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The School of Russian and Asian Studies (SRAS) is a team of consultants and advisers dedicated to education and educational opportunities in Russia and Eurasia. They have studied within the Russian educational system and have worked closely with institutions for several years to identify programs of interest and value to international students. More information about SRAS is available at www.sras.org.

VESTNIK produced twice yearly and is available for free in HTML and PDF formats at www.sras.org/vestnik.

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Cooperative Ventures of Russian Civil Society:

Three Case Studies from the Memorial Human Rights Group

by Michael Zeller

Democracy – in particular, a healthy liberal democracy – also requires a public that is organized for democracy, socialized to its norms and values, and committed not just to its myriad narrow interests but to larger, common, ‘civic,’ ends. Such a civic public is only possible with a vibrant ‘civil society.’[1]

- Larry Diamond, *Developing democracy: toward consolidation*

Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, two of the preeminent authorities of political sociology, define civil society as “that arena of the polity where self-organizing and relatively autonomous groups, movements, and individuals attempt to articulate values, to create associations and solidarities, and to advance their interests.” [2] The success of these entities in advancing their interests often depends upon their ability to advance those aims in the aggregate, cooperating with other civil society groups and amassing a maximum amount of support.

Before a basis for support can be established, a clear understanding of a civil society group’s goals must exist. Memorial International Historical-Enlightenment, Human Rights and Humanitarian Society was officially [3] founded on April 19, 1992. [4] The group’s avowed “primary missions,” as listed in the group Charter, are:

- To promote mature civil society and democracy based on the rule of law and thus to prevent a return to totalitarianism;
- To assist formation of public consciousness based on the values of democracy and law, to get rid of totalitarian patterns, and to establish firmly human rights in practical politics and in public life;
- To promote the truth about the historical past and perpetuate the memory of the victims of political repression exercised by totalitarian regimes. [5]

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In examining how Memorial pursues these objectives through maneuvering within the sphere of civil society, this paper will examine three cases of Memorial's encounters with other entities: the Sakharov Archives, the National Security Archives at George Washington University (Washington D.C.), and "For Fair Elections." The final mission, focused on promoting an agenda of historical awareness, most centrally pertains to the cases of Memorial's work with the Sakharov Archives (Moscow) and with the National Security Archives at George Washington University (Washington, D.C.). However, it must be stated that Memorial's missions are not intrinsically proactive precepts. Indeed, Memorial occasionally expresses its pursuit of the primary missions by refusing cooperation or collaboration with a given group. Thus, the third case presented in this paper explores a refusal to collaborate, wherein Memorial confronts the option of working with the civil movement known as "For Fair Elections," which arose in Moscow after widespread electoral falsification in the December 4, 2011 parliamentary elections.

Case Study I: The Sakharov Archives and Public Center (Moscow)

The Sakharov Archives and Public Center is an organization dedicated to preserving the legacy of the well-known Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov; this includes archiving documents pertaining to his life and works, advancing his ideals (nuclear disarmament, human rights, a free and democratic Russia, etc.), and promoting awareness of Sakharov and his legacy as one of the foremost dissidents of the late Soviet era.

Given their spheres of interest, Memorial and the Sakharov office obviously have overlapping, often competing (in the case of grants and finite resources) pursuits and activities. However, while their rivalry for a limited number of grants and funding opportunities separates them, their intersecting pursuit of archival materials links them within a specialized sector of civil society. This alone would be cause enough for frequent cooperation, but there are deeper connections that account for the close collaboration of these entities.

Memorial's inception came amidst the flurry of activity during perestroika. As ought to be expected of the dynamic Andrei Sakharov, he lent his weight to Memorial's aims by supporting the burgeoning movement's proposal to erect a memorial to the victims of Josef Stalin's reign, successfully securing the placement of a simple monument in Lubyanka Square in Moscow late in 1990. Furthermore, the Sakharov Center's first director—Yury Samodurov—and present director—Sergei Lukashevsky—were both involved with Memorial: Samodurov was one of its most recognizable members during Memorial's perestroika phase, and Lukashevsky worked on Memorial's "History of Soviet Dissidents" project in the early 1990s. Thus, it is not surprising that Memorial now works closely with Lukashevsky and the Sakharov Center both for their common cause and as a continuation of their history of intertwined activities and personnel. These personal connections form the basis of Memorial's fluid collaboration with the Sakharov Archives and Public Center.

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When asked about the nature and means of Memorial's work with the Sakharov Archives and Center, Alexei Makarov, an employee of Memorial since 2008, said that:

(The) Sakharov Archives has repeatedly provided copies of documents we needed and answered all our questions when we, for example, needed to know something related to Sakharov. In turn, we also regularly provide them with documents for their exhibitions and answer their questions.[6]

This sort of document and academic information exchange constitutes the bulk of Memorial's work with the Sakharov office. However, the archival sections do periodically host joint exhibitions; for example, as Mr. Makarov pointed out, "a large combined show of 'Samizdat' materials a few years ago." [7] While the two organizations are "rivals" for archival materials of some dissidents, Mr. Makarov insisted that the personal relationships between employees of Memorial and the Sakharov office do much to pacify any possible tensions.

Mr. Makarov explained further that Memorial has no single employee or department that deals with the Sakharov office, but rather "contact with the Sakharov Center is done by whichever employee has a request." [8] Thus, ad hoc connections occur on many levels of each organization instead of activity flowing through a liaison office. Consequently, there is no coordinated scheme of collaboration between Memorial and the Sakharov office, but neither does the possibility exist of urgent activity getting delayed by passing through a fixed structure as might occur in more limited civil society partnerships.

Finally, when asked whether the Russian government has any role in monitoring Memorial's work with the Sakharov office, encouraging or discouraging such cooperative exchanges, etc., Mr. Makarov said, "thank God that the government does not interfere with Memorial's relationship with other organizations and affects them in no way." [9] His apparent fear is that the involvement of the Russian government is always detrimental to the healthy functioning of Russian civil society. Undoubtedly, were a threat perceived by the authorities in Memorial's work with the Sakharov office, restrictions and exorbitant bureaucratic requirements could be levied upon organizations wishing to engage in joint ventures. It is such a possibility that Mr. Makarov and the workers of Memorial desperately hope to avoid.

Case Study II: National Security Archives, George Washington University (D.C.)

The National Security Archives is a non-governmental institution that stores a wide range of U.S. government documents, including many documents pertaining to U.S. foreign policy, in order to provide a resource for academic research and investigative journalism. Svetlana Savranskaya, a research fellow at the National Security Archives, created the connection with Memorial for the establishment of a Russian-American joint

archival resource. Having studied the human rights aspect of President Carter's foreign policy[10] (a significant aspect of Soviet dissident studies since his focus on human rights led him to communicate directly with several prominent dissidents), she reached out to Memorial as a potential partner to the National Security Archives. With assistance from Tatyana Bakhmina and Alexei Makarov of Memorial, the "American President Jimmy Carter and Human Rights in the USSR"[11] project was started.

This joint initiative grapples with a number of special issues. Unlike Memorial's work with the Sakharov office (which is facilitated by both organizations having offices in Moscow), the geographic distance separating the National Security Archives from Memorial does not allow for regular personal exchanges. Thus, communication between the National Security Archives and Memorial offices is conducted almost wholly online and, for ease of coordination, is channeled through Savranskaya's office in Washington and either Bakhmina's or Makarov's in the Moscow office of Memorial.

Furthermore, the project requires a great deal of translation work. For their part, Memorial charged a team of international volunteers (coordinated by full-time Memorial employees Elena Guseva and Maria Shabanova) with the translation to Russian of the initial 189 documents from the Carter administration[12]. For further assistance, Memorial and the National Security Archives use the services offered by Translations for Progress, an organization that seeks to "facilitate communication within the global grass roots community and to create opportunities for language students and professionals to get involved in social issues." [13] Thus, this project merited the involvement of a third non-governmental organization, producing a multi-faceted symbiotic relationship where core interests of each respective group are satisfied: civil society functioning at its finest.

It must also be noted that this project is finite. While work is still underway and periodic updates will continue, this is a single, focused initiative, unlike the ongoing and extensive cooperation between Memorial and the Sakharov Center and Archives. Presumably, when all available and relevant materials are digitized and translated, work on this project will consist merely of maintenance of the online system. Nonetheless, should the goals or pursuits of Memorial and of the National Security Archives coincide again in the future, the established connection will likely provide means for further cooperation.

Case Study III: For Fair Elections Movement (Moscow)

The study of cooperation within civil society includes the observation of both positive and negative activity; that is, both the assent and denial of collaboration are important considerations. Amidst the tumultuous political environment of Moscow over the past half year, Memorial demonstrated this fact.

Before the Duma elections of 2011, opposition protest activity in Moscow and across Russia held at a steady rate. Sporadic demonstrations materialized, but the handfuls of protesters were generally outnumbered by journalists or spectators, themselves usually outnumbered by police officers. However, following the elections and the publication of a large amount of evidence purporting to show widespread electoral fraud, opposition activity and various efforts challenging the political and bureaucratic status quo in Russia intensified to a level not seen since the early 1990s. Successive protests by the For Fair Elections movement amassed hundreds of thousands of people in the center of Moscow. The efforts of this amalgamation of dissatisfied political and social interests, ranging from ardent Russian nationalists on the far right to socialists and communists on the left, received substantial national and international attention.

In the interest of forming the widest possible bloc of opposition forces, the For Fair Elections movement sought participation from all segments of Russia's opposition spectrum. Yet Memorial—an organization opposed, by virtue of their Charter's "primary missions," to the current Russian government's infringement of civil liberties, dubious legal practices, and intransigent efforts to rehabilitate the exultant historical understanding of Josef Stalin and the Soviet Union—refused to cooperate with the movement.

In a public statement entitled "About the Limits of Cooperation,"[14] Memorial rationalized its abstention from the tremendously popular movement. After acknowledging the laudable intent of the coalition, Memorial posed the seminal questions from the formulation of their decision:

Is it really possible to achieve [the prevention of election falsification, arbitrary application of the law, and protection of citizens' rights], by joining forces with those who call for violence, ethnic discrimination, and support of fascism and racism? Is this really possible to struggle for these ends with those who consider participation in legal forums, in "public areas" as a cover for clandestine activities?[15]

Memorial answered these questions with an emphatic "no." The statement went on to assert that Memorial's fundamental conceptions about the future of Russia and the role of civil society in progressing toward that future were diametrically opposed to the conceptions of various leaders and factions within the For Fair Elections movement. Indeed, three prominent rightist leaders—Konstantin Krylov, Vladimir Tor, and Natalia Kholmogorova—were mentioned in the statement[16] as advocating racist and fascist policies and condoning acts of violence in pursuit of their factions' ends. Indeed, nationalists were at the center of violent outbreaks during protests on May 6th and 7th, 2012.[17] As the statement indicated, such an incidence was one of the troubling possibilities that Memorial considered to be in conflict with its primary missions.

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The leaders cited in Memorial's statement issued stern responses.[18] Nonetheless, Memorial remained conspicuously absent from the operations of the For Fair Elections movement. Its refusal to collaborate with groups representing interests hostile to its own—even when some objectives are shared—demonstrates that Memorial's pursuit of its ends is weighted equally with the methods through which those ends are sought.

Analysis

Memorial exemplifies the comportment of an organization governed by rational self-interest. That is, its decisions on whether or not to collaborate with other entities of civil society are governed by its determination of the option most aligned with the primary objectives of its charter. The details of the preceding cases bear out this prevailing philosophy.

Memorial's relationship with the Sakharov Center and Archives is remarkably close. This thorough and intimate affiliation is explained by the alignment of their purposes. The homepage of the Sakharov Center lists the organization's missions:

- To contribute to the preservation of the historic memory of tens of millions of victims of the political repressions and crimes of the Soviet regime.
- To contribute to the establishment of the values of an open democratic society and state in today's Russia, as advocated and shared by Andrei Sakharov.

The intent of these objectives is exactly the same as that of Memorial's "primary missions." Indeed, the wording is nearly the same. Where the alignment of purposes is so close, where resources are readily shared, and where the personal connections are so extensive (an advantage none at Memorial hesitate to mention), one cannot wonder at the character of Memorial's association with the Sakharov Center and Archives.

However, such agreement and singularity of purpose does not appear common in civil society. Memorial's collaborative efforts are limited by the extent of the intersection of its interests with those of other groups. Thus, the joint initiative of Memorial and the National Security Archives, wherein the scope of the partnership is limited by their mutual interests, seems more the norm. Limited collaboration of this sort is evident in many of Memorial's partnerships, such as its work with Golos on election monitoring[19] or with Civic Assistance on refugee affairs.[20] This strict observance of the cross-section of interests characterizes Memorial's civil society affiliations.

The final case examined here displays the steadfastness of Memorial's staff in pursuing their organization's goals. Against the appeal of bandwagon activism, Memorial refused to take common cause with actors who, in the steering committee's estimation, would undermine Memorial's interests and the entirety of the project from within. The organization acted in strict adherence to many principles laid down in its Charter,

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perhaps none more explicitly than a clause of Article 6 Section 1, which declares membership in Memorial to be “incompatible with support for any form of totalitarianism as well as with promotion or practices of national, ethnic, religious or social intolerance.”[21]

Conclusion

The most basic element of a democratically-oriented political culture is an engaged citizenry. This encompasses a great number of characteristics, including: a belief in political efficacy, political awareness, and the expectation of both input to and output from the government. In other words, a “participant political culture”[22] is the typical culture of democracies. An entrenched notion of political efficacy is perhaps the most salient characteristic. Citizens freely engage in the political process and believe in their ability to affect change in government. This belief cultivates within its citizens trust in the symbiotic relationship between the government and its citizenry. This sort of participant political culture encompasses an important concept of civil competition, wherein political actors freely compete for influence, rather than wresting influence by means of manipulation or violence. Thus, the key element of a genuinely flourishing civil society is the ability for un-coerced popular influence to freely act within a pluralistic scene of governmental and non-governmental structures. As such, a successful civil society provides for not only one, but several poles of countervailing power and interest representation.

It is a matter of debate whether a vibrant civil society is an actual impetus to democratization. Arguably, a majority of political scientists, from Alexis de Tocqueville up to the recent work of scholars such as Robert Putnam, have held that a vigorous civil society is essential to democratization.[23] Thus, where a citizenry is confident in its ability to affect governmental change, the role of civil society in accruing public support and acting as an external pressure on the regime is of paramount importance. Memorial is just one actor in the larger scene of an increasingly democratic reform-minded Russian civil society. By continuing to act in its rational self-interest, the staff of Memorial aims to draw popular support to its standard of human rights and anti-authoritarianism. Yet the professed desire of much of Memorial’s staff to oppose the monopolization of Russian state is shared with many prominent entities within Russian civil society. Indeed, a core objective of its Charter is to “get rid of totalitarian powers,” of which power monopolization is certainly one. Ultimately, the ability of Memorial and other such organizations to deftly pursue their democratic agenda may serve as a determining factor in the future of Russian democracy.

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Footnotes

[1] Diamond, Larry J. *Developing democracy: toward consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999: 221.

[2] Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stepan. "Toward Consolidated Democracies." *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 15.

[3] Memorial's official founding came in 1992, but its genesis came in the middle of the 1980s from a small group of dissidents seeking to erect a memorial to the victims of Stalinist-era persecution.

[4] Memorial Human Rights Group. "THE CHARTER."
www.memo.ru/eng/about/charter.htm

[5] Ibid.

[6] Makarov, Aleksei. Interview and translation by author. Email interview. Moscow, April 2, 2012.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Memorial's Online Resource entitled "American President Jimmy Carter and Human Rights in the USSR" begins by stating that: "Carter was the thirty-ninth president of the United States of America, but the first to make the defense of human rights one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the American administration."

[11] Kuzovkin, Gennady. "An Electronic Historical Resource: 'American President Jimmy Carter and Human Rights in the USSR'." Memorial: History of Soviet Dissidents.
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[12] Ibid.

[13] "Main menu: Translations for Progress." Home: Translations for Progress.
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[14] Memorial Human Rights Group. "О границах сотрудничества. Заявление «Московского Мемориала»." Мемориал Правозащита. www.memo.ru/d/3148.html (accessed March 28, 2012).

[15] Ibid, translated by author.

[16] Ibid.

[17] On May 6, 2012 (the eve of Vladimir Putin's inauguration to a third term as Russian President) between 50,000 and 100,000 protesters assembled on Bolotnaya Square—an important rallying point for the For Fair Elections movement. After police canceled the sanctioned rally, clashes between demonstrators and riot officer broke out at the western edge of the square. Dozens were injured and several hundred were arrested. The following day, May 7th, intermittent altercations occurred throughout the day as small protests appeared in several Moscow neighborhoods.

[18] See: Krylov, Konstantin. "Открытое письмо редакции портала «Грани.ру»." АПН - Агентство Политических Новостей. <http://www.apn.ru/column/article25897.htm> (accessed April 26, 2012).

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[19] "Press Conference of Independent Observers." Memorial Human Rights Center. www.memo.ru/d/3320.html (accessed June 20, 2012).

[20] "Refugee Expulsion." Memorial Human Rights Center. www.memo.ru/2007/09/26/3/2609073eng.htm (accessed June 21, 2012).

[21] Memorial Human Rights Group. "The Charter..." Memorial. www.memo.ru/eng/about/charter.htm.

[22] For specific full explanation of Almond and Verba's "civic culture," reference: Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. *The civic culture: political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. [New ed. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1989.

[23] Reference: Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, and *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.