

# RUSSIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY PROSPECTS FOR ST. PETERSBURG

by

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Civil Society and Expanded Dialogue

The prospects for civil society involvement at this summer's G8 Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, has been an issue of great attention for both analysts and civil society groups. Since 1975, the institution's annual summits have evolved to include greater involvement and input from various civil society stakeholders including business, industry, environment, development, and human rights organizations.<sup>1</sup> Because 2006 marked the first time that the Russian government would assume the G8 presidency, it was unclear exactly what approach it would take toward continuing this trend. Concern especially arose among civil society groups in late 2005 and early 2006 when the Russian government announced a new law aimed at restricting the activities of NGOs operating within Russia's borders. It was unknown what effect this new law would have on NGOs seeking to be involved in dialogue and/or protest at the summit. There remain a number of questions regarding the effects of this new law on NGO activities in Russia outside of the summit context as well. Notwithstanding the controversy surrounding the NGO law more broadly, for the purposes of the Summit, the Russian government has taken significant steps toward including civil society groups in a dialogue regarding the Summit's major issues. This seems to suggest that both domestic and international NGOs will have opportunities to have their voices heard in St. Petersburg.

## Russian Initiatives

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### *Civil 8-2006*

The Russian government has undertaken a number of initiatives to ensure that civil society groups are included in discussions on the major issues of the 2006 summit. The most important of these initiatives is the 'Civil G8-2006' project, an initiative jointly undertaken by Ella Pamfilova, Chair of Russia's Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights, in consultation with representatives of major NGOs such as Greenpeace Russia, Social Contract National Project Institute, World Wildlife Fund Russia, Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, and the World Business Organization.<sup>2</sup> The project now has an advisory council of representatives from approximately 50 international NGOs.<sup>3</sup> The Civil G8-

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<sup>1</sup> Peter I. Hajnal, Civil Society at the Gleneagles Summit. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 17 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. [http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/scholar/hajnal\\_060309.html](http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/scholar/hajnal_060309.html).

<sup>2</sup> Dialogue of the Russian and World Community with the G8 within the Russian Federation's Presidency in 2006. G8 Information Centre (Toronto), 20 December 2005. Date of Access 15 January 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/civil8051220.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Civil G8 Advisory Council. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 9 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cg8-council.html>.

2006 project is designed to allow NGOs to make specific recommendations and to participate in an open dialogue with G8 leaders concerning the issues of the Summit.

The initiative has two major components. The first is a website, <http://en.civilg8.ru>, where news and information about the Summit, its major issues, and scheduled events can be accessed by civil society groups, and where those groups can offer their input via an online forum. The second major component of the Civil G8-2006 initiative is a series of conference-style forums where domestic and international NGOs are able to discuss Summit issues with and make recommendations to representatives ('sherpas') of each of the G8 governments.<sup>4</sup>

The first of these meetings was a 'round table' forum which took place in Moscow on 16 February 2006. Here, relatively small groups of experts on each of the three main 2006 Summit issues – energy security, infectious diseases, and education – converged to share ideas and make general recommendations that would be relayed to the G8 leaders.<sup>5</sup> A much larger NGO forum, entitled "International Civil Forum: 'The Contribution of Civil Society Institutions to the G8 2006 Agenda,'" took place from 9-10 March 2006, also in Moscow. Representatives from over 400 domestic and international organizations gathered in order to have their voices heard by representatives of each of the G8 leaders. Clear statements outlining recommendations on each of the three issues of the Summit agenda were made. Statements were also made on the issue of development in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Four more similar forums are scheduled – two prior to the Summit and two afterward. A meeting of select NGO representatives with sherpas occurred on 18-19 May and will be followed by another large international NGO forum closer to the date of the Summit, from 3-4 July. Following the Summit, an NGO round table on Africa will take place from 26-27 October, and a final NGO conference entitled "The Fulfillment of the G8 Summit Agenda in 2006," from 21-22 November will allow participating organizations to reflect on their success in having their perspectives acknowledged and addressed at the July Summit.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the impressive efforts made in coordinating the Civil G8 events, it remains to be seen exactly how much influence civil society groups will be able to have on the G8 leaders. While the Civil G8 initiative may allow civil society concerns to be voiced, there is no guarantee that the leaders will actually take them into consideration in their discussions and agreements.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, because the Civil G8 forum is being held more than a week earlier than the Summit and in Moscow as opposed to St. Petersburg, it is questionable how much of a direct impact participating groups will be able to have during the Summit itself. And, as G8 analyst Peter I. Hajnal notes, it is unclear at this point whether civil society groups will be granted any of the direct access to the leaders that they have seen at past summits.<sup>9</sup> But while some important questions remain about what the Civil G8-2006 initiative will be able to achieve substantively,

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<sup>4</sup> The personal representative appointed by each G8 leader to represent them in pre-Summit preparations and meetings. Dialogue of the Russian and World Community with the G8 within the Russian Federation's Presidency in 2006 – Press Release. G8 Information Centre (Toronto), 19 December 2005. Date of Access: 15 January 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/civil8051219.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Road to St. Petersburg: Civil G8. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 16 February 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/index.html#cg8060310>.

<sup>6</sup> Road to St. Petersburg: Civil G8. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 16 February 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/index.html#cg8060310>.

<sup>7</sup> Work Schedule. Civil G8-2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://en.civilg8.ru/actcivil/590.php>.

<sup>8</sup> Peter I. Hajnal, Expert Opinion. Civil G8-2006 (Moscow). Date of Access: 16 June 2006. <http://en.civilg8.ru/opinion/1612.php>.

<sup>9</sup> Peter I. Hajnal, Expert Opinion. Civil G8-2006 (Moscow). Date of Access: 16 June 2006. <http://en.civilg8.ru/opinion/1612.php>.

overall it has provided a vital opportunity for NGOs to network, organize, and ensure a level of involvement and influence in the Summit proceedings.

### ***Sherpa meetings***

Another important initiative that the Russian government has made to allow for civil society involvement is a series of meetings between the Russian G8 sherpa, Igor Shuvalov, and NGO stakeholders in each of the G8 countries. The first of these meetings was on 10 April 2006 in Ottawa, in which NGOs across Canada were able to participate and ask questions to Mr. Shuvalov via teleconference provided by the G8 Research Group.<sup>10</sup> From Ottawa, Mr. Shuvalov travelled to Washington, and then to Japan and Europe in order to meet with NGOs, as well as government officials, in each of the G8 countries.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Shuvalov's visits with NGOs around the world have provided an important opportunity for those organizations that may not have been able to attend the Civil G8 conferences in Moscow, to have their voices heard and concerns addressed in person by a representative of the Russian presidency. Once again, to what degree these discussions will be adequately communicated to and considered by the G8 leaders remains to be seen,<sup>12</sup> but they do provide an important starting point for wider civil society influence.

### ***The Junior 8 (J8)***

A final initiative worth mentioning is the renewal of the J8 or 'Junior 8' Global Citizenship Programme. First undertaken at the 2005 Gleneagles Summit, the J8 program presents an opportunity for youth aged 14-17 from each of the G8 countries to be involved in the G8 Summit by exploring the Summit issues and making their own recommendations to the G8 leaders.<sup>13</sup> The J8 Programme will take place for the second time at the St. Petersburg Summit, and while it does not represent the inclusion of civil society organizations as such, it does represent an effort to include important members of civil society whose voices are often not heard in the context of intergovernmental policy meetings – namely those of youth.

Thus, while questions remain about their ultimate efficacy, through these initiatives the Russian government has made an impressive effort to encourage civil society involvement in the 2006 Summit from a variety of individuals and groups.

## **NGOs in Russia**

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Because there is a large number of Russian organizations seeking participation at the St. Petersburg Summit, and because they are likely to seek engagement beyond the context of the Summit itself, an important element of the prospects for civil society involvement is the larger environment in which these organizations find themselves. Here there are conflicting tendencies. While civil society groups have experienced increased freedom and influence in Russia over the past 15 years, the Russian government has recently moved to apply new restrictions that could

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<sup>10</sup> Russia's and Canada's Objectives for the St. Petersburg Summit. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 10 April 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/speakers/g8outreach060410.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Russia to hold 64 international functions in 2006 – Russian sherpa. G8 Summit 2006 News (Moscow). 12 April 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://en.g8russia.ru/news/20060412/1147422.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Peter I. Hajnal, Expert Opinion. Civil G8-2006 (Moscow). Date of Access: 16 June 2006. <http://en.civilg8.ru/opinion/1612.php>.

<sup>13</sup> About J8. J8 Global Citizenship Programme. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.j8summit.com/AboutJ8/>.

hamper this trend. Indeed, this issue itself has potential to become a rallying point for local civil society groups at the 2006 Summit, who may use the spotlight of the event to draw international attention to this broader issue.<sup>14</sup>

A civil society movement has flourished in Russia since the fall of communism in 1991, with over 600,000 NGOs now in operation.<sup>15</sup> This explosive growth has been propelled by a combination of local independent community groups and international donor agencies, often working in tandem.<sup>16</sup> Many of the organizations operating in Russia are local branches of international organizations, such as Amnesty International, Charities Aid Foundation, and Greenpeace.<sup>17</sup> The plethora of NGOs at work in Russia is responsible for a variety of important civic functions including the provision of many social services, in addition to their roles in advocacy and activism.<sup>18</sup>

### *New Russian legislation on NGO activity*

By many accounts, the civil society movement that has flourished in Russia over the past decade and a half is at severe risk of being curtailed by new legislation introduced by the Russian government in late 2005 and passed in early 2006. In an effort to curb what it sees as a threat to Russia's national political stability, in light of the pro-democratic revolutions occurring in neighbouring post-Soviet countries, the Russian government under Vladimir Putin has introduced legislation designed to allow greater control and monitoring by the Kremlin, of NGO activities operating in Russia.<sup>19</sup> These measures are primarily aimed at stopping foreign governments (such as the United States, who donated over US\$45 million to Russian NGOs promoting democracy and civil rights in 2004 alone) and other cross-border actors from unduly influencing Russian domestic politics.<sup>20</sup> In this vein, the new legislation requires that all NGOs operating in Russia be exclusively Russian organizations, outlawing affiliates of foreign or international groups.<sup>21</sup> In addition, all groups operating in Russia will be legally required to register with the Kremlin, which will allow it to exercise greater control over the groups' activities.<sup>22</sup>

For the purposes of the Summit itself, it seems that most NGOs' concerns regarding this new legislation have been addressed, since so far they have been allowed substantial participation via the Civil G8-2006 initiative. Yet the broader implications for NGOs operating in Russia remain

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<sup>14</sup> Press Conference on Co-operation between Civil Society and the Group of Eight during Russia's Presidency. G8 Information Centre (Toronto), 20 December 2005. Access: 15 January 2006.

<http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cs051221.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Russian Civil Society Will Find It Harder To Breathe. YaleGlobal Online (New Haven), 8 December 2005. Date of Access: 8 January 2006. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=6607>.

<sup>16</sup> Julie Hemment, The Riddle of the Third Sector: Civil Society, International Aid, and NGOs in Russia. *Anthropological Quarterly* (Washington), Spring 2004, pp. 215-241.

<sup>17</sup> Moscow Organizations List. Civil Society International (Seattle). Date of Access: 8 January 2006.

<http://www.civilsoc.org/nisorgs/russwest/moscow/rwmoscow.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Julie Hemment, The Riddle of the Third Sector: Civil Society, International Aid, and NGOs in Russia. *Anthropological Quarterly* (Washington), Spring 2004, pp. 215-241.

<sup>19</sup> Russian Civil Society Will Find It Harder To Breathe. YaleGlobal Online (New Haven), 8 December 2005. Date of Access: 8 January 2006. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=6607>.

<sup>20</sup> Putin Defends Reigning In Private Groups. *The New York Times* (New York), 25 November 2005, p. A24.

<sup>21</sup> Russian Civil Society Will Find It Harder To Breathe. YaleGlobal Online (New Haven), 8 December 2005. Date of Access: 8 January 2006. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=6607>.

<sup>22</sup> Russian Civil Society Will Find It Harder To Breathe. YaleGlobal Online (New Haven), 8 December 2005. Date of Access: 8 January 2006. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=6607>.

less clear. Russian NGOs may view the Summit as an opportunity to use international attention (and the attention of the other seven foreign leaders) to put pressure on the Russian government to reverse the NGO law.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it is also unclear what opportunities there will be for civil society groups who seek participation outside of the sanctioned Civil G8-2006 events. For example, it is possible that groups who choose to engage in alternative actions such as protest demonstrations during the Summit may be subject to harsher scrutiny via the new law. Thus, some important questions remain about what the newly passed legislation will mean for civil society groups operating in Russia both during and after the Summit.

## **Civil Society Expectations**

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Based on statements made and actions taken by NGOs at the Civil G8-2006 meetings to date, it is possible to ascertain at least a broad picture of what these groups will expect to achieve at the 2006 St. Petersburg Summit. Expectations of NGOs include influence on each of the three major issues that the Russian government has put on the agenda, as well as an attempt to ensure that other issues receive increased attention at this year's meeting.

Of course, the first priority of NGOs with respect to the Summit was simply to have their perspectives heard and acknowledged. With the introduction of tighter restrictions on NGOs operating in Russia announced in late 2005, many civil society groups were concerned about the opportunity to be included in the Summit at all. However, the creation of the Civil G8-2006 initiative has satisfied at least the most basic concerns of NGOs seeking participation.

The results of the International Forum of NGOs that was held in Moscow from 9-10 March 2006 as part of the Civil G8-2006 project provides more details as to what kind of influence NGOs seek to have. Panels of NGO representatives provided final statements and recommendations on each of the three major issues to be discussed by G8 leaders at the Summit.

### ***Energy Security***

On the issue of global energy security, the NGO panel, which included representatives from Greenpeace Russia, Greenpeace International, and the Russian Meteorological Center, among others, issued a statement urging the G8 leaders to agree to undertake energy initiatives with the goal of reducing fossil fuel and nuclear energy consumption, and increasing the use of sustainable energy sources such as biomass, coal gasification, wind, solar, geothermal, and hydrogen. They recommended that G8 leaders discuss the creation of "new standards and economic stimulus for investments into energy savings and renewable energy sources" and the "expansion of scientific research in this sphere."<sup>24</sup> They also stressed the importance of a more fair distribution of energy resources, urging the leaders to "undertake actions on energy supply to

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<sup>23</sup> Press Conference on Co-operation between Civil Society and the Group of Eight during Russia's Presidency. G8 Information Centre (Toronto), 20 December 2005. Access: 15 January 2006.  
<http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cs051221.html>.

<sup>24</sup> On Activities to Ensure Global Energy Security: Recommendations of the Energy Safety Group to the G8 Summit. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 10 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006.  
<http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cg8060310-energy.html>.

the poor and the poorest population in order to ensure their decent existence in the environment of transfer to the renewable energy sources.”<sup>25</sup>

### ***Global Health – Infectious Disease***

On the issue of global infectious disease, the NGO panel, including representatives from the World Health Organization and Russian Medical Association, among others, hoped to see greater and more effective spending to “prevent, diagnose, treat and cure infectious diseases for all groups, including vulnerable social groups” and “support scientific research on infectious disease.”<sup>26</sup> The groups also recommend that the G8 leaders discuss the creation of an international pandemic surveillance system, and measures to ensure that vulnerable social groups can access medicines and treatment.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Education***

On education, the panel including representatives from the Human Rights Institute, the Institute of New Educational Systems, and the Russian Children Foundation, among others, expect to see movement toward greater inclusion for marginalized children such as those with special needs and children of migrant families in the G8 countries, as well as a general effort to develop civic duty as “the foundation of a democratic culture” through the educational systems.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Other issues: Trade, finance, and development for Africa***

In addition to recommendations made on these three issues, attendees of the Civil NGO Forum issued a statement on trade, finance, and development for Africa. Here, NGOs urged the G8 leaders to endorse a number of policies regarding relations with African nations, including a “trade justice” approach to global trade, increased civil society participation in the WTO, debt cancellation and increased aid for social services, and the implementation of mandatory codes of conduct for transnational enterprises.<sup>29</sup> This statement by the NGOs attending the forum is especially notable given that, while each of the three core issues are closely related to it, the issue of poverty in Africa itself is not part of the official agenda of the Summit. This is a break from previous years, when development in Africa has been high on the G8 agenda. It is perhaps for this reason that civil society groups, seeking to maintain the spotlight on this crucial issue, decided to issue a statement addressing it in addition to the three official topics for discussion, and why the special round table on Africa was planned as part of the Civil G8-2006 line-up. In this way, it appears that NGOs hope to influence not only the decisions that are made regarding the issues on the Summit agenda, but the agenda itself.

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<sup>25</sup> On Activities to Ensure Global Energy Security: Recommendations of the Energy Safety Group to the G8 Summit. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 10 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006.

<http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cg8060310-energy.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Prevention of Global Pandemics: Recommendations to the G8 Summit. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 10 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cg8060310-pandemic.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Prevention of Global Pandemics: Recommendations to the G8 Summit. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 10 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cg8060310-pandemic.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Round Table on Education. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 10 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006.

<http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cg8060310-education.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Trade, Finance, and Development for Africa: Recommendations to the G8 Summit. G8 Information Centre (Toronto). 10 March 2006. Date of Access: 14 May 2006. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2006stpetersburg/civil8/cg8060310-trade.html>.

## **Conclusion**

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In sum, both Russian and international civil society groups have some ambitious expectations for the St. Petersburg Summit, and so far have had substantial opportunities for participation. Thus, the prospects for NGO involvement and influence in the Summit proceedings appear to be quite positive. One can only hope that their recommendations will be thoughtfully addressed in the agreements made among the G8 leaders at the Summit this July.