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**DOES THE CONTEXT OF RECEPTION MATTER?
COMPARING U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA**

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Introduction

This paper is an early draft of the comparative chapter of my dissertation. The dissertation, titled “Civil Society from Abroad: Western Donors in the Former Soviet Union,” analyzes civil society assistance by U.S. government and private foundations to two post-Soviet countries, Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Civil society assistance is the most prominent part of U.S. democratization programs, which also provide support for elections and political parties.¹ Civil society assistance largely consists of grants to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).²

I first look at the *interaction* between U.S. donors and local recipient NGOs that have often been created by donors. What happens as these NGOs indigenize and modify donors’ ideas and practices for use in the local context? As for the comparison of the two host countries, the study raises the question of how we can we think about the position of donor-driven NGOs in the local context in a large and complex country like Russia and in a small, poor and remote country like Kyrgyzstan.

My theoretical framework draws on three main bodies of literature, namely: (i)

¹ In this paper I will, on occasion, use the terms democracy assistance and civil society assistance interchangeably.

² Some portion of civil society assistance goes to mass media organizations.

neoinstitutional organizational theory to analyze the donor-driven diffusion of the professional NGO infrastructure; (ii) *cultural sociology* to analyze indigenization of Western ideas and practices, and how they (dis)articulate with the local context; (iii) *studies of development and postsocialism* to compare differences/similarities between U.S.-local NGO interaction in Russia and in Kyrgyzstan and its effect on state-society relations in the two countries.

Civil Society and the Donor Community

In the 1990s international donor organizations started doing two new things: they initiated programs to support civil society and they moved into the former socialist countries. The two are not unrelated: indeed, the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe often described by East Europeans themselves and Western observers as the triumph of civil society over totalitarianism provided international donor agencies with a valuable concept that was simultaneously a compelling metaphor and a useful prescription. It suggested, in Vaclav Havel's famous formulation, that the powerless have power. The idea of civil society proved to be irresistible because it offered what seemed a universally applicable diagnosis: the stronger the civil society, the healthier the democracy and, more generally, the polity, economy, and society. As a result, it was embraced by the entire donor community so that by the end of the decade different types of donors (private foundations, bilateral and multilateral organizations) pursuing a spectrum of ends — social, political, and economic, with varying emphases — have come to view civil society as a means to achieve them.

In conventional accounts, embraced by donors and scholars, post-Soviet countries presented a particular challenge because social life in the Soviet Union was seen as having been completely invaded by the totalitarian state, and the creation of civil society —

operationalized as a vibrant NGO sector — was viewed by Western governments and donor organizations as urgent for the successful democratization of this vast region.

As a result, in the 1990s the impetus for reviving civil society in the former Soviet Union came from abroad: the West, and the United States in particular, has defined it as one of the main objectives for its involvement. Several recent studies consider successes and failures of U.S. democratization programs in post-Soviet countries (Henderson 2003; Mendelson & Glenn 2002; Sperling 1999). They give donors high marks for creating vibrant NGO sectors in countries where until recently there had been no nongovernmental activity. They also point out such weaknesses of the donor-supported civil society as its dependence on international assistance, lack of incentives to build a grassroots constituency, preoccupation with survival rather than social mission, divisiveness and rivalry for donor attention among NGOs. While the authors fault donors for these shortcomings, they encourage them to learn from past mistakes and develop better strategies in the future, rarely questioning the central premise of the usefulness of such involvement or donors' ability to foster civil society from the outside.

What is absent from such analyses is a theoretically informed discussion of the fact that American donors are promoting an idea of civil society and of the nongovernmental sector with a distinctly American bent. That is, for over a decade U.S. donors have been trying to transplant to the post-Soviet terrain institutional arrangements unique to the United States guided by the assumption that what works for the United States must work for post-Soviet societies as well. However, as one recent review pointed out, had scholars of international democratization assistance to the former Soviet Union given more attention to investigations of similar programs in other regions of the world, there would

have been, from the very beginning, far less optimism “that Westerners could somehow draw upon their own unique experiences and teach citizens in postcommunist countries how to construct civil society” (Kubicek 2003: 626).

In a similar vein, I suggest that an examination of the effects of civil society assistance in the former Soviet Union needs to incorporate insights from studies of development. This is not only because the largest democratization programs have originated in and are implemented by the development establishment, but also because this literature has made a convincing case for the importance of analyzing taken-for-granted assumptions underlying Western-led development (Escobar 1991), the “side effects” that accompany the declared goal of any development project (Ferguson 1994), and causes of repeated failures of development “schemes to improve the human condition” (Scott 1998).

Uniqueness of Postsocialism

In the 1990s, both democratization programs and democratization scholarship have conceived of postsocialist transformation as transition from totalitarianism to democracy. While the final destination (democracy) has proven elusive in most post-Soviet countries, the paradigm of transition has held its ground in the U.S. donor community. Transition is a version of the earlier development paradigm updated for the 1990s, only now democratization, and not economic development, assumes a greater rhetorical significance.³ It certainly made sense for the donor community to shift the emphasis to democratization as they were reformulating their global mission after the demise of the socialist bloc. While postsocialist and developing countries differ in terms of economic

³ In actual funding, democracy aid continues to represent a much smaller piece of the aid pie than economic aid.

and social development, both are undemocratic and hence in need of donor-supported political development.

What is interesting is that the scholarship on Western democracy promotion in postsocialist societies has not seriously explored conceptual and practical linkages between democratization programs of the 1990s and development efforts of the previous decades in other parts of the world.⁴ As a result, most existing studies of Western involvement share the assumption that the latter is fundamentally beneficial (with rare exceptions, such as, most notably, Wedel 1998). When these studies find that donor efforts in post-Soviet societies fail to generate the expected outcome, there is an element of surprise which can be largely explained by a lack of attention to critical studies of development in other parts of the world.

Organizational and Cultural Effects of Civil Society Assistance

What Donors and How Much Money?

The major U.S. donors concerned with civil society promotion in the former Soviet Union are the United States government (USAID and State Department), the congressionally funded Eurasia Foundation, and George Soros's private foundation.

Although it is well-known that the United States allocates a smaller share of its wealth to international aid than any other major donor country,⁵ it is a major provider of aid to Russia and Central Asia. The United States government is also the biggest provider of

⁴ One reason scholars of the former Eastern bloc have not seen the development literature as relevant to the analysis of postsocialist transformation is the fact that the countries themselves, unlike in the Third World, are mostly industrialized and their populations are educated. Another important reason has to do with the organization of area knowledge in U.S. academia: during the Cold War studies of the Eastern bloc countries, and Sovietology in particular, had constituted an academic area distinct from (and more prestigious than) development studies devoted to the Third World, and this division is still there.

⁵ "The United States currently ranks last of 22 industrialized countries in foreign assistance as a share of GDP" (Radelet 2003: 186).

bilateral democracy aid to these countries. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is the main channel for democracy promotion funds, the bulk of which go to train and support NGOs. In addition, State Department administers professional and educational exchange programs, whose alumni form an important staffing pool for U.S.-supported NGOs. In 1992-2002, USAID and State Department's programs in these areas involved around \$800 million for Russia and over \$70 million for Kyrgyzstan.⁶

Another major vehicle for U.S. government assistance in the region is the Eurasia Foundation. It is a privately-managed foundation created in 1992, whose funding is authorized by the U.S. Congress and channeled via USAID. During the same period, the Eurasia Foundation spent over \$55 million on Russia and about \$6 million on Kyrgyzstan.⁷ At least one third of these funds in each country was devoted to NGOs.

Among private funders, George Soros's Open Society Institute (OSI) is by far the most significant one. Not only did Soros initiate his philanthropic activities in the former Soviet Union earlier than any other international donor, public or private, OSI's funding levels are comparable to those of major donor governments. By Soros's own estimation, since 1987 he spent close to a billion dollars in Russia alone. OSI began operating in Kyrgyzstan in 1994 and in 1994-2002 spent about \$41 million in the country.⁸ Again, a significant share of these funds went into NGO support.⁹

⁶ It does not mean that all this money actually went to local recipients. Rather, a significant proportion went to intermediary U.S. contractors implementing these programs. In contrast, OSI's funds discussed later are spent locally.

⁷ Data for USAID, State Department and the Eurasia Foundation come from the Department of State 2001-2003.

⁸ U.S. government, Eurasia and OSI are the main U.S. donors present in Kyrgyzstan. In Russia, they include other foundations, such as Ford, Mott, and MacArthur.

⁹ European donors also have civil society programs and support local NGOs in European post-Soviet states.

New Terrain, New Clients

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to find out precisely how much money went to local NGOs, the above-mentioned figures illustrate that real money went into the post-Soviet NGO sector and the supporting training and exchange infrastructure. The operating assumption behind these programs was that once these new institutions, that did not exist in the days of the Soviet Union, were in place, they would function as greenhouses for democratic ideas and practices, which would then spread to the larger society. However, an important motivation for donors' embrace of NGOs and efforts to establish them in post-Soviet societies has to do with the need for donors to have receptacles that could absorb their funds in a new environment.

The ideological and organizational incentives for donors to create NGOs that would serve as clients for their democracy funds are not well explored in the existing literature. The incentives are strongly related to the question of why the international donor community so quickly embraced the idea of civil society in the early 1990s.

Although civil society funding is a new kind of funding, most donors are not new. Bilateral and multilateral donors, such as USAID and the World Bank, have been engaged in development, whose primary purpose was containment of communism, since the early days of the Cold War. Development itself was a model of global involvement, which enveloped the entire world outside of the socialist bloc, and formed an important mechanism of global political economy. With the end of the Cold War, development had to reinvent itself, both because the old model oriented toward the South (however effective or ineffective it had been) had become obsolete and because donors had encountered a new geographical as well as social and cultural terrain in the postsocialist East. Revival of the

idea of civil society in Eastern Europe took place at the time as donors were struggling to define a new mission and were shifting emphasis from turning backward societies into developed ones to transforming undemocratic societies into democratic ones. Civil society made a perfect fit as most of the world's countries were decidedly undemocratic. By the mid-1990s, civil society became an ideal mechanism for the reinvention of the development aid, all the more so because it enjoyed universal approval. By this time, it became common to operationalize civil society as professional NGOs,¹⁰ which had been rising in prominence in American civic life (Putnam 2000; Skocpol 2003) and in international development (Clark 1991) since the 1970s. From donors' perspective, it made perfect sense to start "building" civil society in the former Soviet Union by creating and proliferating NGOs especially because the *nongovernmental* form was an organizational species manifestly absent under the previous regime.

The interaction between donors and recipients is based on the transfer of money, which requires accounting and, as a consequence, an organization at the receiving end capable of meeting this requirement. In addition, international donors are complex bureaucracies that prefer to interact with formal organizations, which provided an organizational incentive for donors that came to work in the former Soviet Union to engage quickly in the NGO construction business.

Organizational and Cultural Diffusion

Throughout the 1990s donors' efforts to build civil society evolved from creating and developing individual professional NGOs, modeled on U.S. public interest organizations,

¹⁰ The minimal definition of the professional NGO is a nonprofit organization with salaried staff and fundraising (through membership, from individual benefactors and foundations) as an integral part of its operations.

to fostering an NGO infrastructure, modeled on U.S. voluntary sector. The U.S. donors' efforts to transplant an American-style public interest NGO onto the post-Soviet terrain is a clear-cut case of purposive organizational diffusion and a good illustration of John Meyer's theory of world society.¹¹ While the proliferation and legitimation of the professional NGO is a worldwide trend, U.S. donors have been the most important agent in promoting it in the post-Soviet countries.

In the paper delivered at last year's SCR workshop, I argued that a decade into the U.S. civil society promotion in the former Soviet Union, the main *organizational* outcome is the establishment of the professional NGO as the predominant conceptual and organizational vehicle for civil society, and creation of a universe of clients donors can do business with. The main *cultural* effect of the donors' endeavor is the creation of the NGO discourse that disarticulates with the post-Soviet context because it is informed by the Western organizational and historical experience of state-society relations. Consequently, I see the major function of post-Soviet NGOs, which emerged as a result of donor-sponsored organizational and cultural diffusion since the early 1990, in that they serve as interlocutors for the West. Donors, in effect, have created a group of people who understand what they are saying. Conversely, donors (and the West, more broadly) are the only ones who understand what NGOs are saying, since NGOs do not have much common ground either with society or with the government.¹²

¹¹ Meyer and colleagues (Meyer et al. 1997; Boli & Thomas 1999) explain the high degree of structural isomorphism of contemporary national societies, despite enormous differences in resources and traditions, by the institutionalization of global associational and cultural models.

¹² The field research conducted for the dissertation included 6 months of interviews and observations in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, interviews with donors in the United States, and analysis of donor/NGO documents.

As James Ferguson pointed out (1994: 254),¹³ “it may be that what is most important about a ‘development’ project is not so much what it fails to do but what it does do; it may be that its real importance in the end lies in the ‘side effects.’” In other words, the point is not to focus on donors’ rhetorical claims and limit the inquiry to assessing how successful democratization programs have been in democratizing host societies, but rather to identify and investigate the long-term patterns set in motion by the infusion of democracy aid in the first decade of postsocialism.

Following Scott (1998), we can view donors’ efforts to recreate familiar organizational forms in the previously unfamiliar societies as an attempt to make these societies more legible. Greater legibility means greater governability in that donors have established a constituency that looks up to donors for funds and, more important, for ideas about what civil society is and how it acts. Although the donors’ ostensible intention was to enable NGOs to countervail the state’s power, in actuality NGOs have very few resources at their disposal to do so. Public interest advocacy Washington-style does not work in Moscow or Bishkek, and local NGOs rarely have a membership base in the broader society. The post-Soviet state, on the other hand, remains barely constrained in its ability to stifle NGO activities any time it wishes to do so.

Comparing the Effects of U.S. Involvement in Russia and Kyrgyzstan

The Two Countries

Russia and Kyrgyzstan were chosen for the study because they are very unlike. A widely shared assumption in the existing literature on democracy promotion is that agency lies primarily with donors in that what donors do is seen as far more important than the

¹³ I am very grateful to Jeff Sallaz and Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas, participants in last year’s workshop, for directing me to Ferguson’s work.

features of host societies. That donors can effect change (political or economic) in Kyrgyzstan and in Russia is accepted rather than posed as an empirical question.

The two countries offer a stark contrast. Russia is huge (population 145.2 million), industrialized, urbanized, rich in oil and other resources, and, no less important, in human capital. Kyrgyzstan (population 4.9 million) is a small, rural country with few resources or prospects for economic development. In the Soviet hierarchy of republics Russia was at the pinnacle of Soviet modernity, while Kyrgyzstan was vying for the lowest rung. Russia assumed the Soviet Union's mantle of an important geopolitical player, and even if it may not be quite at the center of the world's influence and power, that is where it keeps its company (it is a member of G-8). Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, is a very embodiment of periphery with obligatory connotations of economic underdevelopment and political autocracy. Ejected from the Soviet empire, it no longer is a member, if inferior, or a superpower modern state, but finds itself surrounded by a variety of unsavory regimes. While Russia represents a unique case in donors' experience, Kyrgyzstan in many ways resembles a setting they have encountered in other parts of the world.

NGOs and Different Arenas of State-Society Relations

What I have discussed above describes the results ('side effects') of U.S. donors' actions in the area of civil society assistance. I argue that the most important effects of U.S. civil society assistance is organizational diffusion of professional NGOs and cultural diffusion of the U.S. donor discourse. Together, these effects work to produce the NGO sector dependent on donor funds and ideology, and out of touch with potential local grassroots constituency. This outcome is present in both countries in question, and, I would venture to guess, in many other places where donors have such programs. What about the context

of reception? What difference does it make, if any, in shaping the long-term effects of democracy aid? Are the donor-supported NGO sectors in Russia and Kyrgyzstan positioned differently in terms of their ability to influence state-society relations and social/political change?

Before directly addressing this question of difference between the cases, I first discuss the position of the NGO sector vis-à-vis the five major arenas of a modern consolidated democracy identified by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996). Although the current regimes in Russia and Kyrgyzstan are no longer presumed to be making a transition to democracy — there is a consensus that Kyrgyzstan is authoritarian while Russia is moving in that direction — Linz and Stepan’s model is commonly seen as an ideal type (or necessary elements) of state-society relations in a functional democracy and can be employed to illustrate how far a particular political situation is from it:¹⁴

Arena	Primary Organizing Principle	Primary Mediation upon Other Arenas
Civil society	Freedom of association and communication	Interests and values of civil society are the major generators of political society. Civil society generates ideas and helps monitor the state apparatus and economic society
Political society	Free and inclusive electoral contestation	Crafts laws, manages state apparatus, regulates economic society
Rule of law	Constitutionalism	Establishes a hierarchy of norms that make actions by, and upon, other arenas legitimate and predictable
State apparatus	Rational-legal bureaucratic norms	Enforcement on civil, political, and economic societies of laws established by political society
Economic society	Institutionalized market	Produces the indispensable surplus to allow the state to carry out its collective good functions and provides a material base for pluralism and autonomy of civil and political societies

¹⁴ This is an abridged version of Linz and Stepan’s table (1996: 14).

Using Linz and Stepan's definition of civil society — "arena of the polity where self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests" (1996: 7) — we can view the post-Soviet NGO sector as a part of civil society. Although the major impetus and resources supporting it come from the outside, it is staffed by locals who do indeed attempt to articulate values and advance citizens' interests. What makes NGOs' job difficult is that they attempt to do so armed by Western, not homegrown, ideologies, which fail to elicit a strong response from a wider constituency since the latter is not versed in them. It is important to note that while I view this as a significant pattern produced by the donor funding, it does not mean that NGOs have no agency of their own and that there are no exceptions. Indeed, some donor-supported NGOs have succeeded in mobilizing the public for various actions.

Linz and Stepan's model is particularly useful for a discussion of internal preconditions for democratization because they conceptualize democracy as "an interacting system" where no single arena "can function properly without some support from one, or often all, of the other arenas" (1996: 13). What is common to most post-Soviet societies is that in the state-citizen equation, the state remains very strong, and to the extent that they are interacting systems, various arenas cooperate against civil society (or, rather, its emergence). Even when some NGOs succeed in mobilizing large-scale grassroots support and thus approach the ideal type of full-fledged civil society, they cannot effectively monitor the post-Soviet state apparatus and economy as the other four arenas are either lacking (rule of law) or uninterested in interaction. Russia and Kyrgyzstan display some of the formal trappings of democracy and its political leaders come into office as a result of

elections. Their constitutions are admirable but laws are selectively enforced. The state apparatus in each remains unreformed since the days of the Soviet Union. Political society is motivated by the interests and values of the state, not civil society. Market is institutionalized in the sense that it functions at the pleasure of the state rather than providing a material base for autonomous political and civil societies.

Based on this quick overview, the position of the NGO sector in the structure of state-society relations is similar in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. One of the central arguments of the democratization literature is that democratization depends far more on internal factors than it does on external efforts, such as democracy aid, or international pressure. However, often it is very difficult to draw a neat line between internal and external factors, and we know of many examples where external influence reaches far inside domestic politics and economy. The latter is most easily illustrated in countries heavily dependent on foreign aid and multilateral lending institutions. Russia's and Kyrgyzstan's relationship to external resources, such as aid, is quite dissimilar, and the comparison between the two shows that in Russia's case internal factors are more important, while in Kyrgyzstan's external factors can significantly influence the country's internal political trajectory toward or away from democratization.

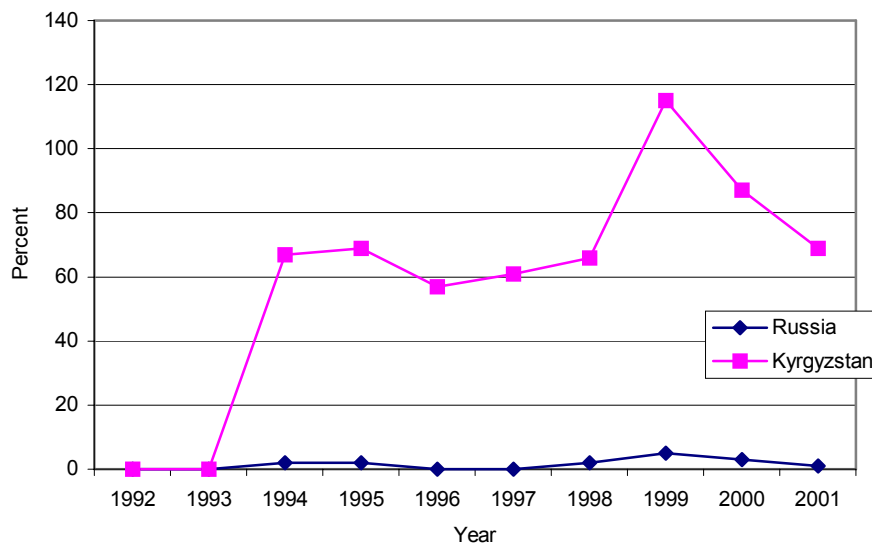
External Resources as Channels of Influence

Democracy promotion by U.S. and other international donors assumes that it is possible to guide social/political change in a host country from the outside. To restate this assumption in terms of state-society relations, there is a belief that outside resources can help empower society against the state.

However, democracy and civil society assistance forms a small piece of the much

larger pie of Western development assistance and aid.¹⁵ It is then instructive to present a broad comparative picture of official assistance received by different post-Soviet states in the past decade and see where the two countries in question stand in it. Although among 12 post-Soviet states of Eurasia¹⁶ in 1992-2002 Russia attracted the largest amount of official aid from international donors in absolute numbers, per capita Armenia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, all small and poor countries, are the top 3 recipient countries (see Table 1 in the Appendix). The snapshot of official U.S. assistance is very similar (Table 2 in the Appendix). Perhaps more important is that Kyrgyzstan not only receives a lot of aid per head of population, but that it is, unlike Russia, heavily dependent on aid, as illustrated in Figure 1, for the day-to-day running of the business of the state:

Figure 1: Official Aid as Percentage of Government Expenditures
(World Bank data)



¹⁵ Official development assistance and official aid include both loans/credits that must be repaid and grants/technical assistance.

¹⁶ Eurasia is the term favored by bilateral donors and OECD to denote successors to the Soviet Union without the 3 Baltic countries.

Besides aid, foreign direct investment (FDI) represents another source of external resources and integration into the global political economy. Both Russia and Kyrgyzstan have so far attracted very little FDI. In 1992-2002, Russia received about \$26 billion in FDI (compared, for instance, with \$50 billion that went to Poland and \$37 billion to the Czech Republic, both much smaller countries), while Kyrgyzstan received all of \$420 million,¹⁷ which is largely explained by the lack of natural resources or industries that foreigners could invest in.

These numbers demonstrate a sharp difference in the two countries' positions vis-à-vis the inflow of Western resources. Both aid and FDI are negligible in Russia's case, which has led current Russian government to conclude that "there is no alternative to self-help" (Trenin 2004). For Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, there is for the foreseeable future no alternative to foreign aid.

As far as democracy aid is concerned, as has been mentioned earlier, during this period the United States government spent about \$850 million on Russia and \$79 million on Kyrgyzstan, which constitutes, respectively, 8 and 13 percent of overall U.S. bilateral assistance for each country (Table 3 in the Appendix). What these and earlier numbers show is that in both cases the state receives a far greater share of outside resources than do NGOs. This asymmetry of external resource flows does little to rectify the asymmetry of power between the post-Soviet state and the NGO sector.

Since the primary function of U.S. bilateral aid is to serve as an extension of U.S. foreign policy, the small share of democracy aid is itself a reflection of multiple dimensions of U.S. national interest abroad, which are, as is well known, not always in

¹⁷ FDI data are from UNCTAD.

harmony with one another. In other words, the context of overall aid alone puts constraints on the presumed ability of civil society assistance to change the balance of power between NGOs and the state. We can hardly expect NGOs to inflict much damage on the state when the same hand that feeds NGOs gives a much greater share to it.

Because Russia depends so little on foreign aid and, hence, its political conditionality, the Russian state does not have much external incentive to pay attention to NGOs. It should be, in theory, different in the case of Kyrgyzstan, whose state and ruling regime are so severely dependent on aid that if donors put real pressure on the government it could be expected to behave nicely toward NGOs to insure uninterrupted and undiminished flow of aid in the future. In other words, donors have a leverage of influence regarding NGOs in Kyrgyzstan that they do not in Russia.

The Large-Small Comparison

Another significant difference in terms of how aid is received between Russia and Kyrgyzstan is their size, economic potential, and, for lack of a better word, complexity. A Russian scholar describes Russia's evolution to date as follows (Trenin 2004):

A dozen years after the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Russia has completed a transition within a transition. The train is still moving, but it has arrived at a station. The country has stabilised, for the time being, as a semi-authoritarian state, with a government-directed — though not government-owned — economy. There is a wide rich-poor gap, with a very weak middle... For too long, it was routinely and unfairly compared to advanced western nations. In reality, Russia as a society belongs in a very different and much broader category of second world nations, alongside Argentina, Brazil and Turkey.

Like the three countries Trenin mentions, Russia is a large country with a lot of things going on. Donor-supported NGOs are but a very small piece of a huge and complex landscape of political, economic, and cultural processes. Since foreign aid has been of so

little consequence in the past decade and is equally insignificant to Russia's future, donor-supported NGOs will become an important force in civil society if and when they connect to grassroots constituency. They may yet find allies in politics, as the current Russian leadership is beginning to show interest in reforming the obsolete Russian state apparatus so that it is better equipped to deal with capitalist economy. For now though the NGO sector is primarily one of many channels for Westernization of the elite strata of Russian society, and a loyal constituency for Western donors.

The situation is quite different in Kyrgyzstan. It is small.¹⁸ It is poor in terms of economic resources, economic prospects, and, perhaps most important, in knowledge-producing capacity. Not a lot is going on in Kyrgyzstan compared to Russia. The relatively large infusion of donor resources into its NGO sector made NGOs more prominent in the country's political and organizational landscape, which was far less complex than the Russian one, to begin with. As a result of donor funding, NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are at present far more affluent than universities, political parties, or most mass media, and this affluence made them into significant players on the local political scene. NGOs' frequent contacts with the West have enabled them to become the only knowledge-producers that are capable of generating an alternative to the official discourse, i.e. they play a far more noticeable role in generating critiques of the political and economic situation as compared to NGOs in Russia. Kyrgyzstan's aid-dependence also pushes them in the direction of political engagement with, and often opposition to, government policies: the World Bank/IMF involvement in the restructuring of national economy and social

¹⁸ I am struggling a bit to convey the large/small contrast, which is central to my comparison. Any comments and suggestions for things to read will be appreciated. Since I focused on NGOs that have received most support from U.S. donors, I did my fieldwork in capital cities, where most of them are located. The difference between the cities was striking: if Moscow was very much like New York City, Bishkek's size and pace of life reminded me of Trenton (state capital of New Jersey).

services looms larger than it does in Russia, social consequences of their policies are more obvious and frequently evoke critical response from NGOs. In my view, NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to find a grassroots social base because they speak not only on questions of political rights — like most prominent donor-supported NGOs in Russia do — but also address socioeconomic rights that find resonance with the public that is still trying to find its bearing in the new social order after the retreat of the Soviet welfare state.

To sum up, in the case of Kyrgyzstan the relatively large scale of aid has made NGOs into significant players and propelled them into political arena, something that has not happened in Russia due to the country's size and complexity and the relatively minuscule amount of aid. Kyrgyz NGOs' close connections to Western patrons has also provided activists with a degree of insulation from political harassment by the state that is not available to critics of the regime without such ties (McGlinchey 2003: 186-187). A conclusion one might, therefore, be tempted to draw from the Russia-Kyrgyzstan comparison is that U.S. democracy aid is indeed empowering civil society in Kyrgyzstan, except that, as I showed earlier, these efforts are counteracted by the fact that a much larger share of aid from international donors, including the United States, is used to buttress the authoritarian Kyrgyz state.

Conclusion: Democratization or Development?

Early in the paper I argued that the democratization literature on the former Soviet Union mostly ignores the real-life connection between development and democratization aid, and that this omission has impeded our understanding of the feasibility and expected effect of Western donors' democracy promotion in the region over the last decade. Democracy aid is largely an outgrowth of development assistance. Wide-ranging analyses of the

development paradigm (Ferguson 1994; Scott 1998) demonstrated that while development projects more often than not fail to achieve their declared objectives, they have had a great deal of success in spreading and perpetuating the organizational and ideological model of “development.” Building on their insights I use organizational and cultural analysis of the donor-supported post-Soviet nongovernmental sector to show that cheerleaders for NGOs would be well advised to temper their enthusiasm about professional NGOs’ ability to act as forces for political change.¹⁹ The most significant effect of civil society assistance has far more to do with the creation of loyal constituency for donors’ funds and Western ideas than with sowing “seeds of democracy.”²⁰

The effects of such assistance, however, vary from one place to another, and this variation is to a large degree shaped by how overall aid, of which democracy promotion is only a small part, interacts with local conditions. In terms of the possibility for democratization, Russia is far more in charge of charting its own course than Kyrgyzstan. As a channel of external influence on political and economic developments in Russia, aid is largely irrelevant, partly because it has been so small and because Russia is so big. As a result, donor-supported NGOs are marginal players in terms of their ability to have an impact on state-society relations. NGOs in Russia will become influential in this area when they connect to a broad social base, which will require a different set of skills than the ones they learned from donors.

As I have discussed earlier, the impact of civil society assistance is quite different in Kyrgyzstan, in part because a much greater scale of international aid is a far more

¹⁹ Scholars of social movements, such as Mayer Zald, have been, of course, making that point for quite some time.

²⁰ The name of the first major USAID civil society initiative in the early 1990s.

significant leverage of Western influence. Here American donors' funds enable recipient NGOs to present a challenge to the authoritarian state. However, Kyrgyz NGOs come into confrontation not only with the state, but with the multiple and often not mutually reinforcing goals of U.S. assistance. The latter pattern has become more pronounced in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, when the United States opened a military base in Kyrgyzstan and increased security cooperation with the Kyrgyz government in the war against terrorism. As is well known, security concerns predominated in the Cold War model of development, and the current situation in Kyrgyzstan increasingly resembles earlier U.S. development engagement in other parts of the world. In terms of aid, the United States' leverage in Kyrgyzstan is much higher than it is in Russia, but it is used for purposes other than democratization.

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APPENDIX: TABLES

Table 1: All Official Assistance to Eurasia, 1992-2002 (WB, OECD data)

COUNTRY	Per Capita (\$)	Official Assistance (\$ billion)
Armenia	664	2.13
Georgia	523	2.30
Kyrgyzstan	444	2.18
Azerbaijan	206	1.67
Moldova	184	0.79
Tajikistan	182	1.11
Russia	116	16.89
Belarus	113	1.13
Ukraine	98	4.74
Kazakhstan	89	1.34
Turkmenistan	71	0.32
Uzbekistan	53	1.31
Total		35.90

Table 2: U.S. Official Assistance to Eurasia, 1992-2002 (State Dept. data)

Country	Per Capita (\$)	U.S. Assistance (\$ billion)
Armenia	419.0	1.34
Georgia	255.5	1.13
Kyrgyzstan	129.2	0.63
Moldova	128.3	0.55
Tajikistan	81.6	0.50
Russia	74.4	10.80
Ukraine	63.3	3.07
Kazakhstan	58.9	0.88
Turkmenistan	48.7	0.22
Azerbaijan	42.9	0.35
Belarus	40.4	0.40
Uzbekistan	20.8	0.51
Total		20.40

Table 3: U.S. Official Democracy Assistance (State Dept. data)

Country	Per Capita (\$)	U.S. Democracy Assistance (\$ mil.)
Armenia	49.7	158.91
Georgia	25.3	111.40
Kyrgyzstan	16.1	79.01
Moldova	11.9	51.31
Azerbaijan	9.1	74.03
Ukraine	8.4	408.43
Kazakhstan	7.4	111.59
Belarus	6.7	67.24
Turkmenistan	6.4	28.98
Tajikistan	6.2	37.93
Russia	5.9	854.72
Uzbekistan	3.4	83.95
Total		2,067.50