of Putin's inner circle,<sup>29</sup> whose capabilities are vast but hidden from public scrutiny.

29 "2018 Ranking of countermeasures by the EU28 to the Kremlin's subversion operations," the European Values Think-Tank, June 13, 2018. <http://www.kremlinwatch.eu/userfiles/2018-ranking-of-countermeasures-by-the-eu28-to-the-kremlin-s-subversion-operations.pdf> (Retrieved on December 18, 2018).

## DESIGN AND ACTIVITIES

**It is clear that, on the one hand, the Kremlin is narrowing down the legal space for independent nonprofit organizations, while, on the other hand, is replacing them with state-controlled NGOs—organizations that imitate independent NGOs and thus degrade and discredit Russia’s nonprofit sector. These pseudo-NGOs are launched and shut down at the government’s convenience.**

For example, the once popular youth movement Nashi, championed by former Deputy Chief of Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov, is almost forgotten today, while a new youth organization is being groomed by the Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu (it is also, reportedly, linked to the sanctioned Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, who is often described by the media as “Putin’s chef” for his close ties with the Russian president). The new organization, the Youth Army, counts 230,000 people among his members. While both organizations are

self-described as “patriotic,” their missions are different. *Nashi* primarily tried to appeal to the young ambitious Russians who wanted to pursue a career in public administration. Members would be invited to participate in various networking events; the movement’s annual summer camps were often attended by high-profile Russian officials, including Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. The Youth Army targets an even younger audience, catering to school children.

Institutional structure of the pro-Kremlin NGOs varies. They can be set up as a traditional NGO, a foundation, a think tank, an association, or a social movement, with a caveat that it is controlled by the state. Alternatively, they can exist as unregistered, paramilitary, or hate groups.

These organizations focus on an array of issues ranging from foreign affairs, international cooperation, and Russian diaspora to education, culture, religion, human rights to politics, history et al.



Launched as a local grassroots movement several years ago, today, Immortal Regiment marches bring together about over 8 million of Russian people across the country. Russian embassies and Kremlin-friendly NGOs also help organize Immortal Regiment processions in more than 60 countries around the world. Photo: open sources.

Regardless of their structure and focus, pro-Kremlin NGOs fall into four broad categories:

- 1. Pro-Kremlin entities that are transparent about their status as GONGOs.** Russkiy Mir, the Gorchakov Foundation, and the Russian Peace Foundation, among others, were officially established by the Russian government and list state officials on their boards of trustees.
- 2. Co-opted independent NGOs.** A well-known example of an independent NGO taken over by the state is the Immortal Regiment («Бессмертный полк»), which had started out as a grassroots movement of those Russians who wanted to commemorate their family members perished in World War II by marching with their photographs on May 9 (Russia's Victory Day). The initiative was launched in 2011 in the Russian city of Tomsk by a group of local activists. Once it became popular and gained wide support throughout the country, the initiative was hijacked by a pro-government group, which turned the Immortal Regiment into one of the Kremlin's main patriotic activities. Today, as part of the May 9 celebrations in Moscow, Putin personally leads the march. Additionally, the government now doles out grants to loyal NGOs to help organize these marches. In 2018, the Immortal Regiment march in New York<sup>30</sup> was organized by the group called "Russian Youth of America,"<sup>31</sup> operating in the United States since 2016. It is affiliated with the Coordinating Council of the Russian Compatriots of the United States and Russkiy Mir.
- 3. NGOs that claim to be independent but can be linked to the Kremlin.** A particularly interesting example is The Dialogue of Civilizations, a think-tank established by the former head of the Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin, who is also Putin's former neighbor from the Ozero cooperative.<sup>32</sup> During his tenure at the Russian Railways in 2005-2015, Yakunin managed to accumulate billions of

rubles, however, the sources of this miraculous enrichment were never properly investigated. Today, his think tank promotes the idea of Russia's "special way" in politics and the notion that Russia and the Putin regime are entitled to special treatment on the international arena. The organization maintains offices in Berlin and Vienna, holds large conferences on the Greek island of Rhodes, and seeks to integrate academics and public intellectuals from all over the world into its network by funding their articles and reports that promote the Kremlin's agenda.<sup>33</sup> Yakunin reportedly has invested \$28 million of his personal wealth in the think tank over five years, but the organization has no official record of its income and expenses.<sup>34</sup>

- 4. Foreign organizations that preserve an independent façade but are being either operated or funded, often covertly, by Moscow.** This category includes hate groups, paramilitary groups, traditionalists, and radical right activists. The Kremlin's support for them is usually not official. Some examples include groups of Cossacks who work to spread conservative orthodox values throughout the CIS, "anti-fascist" communities and Russian-minority groups in the Baltic states, pro-Russian paramilitary and youth groups acting, as recently reported, in Serbia and Bosnia.<sup>35</sup> In many cases, funding and strategic guidance for such groups are channeled through the outposts of the Russian Orthodox Church.



33 Casey Michel, "Oligarch Gets an Assist from U.S. Academics in Whitewashing Russia's Reputation," *ThinkProgress*, May 30, 2018 <https://thinkprogress.org/why-are-these-american-academics-helping-a-sanctioned-russian-oligarch-1d1fa57c98e1/> (Retrieved on January 10, 2019).

34 Roman Goncharenko, "Dialogue of Civilizations': Why Yakunin Launches an Institute in Berlin," (in Russian: "Диалог цивилизаций": для чего Якунин открывает институт в Берлине?) *Deutsche Welle*, June 30, 2016 <https://www.dw.com/ru/диалог-цивилизаций-для-чего-якунин-открывает-институт-в-берлине/a-19370129> (Retrieved on January 10, 2019).

35 Paul Goble, "Moscow Using Serbs Against Bosnia as It Did Ethnic Russians Against Ukraine," Jamestown Foundation, April 19, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-using-serbs-against-bosnia-as-it-did-ethnic-russians-against-ukraine/>; Vera Mironova, Bogdan Zawadewicz, "Putin Is Building a Bosnian Paramilitary Force," *Foreign Policy*, August 8, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/08/putin-is-building-a-bosnian-paramilitary-force/>; "Keeping the Balkans Out of Putin's Grasp," *Bloomberg*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-12-20/the-balkans-progress-and-russian-interference> (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).



30 "The Immortal Regiment march in New York," YouTube, May 9, 2018 <https://youtu.be/VHoOetcm0Vo> (Retrieved on January 10, 2019).

31 Official website of the Russian Youth of America (in Russian: «Российская молодежь Америки») <http://russianyouthofamerica.org/> (Retrieved on January 10, 2019).

32 Ozero (Lake) is the dacha cooperative in the countryside near Saint-Petersburg. It was founded in 1996 by Vladimir Putin's inner circle; all of these people have become extremely wealthy and powerful.



Founder of the international investment fund Marshall Capital Partners, Konstantin Malofeev chairs the board of directors of the Tsargrad media group; he is also Chairman of the St. Basil the Great Charitable Foundation. Photo: open sources.

Konstantin Malofeev, a Russian oligarch who has been exposed in the Western media as a supporter of the Europe’s ultranationalist movements, and Vladimir Yakunin are the key pro-Kremlin Orthodox philanthropists who fund several initiatives connected to the Russian Orthodox Church. They also lead special foundations seeking to spread Russian Orthodox values, such as the Center of the National Glory of Russia and the St. Basil the Great Foundation.

An OCCRP report<sup>36</sup> published in July 2018 named another Russian oligarch who sponsored riots in Macedonia (echoing similar developments in the

36 Saska Cvetkovska, “Russian Businessman Behind Unrest in Macedonia,” OCCRP, July 16, 2018, <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/8329-russian-businessman-behind-unrest-in-macedonia> (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).

Balkans and Poland),<sup>37</sup>—Ivan Savvidi, a former member of the Russian State Duma now residing in Greece. Savvidi donated over 300,000 euros to organizations opposed to renaming of the country that would qualify it for NATO membership.

The cases of Yakunin, Malofeev and others raise the question of how these activities are coordinated, especially since many of them appear to be organized locally. These individuals are integral to Putin’s regime and owe their fortunes to the personal relationship with Putin. They still enjoy the support of the regime and cooperate with the regime authorities. Their ability to establish these organizations underscores the Kremlin’s confidence in them and their key position within the regime.

The official strategy of the Russian third sector is described by the Civic Chamber as “action-oriented patriotism.” But in today’s Russia, the term “patriotism” has come to denote full support of the regime, which is why nonprofit organizations do not necessarily pursue independent policies but instead promote those of the regime.

Despite the many different forms that NGOs take in Russia, most of them pursue activities in three areas. They are:

- Advancing propaganda in cooperation with media outlets and troll-networks;
- Facilitating the kleptocracy network;
- Supporting Russian intelligence operations.

37 For details, see: Christo Grozev, “The Kremlin’s Balkan Gambit: Part 1,” *Bellingcat*, March 4, 2017, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/04/kremlins-balkan-gambit-part/>; Christo Grozev, “Balkan Gambit, Part 2: The Montenegro Zugzwang,” *Bellingcat*, March 25, 2017, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/25/balkan-gambit-part-2-montenegro-zugzwang/>; “Kremlin Octopus: Part III: How GRU Used the Serbians for a Coup in Montenegro and the War in Ukraine,” *The Insider*, July 26, 2018, <https://theins.ru/uncategorized/111402?lang=en> (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).

## PROPAGANDA

The pro-Kremlin NGOs play a key role in developing and promoting the Kremlin's view of the world, which is consequently integrated into its propaganda both inside and outside of the country:

1. They supplant genuinely independent NGOs by imitating their activities, such as fundraising and crowdfunding. The Russian election watchdog Golos has recently published a report on pseudo-NGOs' activities during the 2018 presidential elections,<sup>38</sup> which documents how such NGOs volunteered for Putin's campaign, presented themselves as independent election monitoring organizations, and reported that the election was free and fair.
2. They promote and amplify government narratives, diverting attention away from issues that may be damaging to the Putin regime. When it comes to human rights issues, pro-Kremlin NGOs are particularly harmful as they erode human rights norms. They have even begun to accuse human rights activists of violations. In Russia, there are several very outspoken pseudo-human rights activists like Anton Tsvetkov, who regularly defends law enforcement officers in cases against genuine Russian activists, and Alexander Brod, who consistently questions genuine activists' charges against authorities. Both frequently appear on the state television as "representatives of the civil society."
3. They promote and defend policies of the Russian government, openly and covertly. Such NGOs make the "correct" statements, send the "right" experts to international conferences and discussions, network with foreign politicians and academics, and create pro-Kremlin expert communities. The goal is to use these networks to criticize the European Union and the United States and undermine transatlantic cooperation. (For more details, see the OSCE meetings section on this report).
4. They exploit and misuse democratic procedures thereby discrediting them, creating confusion and undermining the credibility of democratic institutions and values, corrupting norms in international institutions, supporting political extremists and populists with anti-establishment and anti-immigrant ideas. Pro-Kremlin NGOs support political extremists and populists with anti-establishment and anti-immigrant ideas.

## KLEPTOCRACY

1. Pro-Kremlin NGOs are active in Russia's kleptocracy network. They help fund regime insiders and recruit the support of outsiders. The well-known case of Azerbaijan's corrupt ties to several European politicians in the Council of Europe shows how pseudo-NGOs can be used to organize events, pay for sham contracts, fund and attract supporters.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Russian authoritarian NGOs are engaged in similar activities.
2. They help white-wash reputation and launder assets of the regime insiders in Europe and in the U.S. Vladimir Yakunin's attempts to establish himself as an enlightened philanthropist and scholar central to the European discourse, is a perfect example.
3. Pro-Kremlin NGOs employ key figures loyal to the Kremlin and their relatives, giving them payroll, status, and influence inside and outside of the regime. This practice is also a form of honorable retirement. The Martens Center and the Chatham House have documented multiple former or current Russian dignitaries and members of the United Russia party who had been given management positions in the pro-Kremlin NGOs or seats on their trustee boards. Konstantin Kosachev, a senator and former head of the Rossotrudnichestvo, now holds posts at four Russian organizations that are openly GONGOs: the Foundation for Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad, The Gorchakov Fund, the World Association of the Russian Press (WARP), and the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Russia's current Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov is a member of the trustee boards of three of these GONGOs (with the exception of WARP); he also has a seat at the trustee board of Russkiy Mir. The Russian Peace Foundation is headed by Leonid Slutsky, who chairs the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs. Many of Russia's top businessmen are also board members of these organizations — a position that often requires donations to these GONGOs.

38 "The Smoke Screen: How Pseudo-activists Imitate Citizen Participation in Elections" (in Russian: «Дымовая завеса: Как псевдообщественники симулируют гражданское участие в выборах»), Golos, February 22, 2018. <https://www.golosinfo.org/ru/articles/142503> (Retrieved on December 27, 2018).

39 Katarina Sabados, "Council of Europe Releases Report on Azerbaijan Corruption," OCCRP, April 23, 2018. <https://www.occrp.org/en/27-ccwatch/cc-watch-briefs/7987-council-of-europe-releases-report-on-azerbaijan-corruption> (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).

## INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES

Beyond monitoring and reporting on Russian diaspora worldwide, activities of the pro-Kremlin NGOs include:

**1. Community organizing.** The idea is to offer assistance in order to establish control over communities and inhibit their independent political activity. Kremlin-sponsored youth movement *Nashi* was a key example; today, however, The Youth Army has replaced *Nashi* and continues to coordinate youth activists, organize their events and promote pro-government views. Another example is a strong volunteer movement that emerged in Russia after a devastating flood in Russia's southern city of Krymsk in 2012.<sup>40</sup> The government noticed this trend and, in response, went on to set up its own volunteer organizations and take control over the independent movement.

**2. Supporting paramilitary and veteran organizations in Russia.** These groups have become more active following the surge of patriotic sentiment in Russia after annexation of Crimea and the onset of the Donbass operation in Eastern Ukraine. They participated in recruitment campaigns to send Russian volunteers to fight in Donbass and, later, in Syria. Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who oversees Wagner private military group, and Konstantin Malofeev, among several others, are the key figures involved in these activities in cooperation with Russian security services.

**3. Supporting paramilitary groups and hate groups in the CIS, Eastern Europe, the Baltics, and the Balkan States.** For example, last year, before elections in Bosnia, Vladimir Putin held a meeting in Moscow with Bosnian Serb nationalist leader Milorad Dodik. In Serbia, the Kremlin created a "humanitarian-relief center," but the United States warns it is cover for an espionage operation. It has also been reported that the Russian hacking group Fancy Bear attempted a cyberattack against Montenegro's defense ministry.<sup>41</sup>

## CASE STUDY: RUSSIAN NGOS AT THE OSCE MEETINGS

**Pro-Kremlin NGOs do not only operate within Russia or target specific countries, but they also infiltrate international organizations and participate in international events, where they push political narratives that benefit the Kremlin, act as the regime proxies allowing the Russian government to claim "plausible deniability" and to obstruct and pollute the debate by introducing "noise"—meaningless issues and unproductive initiatives. Thus, they steal value from such events and undermine the efforts of international, national, regional, and local civil society groups.**

The influence of pro-Kremlin NGOs on international institutions is analyzed in the case study of the activities of such NGOs at the OSCE's Human Dimension Implementation Meetings. The lists of participants in these high-profile human rights meetings are particularly illustrative, as they provide details on which organizations are of the Russian origin and which ones strongly steer toward pro-Kremlin narratives (e.g. NGOs focused on the issues of Novorossiia—the Kremlin-sponsored, but now-abandoned separatist project in Eastern Ukraine—which emerged in 2014; or NGOs representing the Russian minority in the Baltic states, most of which emerged simultaneously in 2012) and how the numbers changed from 2006 to 2017.

The following characteristics help identify pro-Kremlin NGOs:

**1. State funding:** If an NGO receives government grants and contracts, it could be pro-Kremlin. This provision alone is not exhaustive, however, as there are several independent Russian NGOs that received government grants. The key differentiator is the NGO's capability to attract funds from other, nongovernmental sources. Another indicator pointing to pro-Kremlin NGOs is their lack of transparency because all NGOs are required by law to publish their financial reports. In fact, failure to comply gives the Ministry of Justice a legal reason to shut down such an organization.

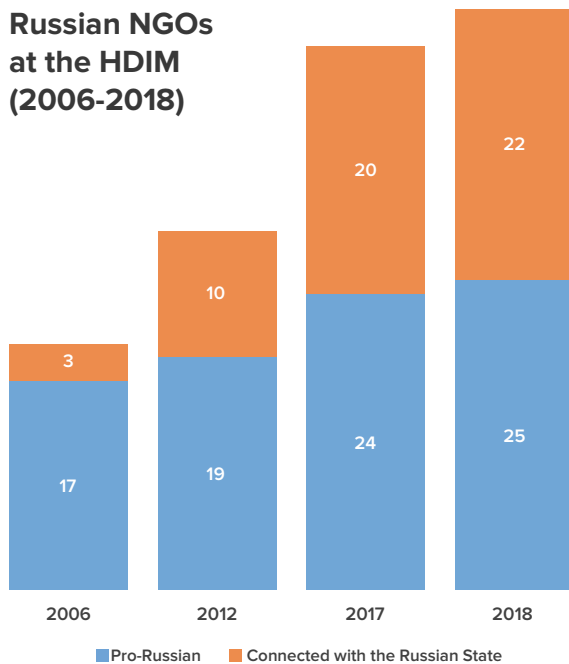
40 "Witness: Without Volunteers Krymsk Would Not Have Been Saved" (in Russian: «Очевидец: без волонтеров Крымск бы не спасли»), TASS, July 6, 2017 <https://tass.ru/v-strane/4391433> (Retrieved on January 10, 2018).

41 "Keeping the Balkans Out of Putin's Grasp," *Bloomberg*, December 20, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-12-20/the-balkans-progress-and-russian-interference> (Retrieved on January 11, 2018).

**2. Promoted ideas:** An NGO is considered pro-Kremlin if it participates in events initiated by officials or supported by the government, propagates anti-liberal and anti-Western views, promotes traditional values, supports the approach to history pushed by the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, and participates in election observation organized by Russia's Central Election Committee.

**3. Connections to the authorities and Putin's inner circle.** Sergey Roldugin's Talent and Success Foundation is the best example showcasing the importance of such connections. But there are many more. The "For Fair Elections" movement enjoys the Kremlin's financial support not in the least because the chairman of its board is Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. In an ironic twist, a company called "Granat," controlled by Vladimir Putin's close friend, billionaire Arkady Rotenberg, has recently secured a government contract for 46 million rubles (\$687,500) with the Civic Chamber to organize events aimed at the development of the civil society institutions, public control, and fighting against corruption.<sup>42</sup>

The graph below shows the growth of the number of pro-Kremlin NGOs at the OSCE meetings:



42 "Rotenberg's company won a 46 million RUB contract to organize anticorruption forums" (in Russian: «Компания Ротенберга заключила контракт на 46 млн RUB на организацию антикоррупционных форумов»), *Znak*, January 11, 2019 [https://www.znak.com/2019-01-11/kompaniya\\_rotenberga\\_zaklyuchila\\_kontakt\\_na\\_46 mln\\_na\\_organizaciyu\\_antikorrupcionnyh\\_forumov](https://www.znak.com/2019-01-11/kompaniya_rotenberga_zaklyuchila_kontakt_na_46 mln_na_organizaciyu_antikorrupcionnyh_forumov) (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).



Former head of the Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin currently chairs the Supervisory Board of the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute. Photo: Yury Golovin (open sources).

In 2006, there were 20 Russian and pro-Russian NGOs out of the total number of 324 third sector representatives among all the OSCE members. Three out of these 20 organizations were affiliated with the Russian government. It is remarkable that there were no organizations from the Baltics or from the CIS countries that would support pro-Kremlin agenda.

The picture is different in 2012: several Baltic-based NGOs that promoted pro-Russian and anti-fascist ideas emerged at the OSCE meetings.<sup>43</sup> Twenty-nine out of the total 410 NGOs, registered for the OSCE meetings, pursued the pro-Kremlin agenda, and ten of them were pro-Kremlin in their support of the Kremlin narratives.

In 2016, the number of the registered NGOs was at 495. Forty-eight were linked to the Kremlin (in 2015, there were 45 out of 514). In 2017, the total number decreased to 447. Forty-four, or ten percent, can be considered

43 Alexandra Yelkina, "Russian-language NGOs in the Baltics: human rights defenders or the Kremlin's agents?" (in Russian: «Русскоязычные НКО в странах Балтии: правозащитники или агенты Кремля?»), *Deutsche Welle*, January 12, 2015. <https://p.dw.com/p/1HEeJ> (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).

Name, official website	Associates	State funding	Activities and agenda	Year
Historical Memory Foundation <a href="http://www.historyfoundation.ru">http://www.historyfoundation.ru</a>	Alexander Diukov, Denis Fomin-Nilov Alexandra Orlova Roman Smagin Sergey Zhuravlev	No official reports	Participation in the official meetings of the State Duma, Presidential Administration and various state councils. Publications of articles, reports, books. Organization of conferences. Views: Supporting annexation of Crimea; accusing Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States of fascism	2008
All-Russian Parents Resistance <a href="http://www.rvs.su">http://www.rvs.su</a>	Zhanna Tachmamedova	\$150,000 in presidential grants in 2015-2017	Organizing advocacy campaigns in support of traditional family and against juvenile law. Views: anti-Western, anti-American, anti-liberal. Connected to Sergey Kurginyan, founder and leader of the Russian nationalist movement Essence of Time. Alexander Kudryavtsev, who chairs the organization's Council, previously worked in the Ministry of Justice and at the Presidential Domestic Policy Directorate.	2013
All-Russian Public Organization "Russian Association of Protection of Religious Freedom" (RARF) <a href="http://www.religsvoboda.ru">http://www.religsvoboda.ru</a>	Oleg Goncharov	\$150,000 from the state budget in 2016	Producing monitoring briefs, research and policy papers; running advocacy campaigns. Views: supporting traditional values, anti-Ukraine stance.	2014
Center for Social-Political Studies "Russian Baltika" <a href="http://www.rubaltic.wordpress.com/about/центр-общественно-политических-иссл/">http://www.rubaltic.wordpress.com/about/центр-общественно-политических-иссл/</a>	Oleg Filonov Andrejs Starikovs	\$104,000 in presidential grants in 2014-2016 (no official reports)	Conducting research, organizing summer schools for the media, holding conferences and roundtables on the issues of the Russian-speaking community in the Baltic states.	2006
Centre for Research and Protection of Fundamental Rights <a href="http://www.pravovojcentr.lt">http://www.pravovojcentr.lt</a>	Shifo Rakhimbekova	no official reports	Organizing conferences for the Russian diaspora in Lithuania, supporting diaspora issues in Lithuania. Has ties with Rossotrudnichestvo and the Russian embassy in Lithuania. Receives grants (stipendiiums) from the Moscow mayor. In 2015, Lithuania's state security agency mentioned the Center in its report calling it Russia's influence agent and a threat to the Lithuanian national security.	2013
Commonwealth of the Independent States—Elections Monitoring Organization (CIS-EMO) <a href="http://www.cis-emo.net">http://www.cis-emo.net</a>	Alexey Semenov	\$120,000 in presidential grants in 2015-2017	State-controlled organization focusing on election observation. The Kremlin's alternative to the observers of OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.	2003

For Fair Elections <a href="http://www.komitet2005.ru">http://www.komitet2005.ru</a>	Olga Loseva	no official reports; claims no foreign funding	Created with the support of Russia's Central Election Committee. No reported activities, official website reprints official news. Linked to Russian politician Nikolay Gonchar of the United Russia's Moscow branch.	2006
Fund for Legal Support and Protection of Compatriots' Rights Abroad <a href="http://www.pravfond.ru">http://www.pravfond.ru</a>	Vladimir Ivanov Victor Demin	\$10,000,000 from the state budget in 2013-2017	Grant-making organization; supports the Kremlin's agenda and works with the Russian diaspora in various countries. Views: criticizes the West, promotes the Kremlin.	2012
Information Group on Crimes Against the Person (IGCP) <a href="http://igcp.eu">http://igcp.eu</a>	Maksim Vilkov	no official reports; official status unknown	Producing monitoring briefs and reports, active in social media. Links to "Historical Memory" Foundation (see above).	
International Byzantine Institute <a href="https://byzantclub.world/el/">https://byzantclub.world/el/</a>	Sergey Lakovksy	no official reports	Supports the idea of an Imperial Russia. Associated with Sergey Markov, member of the Civic Chamber, and nationalist politician Sergey Baburin, former leader of the Rodina party.	2016
International Platform "Global Rights of Peaceful People" (Hungary)	Sergiy Markhel	no official reports	Organizes exhibitions in Europe the issues of what it calls the "humanitarian tragedy in Donbass," holds rallies in Europe, promotes The Immortal Regiment movement. Views: supports the Novorossiya project, as well as anti-NATO platforms.	2014
International Public Foundation "Russian Peace Foundation" (RPF) <a href="http://www.peacefond.ru">http://www.peacefond.ru</a>	Anatoly Salutskiy	No official reports. Several regional branches (separate entities) received around \$164,000 in 2014-2017. According to activity reports, RPF spent over \$2,500,000 in 2016.	Former Soviet Fund for Peace. Provides grants, humanitarian support; organizes competitions, conferences, festivals, and exhibitions; funds trips for the youth. The elected chair of the RPF Board is Leonid Slutsky, who also chairs the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs.	1961
Latvian Human Rights Committee <a href="http://www.lhrc.lv/">http://www.lhrc.lv/</a>	Mr. Aleksandrs Kuzmins	No official reports	Supporting minority rights, persons' legal status and housing rights. Connected to Rossotrudichestvo and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.	1992
Legal Information Centre for Human Rights <a href="http://www.lichr.ee">http://www.lichr.ee</a>	Larissa Semjonova	No official reports	Associated with Rossotrudichestvo and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.	1994
The Commonwealth of Journalists <a href="http://mediacongress.ru">http://mediacongress.ru</a>	Ashot Dzazoyan	No official reports	Holding forums, competitions, and festivals for journalists. Office located in the headquarters of the Rossiya Segodnya, a news agency owned and operated by the Russian government.	2013

Russian Association for International Cooperation <a href="http://rams-international.ru">http://rams-international.ru</a>	Georgy Muradov Leonid Mironov	No official reports	Georgy Muradov, deputy head of the Association, previously worked as a deputy head of Rossotrudnichestvo.	1992
Russian Public Institute of Electoral Law (ROIIP) <a href="http://www.roiip.ru">http://www.roiip.ru</a>	Igor Borisov Alexander Ignatov Elizaveta Borisova	No official reports	Associated with the United Russia party, Russia's Central Election Committee, and CIS-EMO (see above).	1999
Russian Union of Journalists (RUJ) <a href="http://www.ruj.ru">http://www.ruj.ru</a>	Andrei Trofimov	No official reports	Head of the Russian Union of Journalists Vladimir Solovyev (since 2017) is a TV anchor and a well-known Kremlin propagandist.	1992
World Russian People's Council <a href="http://www.vrns.ru">http://www.vrns.ru</a>	Marine Voskanyan	No official reports	Associated with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.	1993

pro-Kremlin (including NGOs from the CIS countries, Donbass, and the Baltic states). Twenty, or almost half of them, are linked to the Russian government.

The percentage of the Russian NGOs at the OSCE meetings has doubled over ten years, while the structure of those affiliated with the Russian state has changed dramatically.

Below is the list of the NGOs identified as affiliated with the Russian state based on the official information about the OSCE's 2017 HDIM.<sup>44</sup> (Excluded is the Russian Orthodox Church, whose representatives also attended the meeting; however, it is noteworthy that today, this institution is strongly linked to the Russian state).

This table shows some of the components of the Russian foreign policy: support for the Russian diaspora and the Orthodox believers, control over election observation, promotion of the imperialistic views among separatist groups in Ukraine.

Just to compare, the list of pro-Kremlin representatives at the OSCE's 2006 HDIM (again, excluding the Russian Orthodox Church), had only two entries, as seen below:

- Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, Alexander Brod, <http://pravorf.org>,<sup>45</sup>
- Russian Institute of Electoral Law, Igor Borisov, <http://www.roiip.ru>.

44 Some information in the OSCE list (e.g. website links) has been updated for clarity and to reflect the current status-quo.

45 The link is currently unavailable (removed by the original source).

## GONGOS' IMPACT

The impact of GONGOs has been analyzed by the former U.S. ambassador to the OSCE Daniel B. Baer, who provides the following examples of the ways the pro-Kremlin NGOs can obstruct the work of OSCE's human rights sessions:<sup>46</sup>

- "By flooding HDIM plenary sessions with GONGOs, the amount of time given to real civil society organizations is reduced;"
- By the passionate performance "reduce the impact and resonance of the compelling, fact-based testimonials shared by groups and organizations being repressed by their governments;"
- "Booking side event rooms solely to prevent others from having a space to hold their own events;"
- "...abuse question-and-answer periods to make lengthy, aggressive, and often loud statements in support of their governments' views, again eating up time and space for dialogue;"
- "...consume all of the food and drink, and leave before the real conversation starts;"
- "GONGOs masquerading as bona fide civil society organizations frequently team up with repressive governments' state-controlled media."

46 Baer uses the term "GONGO" in a broader sense than is stipulated in this report.

## DEALING WITH KREMLIN'S NGOS

**Pro-government NGOs in the authoritarian regimes are learning how to mimic independent NGOs and how to manipulate democratic procedures. They are becoming more difficult to distinguish from bona-fide NGOs. Various experts, journalists and NGOs employees interviewed as part of this research agree: pseudo-NGOs fear public exposure and mostly prefer to operate in the shadows, obscuring information about their founders, funding sources, and their real goals. The key advice offered to the author of this report by the members of independent NGOs is not to prevent pseudo-NGOs from participating in international events. Such obstruction would cause domestic retaliation, e.g. dividing NGOs into the “right” and “wrong” groups, and, as a result, independent NGOs that actually challenge authoritarian governments, can be prevented from participating in international events.**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Public exposure is an effective strategy in dealing with pseudo-NGOs. It is key to making real NGOs more known, as well as to uncover those that are affiliated with Putin's oligarchs and officials. Transparency of history, founders, and funding sources of such structures as Vladimir Yakunin's Dialogue of Civilizations matters, and it should matter in particular for the academic community.
- Fact-checking is another method of dealing with pseudo-NGOs, which is similar to countering propaganda in the media and on the internet. It is important to distinguish the statements of real independent NGOs from false statements of quasi-nonprofit organizations. Fact-checking and information support in sharing the real issues would be helpful.
- Smarter structuring of the international meetings and events is yet another strategy that will prevent authoritarian NGOs from exploiting democratic procedures.
- Cooperation between genuine, independent NGOs and active involvement of the staff of international organizations and institutions constitute the fourth helpful strategy.
- Developing “a rating system for NGOs,” similar to credit rating agencies in the financial sphere, is a strategy suggested by Moisés Naím, former editor of the *Foreign Policy* magazine.<sup>47</sup> It can be a database of pseudo-NGOs, which independent NGOs, donors, and international institutions can update. To start, the database should include the list of quasi-NGOs already identified in this report and by other respected think tanks and institutions.

### CONCLUDING NOTES

This report presented the pro-Kremlin NGOs as a solid, albeit living and mutating, system. However, the degree of the Kremlin's control over this system is unclear, especially when it comes to understanding the activities of people like Vladimir Yakunin or Konstantin Malofeev. They are members of the regime, part of the system. But could they act independently? If so, to what extent?

Let's take, for example, Public Initiative “Creative Diplomacy” (PICREADI), a Russian NGO that publicly and actively asserts its independence online. This is how they describe themselves:

*“PICREADI is one of the leading Russian organizations on public diplomacy. In 2017, it was mentioned among five important Russian soft power agencies in a study commissioned by the British Council from the University of Edinburgh. PICREADI positions itself between academic research center and grass-roots organization in the field of Russia's public diplomacy system. We raise awareness about challenges and opportunities for our country's public diplomacy and do our best to make it better. Additionally, PICREADI is an intellectual platform promoting annual face-to-face debates among prominent experts and emerging voices in Russian foreign policy community. We also teach public diplomacy and organize training programs.”<sup>48</sup>*

47 Moisés Naím, “What Is a GONGO?,” *Foreign Policy*, October 13, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/13/what-is-a-gongo/> (Retrieved on January 11, 2019).

48 Official website of the Public Initiative “Creative Diplomacy” <http://www.picreadi.com/about/> (Retrieved on January 10, 2018).





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