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“Two conditions for a successful partnership: high-levels of NGO professionalism and the readiness of local and regional administrations to find new forms of partnership” - Interview with Asmik Novikova, Demos Centre, Moscow, 6 March and 12 October 2008

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“Two conditions for a successful partnership: high-levels of NGO professionalism and the readiness of local and regional administrations to find new forms of partnership” - Interview with Asmik Novikova, Demos Centre, Moscow, 6 March and 12 October 2008

Introducing Demos

1 **PIPSS.ORG** - Could you introduce yourself and describe your career (including what circumstances brought you to work for Demos)?

2 **Asmik Novikova:** After I graduated from Moscow State University in the summer of 2001, I wondered where I could find a good place for my research plans. I wished to develop and conduct sociological surveys, but not in an overly academic way. I felt that sociology was a very effective tool to study the current situation in Russian society and maybe find ways of improvement. This particular place was a human rights organisation, the Moscow Helsinki Group, where the analytical department was busy finding answers to specific questions concerning violations of human rights. In 2004, we established the Demos Centre, based on the analytical department of the Moscow Helsinki Group. The main idea was to develop research work and to call the attention of officials, public opinion, experts, and human rights activists, to the results of this work. The Demos centre is a think-tank which employs 5-6 young experts (the average age is 30) on a permanent basis and up to 20 experts who are recruited within the framework of specific projects. All of them are highly qualified specialists in fields such as human rights, sociology, political science and law.

Empirical analysis of Demos' work

3 **PIPSS.ORG** - What are Demos' areas of interest in the spheres related to the power ministries?

4 **Asmik Novikova:** From the very beginning the Demos Centre focused on the problems concerning modern law-enforcement bodies in Russia. In particular, we study the problems surrounding the arbitrariness of the Russian police and try to understand the permanent mechanisms resulting in practices like torture, degrading treatment and uncivil attitudes towards people. We study the system-defined problems of policing and how it affects day-to-day police work. Our research findings were published in the book *Reforming Law Enforcement: Overcoming Arbitrary Work Practices*¹. It was our first major piece of research. It displayed a whole range of problems and the practices developed to solve them and it helped us to define our research agenda for future studies. We decided to choose one problem and examine it in the next research project. We found out that the Chechen wars were a kind of professional school for Russian policemen and that the conflict affected the quality of modern Russian police in general. So we initiated a second, in-depth interregional research project aimed at studying the question of personal and professional re-socialisation of Chechen war veterans after they return to their district police forces. The research results are gathered in the book *Policemen in Limbo: Veterans of Chechen Conflict in Russian Society*². Our research

activities were primarily focused on the police. The reason is obvious as policemen are the representative of the state with whom people have the most contact. We have been doing a large amount of work, based upon our research findings, aimed at promoting effective police reform. We understand that one of the barriers to reform is the implementation of modern standards of police work and more general problems concerning the implementation of international standards in law-enforcement practices as well as the legal system. Furthermore, the reform process is impeded by the poor development of Russian civil society. In particular, we found that reform of the police will be almost impossible without the involvement of the public. Based on these findings, we started two other research projects. One examines the implementation of international standards (based upon the international documents ratified by the Russian Federation), focusing on the problems and barriers to reform; and the second explores public oversight of the police. This project is aimed at studying different practices of public involvement in civil control and other forms of participation in public law enforcement policy. These two projects are ongoing.

“It is not *that* difficult to convince law-enforcement agencies to cooperate with us”

5 **PIPSS.ORG** - What is your relationship with the power ministries? Are they easy to access?
6 **Asmik Novikova:** It is not always easy to get authorized to do this kind of research. In fact, everything depends on regional factors. What is possible in Altay territory, for instance, may not be possible in Nizhny Novgorod. I have to rely on the local knowledge and contacts of our regional partners, such as: Nizhny Novgorod’s Committee Against Torture; Perm’s Human Rights Centre; Open Altay Foundation. We form a team, work together on general issues and methodology in Moscow, then the regional partner is responsible for doing the fieldwork. It means that the regional NGO has to get the access to law-enforcement agencies. It is easier if the NGO is respected and has a serious reputation. In practice, our regional partners know someone in the local police’s hierarchy. It is not *that* difficult to convince law-enforcement agencies to cooperate with us. Firstly, we show them our publications, prepared on the basis of previous research. Thus they can get an idea of our intentions and what result their participation in the research projects will have. Secondly, we guarantee anonymity for each interviewee. They usually trust us as they already know us or we have been recommended by someone they know. Interviewees are curious about the level of interest in such research and we try to convince them of its relevance and importance. Usually we get agreement and support for our research from the head of the district police office. In many respects interviews depend on him. It is simpler to get an agreement with public order police departments than with the criminal investigation units. This is probably due to the fact that criminal investigation units are completely funded by the federal budget, unlike the public order units, which are mainly funded by the local administrations. Public order units are paid less, but have greater autonomy. We often obtain their agreement and this is important, as public order local police stations are closer to the people. However, some law-enforcement agencies refuse to work with us. This has recently been the case in Nizhny-Novgorod. Although initially accepted, our research project has subsequently been refused without any stated reason. The police have ceased to maintain contact with our regional partner. This change may be due to some scandals involving local police agencies, which have been disclosed during a federal inspection. Another hypothesis is that the local police do not want to support an NGO such as Nizhny Novgorod’s Committee against Torture, which maintains contact with the European Court. Sometimes law-enforcement agencies refuse to cooperate. This has been the case with some OMON officers when we did a research project on Chechen war veterans. The Ministry of Internal Affairs refused to support our project even when we asked the ombudsman to relay our request³. In such cases, we try to meet individually with officers and guarantee their full

anonymity. This is possible because we offer a fee to each interviewee. We do not offer a fee to chiefs, but we offer them some books.

Current research

7 **PIPSS.ORG** - Could you briefly describe your past and current programmes or actions related to the power ministries and when they were implemented?

8 **Asmik Novikova:** I have been working on the police as an institution for seven years already. I had experience with a wide range of services: OMON; public order; criminal investigation; district officers; and traffic. I have also worked with the prison administration, particularly within the framework of the current research project focused on civil control practices over the police and law-enforcement more generally. The current research project deals with civilian control of law-enforcement agencies and scrutinizes NGO activity in this field. In my view, civilian control is too often narrowly associated with prison-visiting NGOs. Civilian control has to be extended from the law's adoption to its implementation; it is necessary for all state functions. This is why part of our work is about training state officials. I am leading this new research which started in February 2007. Olga Shpeleva, and Xenia Brailovskaya work alongside me. Our goal is to edit three books, including a handbook and one about best practice. Our goal is to scrutinize what is being done in the regions, to detect good practice, and to promote it elsewhere in Russia. Our current research focuses on civil control practices over law-enforcement performance which have already been developed by NGOs. We aim to study the current situation: NGOs' experience in any form of participation in law enforcement policy; measures used by NGOs in their activities protecting human rights being violated by police and other law enforcement bodies.

9 For instance, we went to Perm in order to get information on one initiative that we had heard of before, 'Civic Expeditions'. It is a multi-faceted prison-based initiative which includes legal consulting, organisation of cultural events, inspection of the state of prisons and the collection of complaints. Human rights specialists and activists visit closed institutions and conduct all the above mentioned activities. In addition to this, they carry out public activities aimed at drawing the attention of local people. For example, exhibitions on human rights themes and theatre productions stressing human dilemmas and emotional experiences. This helps them to involve people in their activities.

10 Our local partner in Perm, Sergey Isaev, the leader of Perm Human Rights Centre, has obtained permission from the prison administration. In this case, unlike with the police, consent comes from the regional prison administration. It became possible because of two main things: firstly, the regional administration does not fear new forms of partnership or other kinds of team-work (within the limits constructed by federal and regional prison administrations); secondly, Perm Human Rights Centre has highly qualified staff and is a professional organisation, so it is perceived as a serious partner for a state body. We pay special attention to NGO practices which are based on interaction, ranging from confrontation to partnership between the NGO and local police or other law enforcement administration.

11 We can already see two conditions for a successful partnership: high-levels of NGO professionalism; and the readiness of local and regional administrations to find new forms of partnership or other kinds of team-work within the limits constructed by federal and regional prison administrations. In the first stage of our research we made an "inventory" of NGO projects directed towards law enforcement bodies. We developed a special method for classifying information which helped us to evaluate the NGOs' experiences in the regions. After that, we selected one type of practice from each region for further study. In the second stage, we went to these regions and studied the selected practices in a sociological way, using specially developed concepts, techniques and case-study strategy as our approach. We selected five practices in five regions (Perm territory, Altay territory, Krasnodar territory, Region of

Nizhniy Novgorod, Krasnoyarsk territory) and in each of them we conduct the fieldwork stage of the research. The key methods were expert interview, in-depth interview (including participant observation) and document analysis.

12 Now we are busy analysing the evidence from our case-studies in the regions and trying to create analytical models to demonstrate the ways in which civilian control could be exercised in the Russian regional context.

Financial Support

13 **PIPSS.ORG** - Who finances your work?

14 **Asmik Novikova:** Our current research is financed by the European Commission. There is no involvement from Russian private firms, except Uralsib bank which has funded some project on orphanages. Our previous projects were financed by the Ford Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

"The impact of such studies will not be apparent in the near future"

15 **PIPSS.ORG** - How would you assess Demos' impact on policy and social change?

16 **Asmik Novikova:** When we finished our first research on law-enforcement performance in Russia, we made efforts to draw it to the attention of regional and local police administrations which were included in the fieldwork stage of the research. The first result of this publicity has been the improved reputation of our partners and the establishment of a new format of interaction between NGOs and power institutions, especially, with the police. The research made possible the development of a dialogue, an important basis for co-ordinated efforts towards improvements in police performance. Our next research will help to sustain this dialogue and also draw the attention of the police to specific problems. It should be mentioned that the impact of such studies will not be apparent in the near future but rather in the long term, now we see how our previous studies have begun "to work" in the regions. It seems that some top police officials are interested in our work. We have for instance, some good contacts with Moscow police academy. There are also some noticeable changes. We have been invited to develop a research project for the regional court and for the regional police administration in Nizhniy Novgorod. The MVD is interested in a sociological research project examining public opinion on police forces. It is the first time this has occurred.

"We have to stop accusing them of using us, because in fact we use each other!"

17 **PIPSS.ORG** - What are your relations, if any, to the Public Chamber and Civic Forum?

18 **Asmik Novikova:** Last year we were invited to contribute to the annual report of the Public Chamber on issues of law-enforcement. They ordered a report on police and judicial services. This report has been published on their website without any major changes or correction. Our co-operation with the Civic Forum has also been fruitful: importantly our material has been used. Mutually advantageous cooperation has to be built with them; we have to stop accusing them of using us, because in fact we use each other! Finally, we also ought to know how to speak to representatives of law enforcement bodies: we should not tell them "you are violating human rights" but instead "you are breaking the law" and after this, "it violates human rights".

Endnotes

1 <http://www.demos-center.ru/projects/649C353/71CCE4A/71CCED9>.

2 <http://www.demos-center.ru/projects/66AA75D/9FC99FC/1192550894> - in Russian. Also see the review of the Russian version of the report in this issue at www.pipss.org/document1960.html [E.S.K.'s note].

3 See Tanya Lokshina’s interview in Issue 7 on War veterans <http://www.pipss.org/document772.html> [E.S.K.’s note].

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