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# **Civil Society Development in Russia: Political Actors and Power in EU-Russia Relations**

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**Declaration**

I, Marianne Holden, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines non-state actors' role in International Relations. To accomplish this, the study has two objectives. The first objective is theoretical: to explain that different dimensions of power must be included in studies on non-state actors. The second objective is empirical: to show that non-state actors working on Russian civil society must relate to different dimensions of power. The empirical data is based upon participation and semi-structured interviews in the general assembly of the non-state initiative EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. I have also interviewed a representative from the European Economic and Social Committee. Additionally to the empirical data, have I reviewed literature on power, EU-Russia relations and civil society. This thesis argues that non-state actors must relate to power when working on civil society development in Russia. The members of the Forum must relate both to Russian constrains on civil society, and the political crisis between EU and Russia in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea. This influences the Forum in three ways. Firstly, it creates a division among the members between pragmatists and principled views. Secondly, this division is reflected in how the actors themselves act and relate to power. While principled work to get international support to criticize the Russian authorities for the repressive laws on civil society, the pragmatists favor a more subtle form of power aiming to change the anti-Western discourse inside Russia today. Thirdly, in light of the political crisis between EU and Russia the Forum has received increased attention from the EU. In that respect the members in the Forum are becoming increasingly political, which again challenges their work in Russia. The Forum faces several obstacles in regards to the current crisis between EU and Russia, nevertheless it still provides a common space where civil society actors can meet and interact. This common space is how the Forum supports civil society activity in Russia despite the ongoing repression. The future will tell if this common space will continue to exist in the shadow of geopolitical crisis between the neighboring countries. The only point that is clear is that non-state actors also in the future must continue to relate to several dimensions of power.



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## 1. Introduction

Non-state actors' role in International Relations (IR) is the overarching topic of this thesis. To study that topic, I will focus on civil society development in Russia. The Russian civil society becomes interesting as it operates in an increasingly hostile environment. To understand the non-state actors' possibility to act in this context, I will argue that *power* must be included. Power becomes relevant both inside Russia today, and in light of the current crisis between Russia and the European Union (EU).

EU wants to promote stable institutions, economic reforms and democracy in neighboring countries. Towards Russia, however, EU has failed (Haukkala, 2008, 2009) and the relationship is deteriorating. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the diplomatic relationship reached a complete standstill. Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, made EU impose sanctions.<sup>1</sup> Following this crisis in EU- Russia relations, regional interaction became more dependent on people-to-people contact.

While interaction with non-state actors can be an asset for EU to reach its foreign objectives, Russian civil society is under pressure. President Vladimir Putin has in his third term in power adapted several laws restricting civil society activity. The Foreign Agent Law (2012), the Law on Public Control (2014), and the Law on Undesirable Organizations (2015) all hinder non-state actors' possibility to work in Russia. This paper set out to examine how power is at stake for non-state actors in the light of both national constraints in Russia, *and* the political crisis between the European Union and Russia. To study the constraints and possibilities faced by non-state actors working in Russia today, I argue that we need to pay attention to the complex power dynamics that are present in this crisis.

Studies on non-state actors gained momentum in the 1990's. Thirty years later, the state of the debate concerns bringing in different dimensions of power in the study of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Adamson, 2005; DeMars & Dijkzeul, 2015b). When non-state actors gained terrain in the field of IR, the focus was on how norms and ideas connected NGOs through networks that changed international politics (Goldstein & Sikkink, 1993; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Sikkink, Risse, & Ropp, 1999). Following that notion, non-state actors were perceived as norm entrepreneurs promoting liberal norms such as human rights, freedom and equality (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) and therefore operating as apolitical actors. In Russia, however, this is not the case. Promoting liberal norms has become

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<sup>1</sup> See ("EU sanctions against Russia over Ukraine crisis," n.d)

a political activity; A conflict exists in the civil society between those promoting liberal values on the one hand, and those perceiving liberal norms as a threat to Russian sovereignty (Chebankova, 2015). In the constant adjustment from both national politics as well as EU policies, I argue that non-state actors are not only becoming increasingly political, but that the external power relations create a division among the actors on how to act in this space.

In this thesis the objective is therefore to study power and non-state actors. For that purpose, I make two important steps. First, I discuss the concept of power in the study of non-state actors in IR and argue that multiple dimensions of power must be combined. In a second step, I explore how different dimensions of power become visible for non-state actors in EU and Russia relations in a case study of the EU- Russia Civil Society Forum.

### **1.1 EU-Russia Civil Society Forum: Actors' Point of Departure**

The four years of Dimitry Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012) reflected a slight optimism among civil society actors in Russia (Flikke, 2015). This optimism was led to the birth of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (from now on called the Forum or CSF). Russian and European non-state actors founded the Forum in Prague in 2011. The intention was to include civil society in the intergovernmental relations and to strengthen the cooperation between NGOs across borders. The overall aim is "based on common values of pluralistic democracy, rule of law, human rights and social justice".<sup>2</sup>

Today, the Forum has 156 member organizations in which two thirds are Russian NGOs.<sup>3</sup> The personal experiences of the people working in those NGOs were what I wanted to explore in this study. Non-state actors in the Forum are not one group, but work for different NGOs covering corruption, human rights, environment, social issues and education<sup>4</sup>. By being a part of the CSF, the members have to constantly adapt to the change in the political sphere. First of all, the current constraints on Russian civil society challenge the fundamental values of the Forum such as respecting (international) rule of law, human rights and social justice. The actors in the Forum talk about these issues, and relate to it in their work-practice. That is why they become key units in this study. Secondly, the Forum has a close relationship to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

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<sup>2</sup> The Forum organizes annual general assemblies where members of the Steering Committee are elected. The Forum is funded by the foreign ministries in the Netherlands and Germany, the Oak Foundation, and the European Union ("Donors," n.d; "EU-Russia Civil Society Forum: About us," n.d)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Business-people are often also understood as non-state actors, while they are not included in this study.

The EESC is a consultative institution that works to implement civil society in EU's foreign policy. In 2009 and 2010, the EESC and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (CCRF) organized three workshops on civil society in EU-Russia relations.<sup>5</sup> The CCRF is an institution with civil society actors that have a consultative status towards the Russian president. The CCRF has been accused of being controlled by the president, who selects one third of the members (Evans, 2006; Stuvøy, 2014). When the former president of the EESC Henri Malosse was refused a visa to Russia after the crisis in Crimea, the EESC turned to the Forum for cooperation.

Since the annexation of Crimea the EESC and the Forum have organized several meetings and published joint statements on civil society development in Russia (EESC & Forum, 2015; Malosse, 2015). This relationship has intensified as the EESC's interaction with the Civic Chamber was suspended. The close connection between EESC and the Forum makes the Forum particularly interesting to study. That is why I participated in the sixth general assembly in Budapest in December 2015.

The empirical data of this study includes recorded interviews, several informal conversations and participant observation in Budapest where more than 200 people attended the CSF's general assembly. In addition I interviewed a representative from the EESC in Brussels, and involved in two interviews with representatives from Norwegian NGOs. In Budapest, however, I studied how non-state actors assess the potential of the collaborative platform that the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum represents.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The future for civil society depends on the economic as well as the political situation, and on how Russia's foreign relations influence domestic politics. The non-state actors in CSF have valuable experiences in that respect, because they can say something about what happens with the civil society in Russia today. That is why I wanted to focus on these people's assessments on the situation. By drawing on the methodological framework of "subjectivism" (Pouliot, 2007) I will apply three steps in the analysis. The aim is to combine the actors' personal experiences with what secondary data covers on the situation in Russia. The first step is to explore the meanings of the informants. I want to understand how the actors themselves describe the problems they face, and how they find meaning in what they do. The non-state actors' views become interesting because power, either through repressive laws or in the shadow of political crisis, is something the actors have to deal with every day in

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<sup>5</sup> See reference (European Commission Press Release Database, June, 2010).

their working-practice. Their personal experiences become the subjective part of the study. The first research question then addresses how non-state actors explain that the Forum improves or constrains the condition for civil society developments in Russia. As a non-state initiative born in the Medvedev's years of opportunity, how does the Forum help Russian civil society?

In the second step, and the second research question, I will draw on the informants' experiences and contextualize it in literature. Drawing upon theory and context, the objective is to study what kind of power non-state actors can have in the light of the EU – Russia crisis. This is related to both the enabling and constraining ability of power relations, and how actors - despite the ongoing political crisis - can acquire agency within this setting. The aim is to create an objective understanding of how different kinds of power are visible to non-state actors.

In the third research question I will draw attention to the relationship between the EU and the Forum, and investigate what consequences that relationship brings. The third step of this analysis will be discussing whether EU policies, in deepening its relationship towards the Forum, increase the challenging situation for Russian civil society actors, and how this can be understood in historical terms.

Therefore, the three research questions posed in this study are:

1. How can EU-Russia CSF improve or constrain civil society developments in Russia?
2. What kind of power can these non-state actors have in context of the current political crisis between Russia and the EU?
3. What are the consequences of the close relationship between the EU and the Forum?

Writing a thesis involves making some selections on how to study a certain topic. In this thesis the objectives are both theoretical and empirical, which brings with it a set of challenges. The theoretical aim is to investigate how non-state actors make use of and are constrained by power. The empirical aim is to demonstrate this in the case of non-state actors in the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. There is a challenge in regards to the theoretical framework that I would like to address *ex ante*. Previous studies on non-state actors and power do not include external power relations (see Arts, 2003; Del Felice, 2014; Holzscheiter, 2005). That is why I use Barnett and Duvall's (2005) taxonomy of power, which also operates with an external dimension of power. That particular taxonomy, however, was not developed with non-state actors in mind. In this thesis I have attempted to adopt their

framework to be relevant to a contemporary political context and to exploring the power of non-state actors. In the following chapter I will elaborate this conceptual framework and how it is utilized in the case study. In the thesis I take one, albeit small step towards developing this framework and applying it in empirical analysis. To do so thoroughly would be beyond the scope of this work. While acknowledging this limited scope, I will argue that a broader understanding of power is thus needed in order to address non-state actors in international relations.

### **1.3 Outline**

This thesis is organized in eight chapters. The following chapter introduces the reader to the theoretical framework, and shows what will be the building blocks of the analysis. The theory departs from constructivist IR perspective on *non-state actors* and *power*. In chapter 3, I show what I have done in my empirical data collection. I explain my methodological considerations and justify my qualitative method. Chapter 4 addresses literature on EU-Russia relations. The chapter elaborates on EU's normative power, and Russia's rejections to that power. Furthermore, I show how the EU-Russia relations have affected civil society development in Russia. In chapter 5 I address the first research question and show how the informants evaluate the Forum. In chapter 6 I elaborate on how the informants find meaning in what they do, and what kind of power they use. Chapter 7 addresses the challenges of the close relationship between the Forum and the EU. In my conclusion, chapter 8, I will draw on some of the data generated and relate it to challenges and possibilities for future studies on civil society and power.

## **2. Civil Society, NGOing and Power in International Relations**

In this section the objective is to clarify the theoretical framework of this thesis by conceptualizing and defining non-state actors and *power*. *Influence* is the term often used when addressing non-state actors in international relations. In this study, however, I will instead use the term *power*. *Power* includes the term *influence*, while at the same time capturing the external dimensions of how civil society relates to politics in international relations. I will first define the non-state actors in this thesis, before I will develop how they relate to *power*. In the end I will sum up how these concepts are used in the further analysis. I will begin by briefly demonstrating how civil society, NGOs, actors and networks have been conceptualized in IR literature.

## 2.1 Non-State Actors in IR: Transnational Advocacy Networks and NGOing

Non-state actors became part of International Relations research during two waves, first in the 1970's then in the 1990's (see Arts, 2003). Constructivist theory in particular focused on non-state actors after the fall of the Soviet Union. As the realists failed to explain the end of the Soviet Union with their state-centric approach, several scholars belonging to the constructivist tradition began questioning the realists' premise of the anarchic world structure (Wendt, 1992). During the 1990's non-state actors' ability to influence state policies received more attention. In 1998, Keck and Sikkink wrote on how these non-state actors gained influence in Transnational Advocacy Networks (TAN). These global networks brought non-state actors together "by shared values, a common discourse, and a dense exchange of information [...] the goal is to change the behavior of states and international organizations" (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 2). This kind of a global civil society that shares common values has also been used to define civil society development in Russia.

In 2002 Glenn and Mendelson wrote on NGO activity in post-Soviet Russia. In their definition they are faithful to the interpretation that non-state actors work for a common public purpose. They define non-governmental organizations as "public interest advocacy organizations outside the control of the state that seek to influence it on behalf of public aims" (Glenn & Mendelson, 2002, p. 6). These definitions of NGOs, as well as Keck and Sikkink's definition of TAN's, become problematic due to the premises of sharing a common idea. Traditionally, the literature on non-state actors and NGOs has focused on organizations that have a liberal bias (Adamson, 2005). These definitions of TAN's and NGOs demonstrate that non-state activity is understood in a normative way. The normative being in tradition with this liberal bias of what is assumed to be "normal": rule of law, democracy and human rights. Following this tradition, non-state actors are perceived to work for one common idea, and in that sense are understood as apolitical actors and norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In understanding how civil society actors operate in Russia today, there is a need for a broader understanding of how they interact and what they work for. More recent studies on NGOs however, have been critical to this normative idea of Russian civil society.

To avoid the common (mis)understanding of Russian civil society as being equal to NGOs, civil society must not be understood as something that is democratic by its name (Laura A. Henry & Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, 2006). Within Russia there are a variety of actors claiming public interest. In their concept of civil society Henry and Sundström (2006) include actors working within different levels of civil society development such as business groups, non-violent organizational crime networks and media. Russian civil society is in their

book defined “as an intermediary between the public and private spheres (...) civil society is a space of citizen-directed collective action, located between the family and the state, and not directed solely toward private profit” (Laura A. Henry & Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, 2006, p. 5). In this thesis, I will build on their definition of civil society, but to a greater extent stress the importance of how their activity exists in concert with one another.

DeMars and Dijkzeul (2015b) argue that NGO activity must be understood as a process that is relational, rather than entity-based. Their definition of what they call “NGOing” (referring to the activity) is not related to the sharing of common ideas or norms, but rather the fact that the NGOs exist when they interact with other NGOs. The links between the different NGOs or societal partners are constituting NGO activity: “NGOing happens (...) (1) when private actors claim to pursue public purposes, and (2) when, by the authority, so claimed, they partner with societal and political actors in several countries” (DeMars & Dijkzeul, 2015a, p. 301). The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum represents a network where those links can be developed between Russian and European NGOs. The NGOs then can practice “NGOing” when they relate towards other NGOs. It is not what they stand for which define them as civil-society actors, but rather how they relate to each other (Andersen, 2015). In traditional IR literature, the norms and ideas have been the “common basis” for non-state actors operating in networks. This implies, however, a united consensus on a common idea and how to act: “Entities gain their characteristics not from what is inherently inside them, but what is between them – that is, through their relations” (Andersen, 2015, p. 44). This relational way of looking at NGO activity allows for the study of non-state actors with the diversity they inhabit.

This thesis builds upon both the relational concept of NGOing and Henry and Sundström’s (2006) definition of civil society in Russia. This implies that non-state actors are understood as professionals pursuing public interests, located between private sphere and authorities, and working in relation towards other actors. It implies constructivist ontology, where the entity is not the common ideas of the NGOs, but rather the people acting. The NGOs are dynamic and “constantly in the making” (Andersen, 2015, p. 60). Following this understanding of NGOing as relational, DeMars and Dijkzeul (2015) argue for a combination of different theories of IR to study NGOs. The combination should include the constructivists’ understanding of how NGOs practices transform norms, liberalists’ understanding of how NGOs activity spread to institutions, and realists’ understanding of how the NGOs influence power relations (DeMars & Dijkzeul, 2015a). While DeMars and Dijkzeul (2015) do not themselves clarify how this should be done in practice, I agree that the

power dimension must be included in the study of civil society in Russia today. In the next section I elaborate on what kind of power becomes visible when studying non-state actors in IR.

## **2.2. Power Dynamics and Non-State Actors**

Lukes (2005) argues that power is most effective when it is least observable. The notion of power is hard to capture in the study of non-state actors, which is also why it is particularly interesting to study. The main focus of this section is to demonstrate how non-state actors relate to power in international relations. Hence, power is relevant in (at least) two ways. The first way, which is given most attention, addresses how civil society actors through networks and sharing of common ideas access power by influencing the state politics (see Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Price, 1998; Sikkink et al., 1999). This tradition reflects an agent-based approach to power. Non-state actors are capable of influencing states through setting the agenda by using media, advocacy and/or influencing the normative discourse. The other approach assesses how external and internal politics influence NGOs' activity; this method has not received sufficient attention in the constructivist tradition of IR (Adamson, 2005; DeMars & Dijkzeul, 2015b; Neumann & Sending, 2010). For my informants in the Forum both external and internal politics influence their working-practice and how they relate to power. That is why power must be understood as a relational concept.

Power in itself is always related to a context (Baldwin, 1979). This relational interpretation was not the traditional way of understanding power in the early literature on the topic in IR. To understand power as relational, I will first explain how power was understood in traditional realist terms. Perhaps the most cited definition on power belongs to Dahl (1957) defining power as: “*A* has power over *B* to the extent that he can get *B* to do something that *B* would not otherwise do.” (p. 202-203). Even though, Dahl (1957) agrees that *A*'s access to power has to be understood in relations to *B*, the interpretation follows an understanding of power as a resource (Baldwin, 1979, 2013). Baldwin (1979), on the other hand, argues that power must be understood in a relational way. Power does not always depend on the access to resource, because there can be a disconnection between resource and outcome. Baldwin names this “the paradox of unrealized power” (1979, p. 169). Even though *A* has most resources it does not necessarily mean that *A* is able to use its power-resources to achieve its goals. According to Baldwin (1979) *A*'s possibility to impose power over *B* is relational to time and situation.



It is this relational understanding of power that has inspired scholars on the topic today - when they address non-state actors' potential power, they refer to an ideational form of power. Non-state actors cannot force anybody to act in a certain way, but they can change politics and discourse through social relations.

### **2.2.1 Power in Social Relations**

Different constructivist scholars have attempted to describe how non-state actors relate to power in international relations. Arts (2003) establishes a theoretical framework to analyze how non-state actors have power in world politics. The author introduces three faces of power; decisional, discursive and regulatory power (Arts, 2003). "Decisional power" addresses how non-state actors can influence decision-making. "Discursive power" is how actors can frame discursive practices and change them. The last face, "regulatory power", addresses how actors influence rules and procedures (p. 16).<sup>6</sup> The International Campaign to ban Landmines (ICBL) that led to ICBL Treaty in 1997 is an example of decisional power. Decisional power is more related to political decisions, and refers to "lobbying, advocacy, monitoring, protest and participation" (Arts, 2003, p. 18). This decisional power tells something about the possibility for the non-state actors to influence policy makers. In order for actors to have decisional power, having expertise, having contact with policymakers and conducting advocacy are conditional (Arts, 2003). Discursive power, on the other hand, is less concrete in the sense that it operates with changes in the discourse. Following the discriminatory practice that resulted in Holocaust, the United Nations decided to integrate human rights principles in the UN charter. According to Arts (2003) this would be impossible without the pressure from international - and particularly non-state - activists through discursive power. Arts (2003) argues that non-state actors' position in society is of primary importance in order to be able to change discursive practices. Furthermore, they require a connection towards an international media, and the existing political discourse must be under pressure.

It is particularly the second face of power, the discursive power, that has been the center of attention for recent studies on non-state actors (Del Felice, 2014; Holzscheiter, 2005). By drawing on the campaign against the Economic Partner Agreement with EU and African, Pacific and Caribbean countries (STOP EAP), Del Felice (2014) demonstrates how this campaign through discursive practices established the framework of this economic

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<sup>6</sup> By regulatory power, Arts refers to how in particular economic/business non-state actors contribute to establish new rules and procedures in the international market. As I do not focus on business actors I will not give further attention to this third face of power.

agreement. Del Felice (2014) argues that studies have failed to capture power in these negotiation processes, as this type of power is operating in a more subtle way and contributing to the process of changing a discourse.

In comparison to the traditional notion of power as a resource, discursive power is relational and located in the notion of norms and ideas: “the capital of NGOs resides in the discourses they represent and their ability to promote these discourses within state-centered and state-created frameworks” (Holtzscheiter, 2005, p. 727). NGOs produce discursive practices thus access power, and are not only reacting upon the change in international politics. Holtzscheiter (2005) argues that the conceptualization of power must be developed so that non-state actors must be perceived as agents within international relations, not objects. The author argues that the non-state actors’ power is perceived as weaker and less important than state power. While I do agree with Arts, Del Felice and Holtzscheiter that the non-state actors’ power has not been given the necessary attention in IR, I will argue that a major problem lies in how non-state actors can have power in a society where power politics is at play. In order to analyze the notion of power among non-state actors in EU-Russia I have to include both discursive and decisional power, as well as the external dimension of power.

When addressing power in terms of non-state actors’ activity within international relations, it is necessary to use a theoretical framework of power that capture both the external and internal picture of how power is at work. Fiona Adamson (2005) addresses this complexity of how external, geopolitical structures can be at stake in NGO activity. She argues that there is “a lack of theory regarding the relationship between individual agents and global ideological structures” (p.547). Adamson (2005) conceptualizes these ideological structures as a matrix of opportunity. The aim becomes to study NGOs ability to act through geopolitical-, institutional- and discursive opportunity structures. Hence, there is room for agency when being opportune in regard to, for example, geopolitical interests. Neumann and Sending (2010) also address how NGOs can get power in international relations through state policies. They argued that states can make use of NGOs and that there is a mutual gain from both states and NGOs (Neumann & Sending, 2010). Governments can draw on NGO expertise to formulate, develop and justify their policies. This is a way of governmentality, which changes the practice of governance without reducing state power although NGOs gain influence (ibid). While Adamson (2005), as well as Neumann and Sending (2006) talk about NGOs’ possibility to access power within global power structures, they do not recognize how these structures also constrain NGOs’ possibility to power. That is why I find it necessary to introduce Barnett and Duvall’s (2015) definition of power. They define power as “the

production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate” (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 42). Barnett and Duvall (2005) bring in different ways that power is at stake in IR, and in that way combine both the structural and the agentic dimensions of power.

### **2.3 Power and NGOing in a Conceptual Framework**

In this thesis I operate with an agent-based concept of power, without ignoring external power. To accomplish this, I draw on three concepts of power introduced by Barnett and Duvall (2005): compulsory, institutional and productive<sup>7</sup>. Compulsory power refers to power as something substantial understood in realist terms. Institutional power addresses how power is indirectly used through “informal institutions that mediate between A and B” (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 51) and can be related to the liberalist form of power as institutionalized ideas and decisional power (Arts, 2003). Both these terms operate in a framework of interaction. While compulsory power is direct, the institutional power happens behind the scenes in a diffuse interaction. Productive power, on the other hand, is more difficult to capture because of its constitution of social relations.

According to Barnett and Duvall (2005), productive power is related to how constructivists and poststructuralists reference power. Productive power looks beyond structures and “focus on how diffuse and contingent social processes produce particular kinds of subjects, for meanings and categories, and create what is taken for granted and the ordinary of world politics” (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 57). Productive power aims to change discourses and can be compared to discursive power (Arts, 2003). Making a productive power analysis requires focus on how some meanings are adopted in the discourse of a society and how these meanings are produced in “diffuse and social contingent social processes” (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 57). What Barnett and Duvall (2005) capture is the different levels of power, which are at stake for non-state actors operating in Russia. While the external structure of power is present, actors are not deprived of their possibility to power.

The theoretical frameworks I will use depart from power and NGO activity as relational concepts. Non-state actors operate in relations, which means that the possibility to act happens in interaction with other actors (states or other NGOs). A relational understanding of power means that power depends on the context, and not necessary the

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<sup>7</sup> Barnett and Duvall (2005) talk about taxonomy of power also including a fourth dimension: Structural power. This power dimension is not part of this analysis, because I also draw on the agentic dimension of power in relations to Arts (2003) decisional and discursive powers.

resource (Baldwin, 1979, 2013; Lukes, 2005). Non-state actors have the power of ideas by changing discourses in productive power, and/or by framing political decisions in institutional power (Arts, 2003; Barnett & Duvall, 2005; Del Felice, 2014; Holzscheiter, 2005). This possibility to change discourses and frame decisions is, nevertheless, dependent on the context, and this is why the external dimension of power cannot be ignored (Adamson, 2005; Neumann & Sending, 2010). The geopolitical and discursive power structures can give opportunities, but also constrain non-state actors' possibility to act. That is why the theoretical framework of power will be based upon the Barnett and Duvall (2005) three dimensions of power. This means that power is understood within social relations, and combines both agency and power structures. The analysis will address how non-state actors in their work (NGOing) hold power through institutional (understood as decisional) and productive (understood as discursive) power. Furthermore, the analysis will show how these power dimensions can be constrained by compulsory power. But before I get to the analysis I will elaborate on who and how I have applied this framework of power and NGOing. This leads me on to what will be the topic of the next chapter: research methods.

### **3. Qualitative Interpretative Research: Case Selection, Interviews and Validity**

The methodological point of departure for this study is qualitative interpretative research. In this chapter I will explain what I mean by qualitative interpretative methods and demonstrate how I have proceeded by selecting the case and data. In the end, I will elaborate on the semi-structured interviews, validity and ethical dilemmas. But first I need to address how I access knowledge in this study.

Qualitative interpretative research means that the data investigated in this thesis is not given, but generated through my personal interpretation. It is based upon a “constructivist ontology and an interpretative epistemology” (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. xviii). Epistemology is connected to how we can understand knowledge “how we can know” (Ackerly, Stern, & True, 2006, p. 6). Ontology, on the other hand, is the basis of our understanding of the world “what constitute relevant units of analysis (...) and whether the world and these units are constant or dynamic” (Ackerly et al., 2006, p. 6). The data investigated is based upon qualitative interviews, observation and literature review. Hence, I combined different data to access knowledge. I followed three steps using Pouliot's (2007) research methods “subjectivism” to combine this data in my analysis.

First, I interpreted what the non-state actors told me in semi-structured interviews in the Forum. These informants are the units of my analysis, and my primary data. I studied how the actors found meaning in what they do, and how they perceived their possibility to work. Since the units of the analysis are human beings, my perception is that these units do not have a settled and static nature, but are dynamic and change through time and situation. The qualitative interpretative research gives room to work with human interpretation, including the researcher herself. That means I have to be aware of my own role as well as my informants as the data is constantly interpreted (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). As a reminder of that I will use first person and make the reader aware that my interpretation is always part of the analysis (Gusterson, 2008). Secondly, I attempted to conceptualize the information I got out of the interviews. In doing that, I supplemented my first hand information with secondary data. The secondary data were theory and literature on EU-Russia relations, civil society and power. In the third step, I used the interviews with the non-state actors in the Forum together with an interview with a representative from EU. Secondary data was also included to place the meanings of all the informants into a historical context of EU-Russia relations. These steps of “subjectivism” (Pouliot, 2007) showed how personal experiences became relevant to understand how power is at stake for non-state actors in EU-Russia relations. Sharing these experiences was on the agenda when non-state actors in the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum met in the annual general assembly in Budapest.

### **3.1 Case and Data Selections**

This research was conducted from summer 2015 to spring 2016, and included fieldwork at the Forum’s general assembly in Budapest. The fieldwork included five recorded semi-structured interviews and participation observation. Two background interviews with Norwegian civil society actors<sup>8</sup> and one recorded interview with a representative from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) are also included. The informants represent people varying according to gender, origin, position in the Forum and the focus area of the organization they worked for. The informants worked for NGOs in Russia and the EU. Additionally, I engaged in several informal conversations with delegates and other observers, amongst them also international donors supporting the Russian civil society. These informal

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<sup>8</sup> I met with central Norwegian human rights actors. These conversations as well as my own background contributed to my understanding of the Forum, and how Norwegian actors’ approaches differ from EU’s.

conversations happened suddenly and unexpectedly, but often in companion with my supervisor Kirsti Stuvøy.

I went to Budapest and Brussels with my supervisor Kirsti Stuvøy who is conducting research on civil society development in Russia. My position as a research assistant and interacting with her contacts facilitated my ability to access the Forum as well as the interview at the EESC office in Brussels. While I have worked in close relationship towards my supervisor, the analysis is based upon my own interpretation. My reflections during these processes were written in my fieldwork diary. The diary contributed to my own processing of the data collection both in Brussels and Budapest, and became a source of information.

The Forum's general assembly in Budapest became the case study of this thesis because of its key role in gathering actors from EU and Russian civil society. A case study provides information on one particular sample from the reality, but the researcher must not forget "that cases are cases *of something*" (Klotz, 2008, p. 43). Selecting the Forum as a case study gave me access to different NGOs that work daily to improve civil society in Russia. Participating at the general assembly also gave me the possibility to investigate the manifested and latent aspects of the cooperation among civil society actors in Russia and EU in practice, which other method approaches would oversee (Berg & Lune, 2012). The strengths of making the assembly a case study made the informants more related to the role of the Forum as they were in the "situation" during the interview. The environment also inspired our informants, and made it easy to go straight to the topic of our research.

Talking to people and attending the Forum's general assembly also became a way for me to observe the role power plays in their work. In case studies the aim is often to test theories (Klotz, 2008). I used the Forum and the accompanying discussions to understand how power and politics became relevant for members. While the power dimension was visible in the discussions at the general assembly, I received the most crucial information when I interacted with the people.

### **3.2 Informants and Semi-Structured Interviews**

Before I contacted possible informants in the CSF, I reviewed literature on civil society in EU-Russia relations, and developed an interview guide. The interview guide was thematically divided in three parts<sup>9</sup>. The first part focused on the Forum its objective, organizational structure and challenges. The second part addressed the role of European Union, advocacy, cooperation and funding, while the last part was reflecting upon the

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix

Russian civil society development. In order to get variety among the informants I used purposive sampling.

Purposive sample involves selecting samples based upon previous information and experience, thereby including samples which represent different knowledge and expertise (Berg & Lune, 2012). The informants were selected out of three categories, which followed the interview guide and research questions. The first category that was identified was experienced actors who have been part of the Forum since the beginning. The second group was made up of representatives that had a relationship with the European Union. The third group identified was made up of informants with experience from working groups. As the research developed, I found it useful to include one EU representative who could elaborate on the EU-Forum relationship. The representative also addresses how the EU perceives the ongoing situation with Russian civil society. This perspective would have been broadened up with the inclusion of the Russian counterpart: the Civic Chamber. Due to time, access limitation and visa difficulties, I did not have the opportunity to interview actors from the Civic Chamber. While they are not among my informants it does not mean that the Russian perspective is excluded. The focus, as mentioned above, is on the non-state actors working with Russian civil society.

Six in-depth interviews were recorded in Budapest and Brussels that lasted from 40 and up to 90 minutes. As most of the activities happened at the hotel in Budapest, where we also stayed, we were able to conduct informal conversations with more of the delegates. These informal meetings, as well as the log I kept following the meetings, influenced the analysis. It also contributed to the development of both new interviewees and question asked. From this point the research developed, and after first selecting some informants using purposive sample, the project developed into snowball sampling. Snowball sampling denotes that the initial informants gave us information about other people who could contribute with other perspectives necessary for the study (Berg & Lune, 2012). The semi-structured interviews give room for accessing this information.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews give flexibility to the interview situation. The semi-structured form gave room to tailor the interviews to the specific person. This happens through a “branching pattern” in order to build upon previous experiences and bridges from one informant to another (Gusterson, 2008, p. 104). As there were two of us conducting interviews, we discussed the background and objective before each interview. That way we focused on some particular aspects from the interview guide. After each interview, we discussed the outcome together and wrote down personal notes in the fieldwork diary. The

semi-structured interview gave us a good and relaxed connection towards the interviewee as they also contributed with their input in the conversation.

Semi-structured interviews give the researcher the opportunity to delve in deeper on specific topics, while at the same time it is making comparison difficult. Jumping from one point to another, makes the analysis challenging as it requires more from the researcher in finding the pattern that contribute to what Gusterson (2008) calls a “discourse community” (p.104). When each interview is independent from another it is necessary to look for the patterns and themes that connect them together. This was also the case for our interviews, and I faced several challenges in particularly generating the data. Finding concepts that connect the interviews together also became a challenge due to language.

None of the informants had English as their first language. I have to acknowledge that this is a limitation of the analysis, since ideas can be misunderstood in certain situations. Informants’ limited vocabulary may have given us different answers than if the interviews had been conducted in the informants’ native language. On the other hand, one of the interviews was conducted in Russian. This approach presented a different set of limitations for my interpretation of the interview (even though I understand some Russian). A third party transcribed the interview into English, which might have had an impact on my analysis, as all other interviews were transcribed by me personally. However, it is difficult to prove a counterfactual, and as such I am unable to point out what was missed in the process. Another obstacle related to the interview session is that certain things can be unsaid.

The interviews were conducted during the general assembly, which influenced the surrounding for the interview session. As the program lasted for three days from early morning to late night, it was difficult to set time and place for the interview sessions. In most cases the interviews were conducted during lunch, breakfast and often in the hotel reception hall. The noisy atmosphere influenced to some extent the transcribing process when it could be difficult to hear what was said. The surroundings may have also limited the informants’ willingness to talk about sensitive issues. However, the atmosphere was relaxed, and I experienced that the informants were open and willing to share. What may be regarded as a limitation, on the other hand, can be related to purposive sampling.

The purposive sampling and the small number of informants are not adequate to generalize based upon the data generated in this thesis. However, my objective was not to generalize and make broad claims about the experiences of all non-state actors in Russia. Rather, I wanted to show that non-state actors’ personal experience of power relations can contribute to understand how the different dimensions of power are at stake. In order to



contribute to an objective understanding of how power is at stake in EU-Russia civil society development, the subjective perceptions of the actors need to be included. In that sense the number of informants is not limiting my access to useful insights. According to Pouliot (2007), the subjective starting point is often neglected in research in striving for an objective truth. This subjectivity is addressed to understand how the political situation affects the actors on the ground. By observing the discussions during the general assembly and through semi-structured interviews I focused on uncovering the agents subjective meanings (Pouliot, 2007). While I wanted to understand something about the development of civil society cooperation in the light of political crisis between EU and Russia, I needed to start my analysis at their level. The informants cannot give me the whole picture of the Forum and the influence on the relationship between EU and Russia, but they contribute in making me understand the “discourse community” (Gusterson, 2008, p. 104) among some of the actors on civil society and power relations. The interviews thus contributed to understand how non-state actors interpret power structures and act within them.

Interviews are dynamic, and open up for new insights. The interviews also gave me access to different debates among the informants, and the discourse communities. In order to get closer to this understanding and discourse community, it was also necessary to observe the behavior. As the interview can be artificial because it is not a natural part of the Forum’s general assembly, the participation helped to observe the connection between what was being said in the in-depth interviews and what happened at the general assembly (Soss, 2006).

### **3.3 Participant Observation**

Participation in the general assembly in Budapest provided me with a broader picture of what was being said and done in relation to the role of the Forum. Participant observation is “a method of research in which ethnographers join in the flow of daily life while also taking notes on it (either in real time or shortly afterwards)” (Gusterson, 2008, p. 99). The method has several benefits, one of them being our access to informants. Participating was an effective way to learn about the true nature of the Forum and get the opinion from experienced participants. Gusterson (2008) names this “exploring the difference between ‘frontstage’ and ‘backstage’” (p.100). That is when the researcher’s role becomes more important.

The information accessed during informal meetings is difficult to validate as the knowledge is based upon my own experiences. Part of participation methods also includes informal conversations with other participants. During the general assembly we got in contact

with different actors sharing their history and experiences, sometimes also without explicitly asking for it. In each situation we always made it clear that we were observers and conducting research. In one situation in particular, I experienced that my role as a researcher got in conflict with my role as a private person. In that situation the key informant, knowing that we were there for research, started to give some confidential information about the Forum. I was taking some notes, until the informant made it clear that this was not an interview, and what had been said was confidential. The situation became a bit awkward and I found it necessary to say that I would not cite from that conversation. However, the information gave us an understanding of the Forum's role and also helped us shape the up-coming interviews. This experience made me aware that my role was not only as researcher, but that I was also being perceived as a participant among all the non-state actors. A researcher always brings in her personal experience, and need to include that in her reflections (Soss, 2006; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Being transparent is not only important in front of the informants, but also in generating data. Thus transparency becomes relevant both in regards to ethics and validity.

### **3.4 Research Ethics and Validity**

Interpretative methods, which involve participation, challenge the researcher role in the study. As a researcher, my major challenge was that first of all, I felt divided between my role as a Master student participating for research purpose and my experience as a previous co-worker on civil society in Russia<sup>10</sup>. Of course, this background also gave me some benefits. Due to my personal experiences, the informants trusted me as “one of their own”. While I am unable to avoid this bias, I strive to be as transparent as possible for the reader. As explained above this was sometimes misunderstood. I found help and guidelines in the literature, to understand that my experience is part of who I am. In interpretative research I am never objective and I always bring in “*a priori* knowledge” (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 3). Knowledge is always interpreted, and this experience has strengthened the reflection about my personal construction of meaning in the further analysis.

Although this study cannot meet the criteria for reliability of quantitative methods, it does not make this study less trustworthy. The main objective of addressing validity and trustworthiness in this study is to reflect upon my own role as a researcher (Soss, 2006;

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<sup>10</sup> From 2011 to 2015 I worked in a Norwegian NGO to promote human rights education in Russia and Norway (see more [www.mr-akademiet.no](http://www.mr-akademiet.no))

Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). At the same time as I have been going through the interviews and my notes in this research, I have also tried to reflect upon my work and my own interpretations. This is part of validating my study.

In order to have valid arguments that support the conclusion, the researcher must address “accuracy, adequacy, representativeness, and relevance of the information” (Leander, 2008, p. 24). My study includes both recorded and non-recorded interviews. The recorded interviews support the accuracy and the adequacy of the study. My logbook is the source of the unrecorded interviews. By discussing my perception with my supervisor I also crosschecked my notes on what happened in the situation. However, in the very end the analysis of the data is based upon my own interpretation.

The trustworthiness of the study is related to transparency of methods and my personal access to knowledge. The researcher must use an “epistemological prudence” (Leander, 2008, p. 24), meaning that I must reflect upon my own role and my own understanding of how I generate knowledge in the study. Two important analytical tools have helped me in striving to match that: transparency and personal notes. By transparency, I refer to how I have worked in the interview guide, transcribing, selecting informants and analyzing concepts that support my conclusion. The personal notes have been a guideline to follow my reflexive development, and also helped me to reflect upon challenges I met during the research process. There is not guaranteed that another student would develop the same conclusion as I did in this research. However, I do believe that my transparency in methods and my interpretative epistemology can contribute with some useful insights on Russian civil society and the role of the Forum as such. Transparency on my own role as a researcher is also a requirement for conducting ethical research.

This master thesis is approved by Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) and follows the Norwegian law of ethics on research and data. The application to NSD was approved before we went to Budapest. Ethics is the obligations and moralities between the researchers and their unit of analysis (Ackerly et al., 2006). In this study, my major concern was first of all related to the informants, which are all given confidentiality in this study. Some informants, who have asked for it, have also been able to read through their quotes, and also contributed with useful insights and clarifications. According to Berg and Lune (2012) the general aim of ethics in research is to “*do no harm*” (p.61). In this research, I have strived to achieve that, firstly by clearly defining my role as a participant observer in the Forum. We informed the Secretary and all our informants through an information paper. Secondly, we offered confidentiality in the records and transcribing process.

Confidentiality means that the researcher strives to eliminate all identifying aspects of the informants in the information generated by the study, however it is not possible to give complete anonymity as I do know their names (Berg & Lune, 2012). Recording interviews requires high security of confidentiality. I do not want my informants to run any risks in relation to this thesis, as non-state actors working in Russia today are under particular pressure. I have therefore chosen to call my informants by fictive names. These names are Masha, Sonya, Lena, Sasha, Roman and Mons<sup>11</sup>. I will for practical reasons apply these names in the analysis, instead of numbers. Before I will address the actual analysis, I need to elaborate on the contextual background on the EU-Russia relationship and civil society. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the relationship has faced several challenges in regards to the expansion of the European Union, normative power and civil society.

#### **4. EU- Russia Relations and Civil Society Development**

This chapter will elaborate on the Russian civil society development and EU- Russian relations after the fall of the Soviet Union. A broader understanding of these topics will provide contextual background to the case study, and demonstrate in what environment my informants have to operate. The focus will be on two aspects. The first topic addresses how civil society has developed in post-communist Russia, and the constraints that NGOs face today. The second topic will elaborate on the EU-Russian relationship and how Russian civil society can take part in that. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, part of the Russian civil society has had a clear link to donors abroad, which created challenges for the Russian authorities.

##### **4.1 Civil Society in Post-Communist Russia: From Opportunities to Hopelessness**

In the first years of president Boris Yeltsin, the NGOs experienced that Russian authority did not care for, nor facilitate civil society activity (Henderson, 2011). The state was in financial dire straits. State wages and pensions were delayed and state institutions ruined. Hence, civil society actors were not the first in line to receive state funding (Henderson, 2011). Even though the state was nearly bankrupt, the fall of the communist regime gave a possibility for more visible civil society in Russia. NGOs turned to international society to get funding for their activity, and Western donors willingly contributed. Funding Russian NGOs became a tool to achieve democratic development in the former Communist country (Timmins, 2004), or put in other words: a tool to increase Western political influence in

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<sup>11</sup> See appendix

Russia. However, that Russian civil society received funding from abroad led to accusation that the NGOs promoted Western liberal ideas (Glenn & Mendelson, 2002). Some of the critics have also claimed that foreign donors hindered the development of civil society in Russia, as the NGOs targeted external funds instead of focusing on the real needs in the local society (Henderson, 2002). While the idea of foreign funding was criticized, it has nevertheless helped Russian NGOs create independence from the state. It is this independence of foreign funded NGOs that became a threat to the Russian authorities. Therefore, in contrast to Yeltsin, President Vladimir Putin began to give civil society more attention.

President Putin chose a more active approach towards NGOs. Already in his second presidency (2004-2008), he argued that civil society should support Russian values and be loyal to the Russian state sovereignty (Evans, 2006; Henderson, 2011). In 2005 Putin established the Civic Chamber (CCRF), an institution set out to facilitate the interaction between the Russian authorities and the people (Evans, 2006). The Civic Chamber, however, has been accused for being another way for the Russian state to control the civil society (Evans, 2006; Stuvøy, 2014). Russian organizations which supported nationalistic interest, or worked for the state, held the majority in those chambers (Evans, 2006; Henderson, 2011). While the Civic Chamber has been unable to help civil society actors critical of the authorities, other NGOs working in the region have used the local chambers for state interaction (Stuvøy, 2014). While the Civic Chambers did enable some opportunities for certain NGOs, Putin's return to power in 2012 worsened the situation for civil society in Russia.

After several demonstrations against Putin in 2011-2012, the president started to push forward laws restricting civil society activity (Flikke, 2015). In a few years, the Russian parliament adopted the Foreign Agent Law (2012), the Law on Public Control (2014) and now most recently the Law on Undesirable Organizations (2015). The laws contributed to a stigmatization on Russian civil society actors, hence made the NGOs' interaction with the state more restricted (Flikke, 2015). Since 2012 more than a hundred NGOs have been labeled foreign agents. Twelve of these NGOs have decided to either stop their activity (Human Rights Watch, 2015) or have left the country. Organizations labeled as foreign agents who continue their work run the risk of criminal prosecution. Several donor organizations have stopped funding Russian NGOs following these laws<sup>12</sup>. This shows that non-state actors

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<sup>12</sup> According to Human Rights Watch (2015) the American Donor organization National Endowment for Democracy was declared unwanted in August last year. Following that, two other donor organizations stopped their activity in Russia.

working in Russia today operate in a condition of unpredictability, where they do not know what will be the next step.

The different Russian laws have created problems for NGO activity. NGOs constantly have to adapt to this uncertainty of new laws. For this reason, many non-state actors have fled the country and moved their activity to European countries among others (Mendelson, 2015). According to Mendelson (2015), one way of supporting civil society development in Russia now, is to fund Russian NGOs in exile, and NGOs in Ukraine. The latter will send a clear statement to the Russian government that their repression on civil society does not work: “if donors who have left Russia ignore Ukraine, Putin may very well come to believe that his actions have few negative consequences” (Mendelson, 2015, para 6). The Russian civil society actors are facing severe restrictions in their own country. It is in the light of these internal developments that my informants have to operate. The challenge for the non-state actors in the Forum is that they also become in the center of two world powers. It is particularly the Russian role in world politics that makes civil society in Russia more demanding (Glenn & Mendelson, 2002). The political crisis following the annexation of Crimea is not making the relationship any better. In Russia there has been a growing discontent with the way the EU has expanded towards the East both geographically and ideologically.

#### **4.2 EU-Russia Relations: Eastern Enlargements and Growing Russian Discontent**

While EU has promoted democracy, rule of law and human rights through institutionalization in the European continent for more than sixty years, Russia struggles with an undemocratic history. The EU’s foreign policy objectives have been to promote stability in neighboring countries through institutionalization, economic reforms and democratization. Civil society can be an asset for EU to reach these objectives, and Russian civil society is no exception (O’Dowd & Dimitrovova, 2011). However, EU has not succeeded in Russia, as Russia is reluctant towards the EU’s normative agenda (Haukkala, 2008, 2009; Headley, 2015). This happens at the same time as EU, in the shadow of the annexation of Crimea, is criticizing President Putin for his repressive actions towards civil society. In that way civil society actors also become a part of this geopolitical struggle of power.

The European Union holds one of the most important assets to power in international politics: normative power. Manners (2002) argues that the biggest threat to Russia is the EU’s capability of normative power: “the ability to define what passes for ‘normal’ in world politics is, ultimately, the greatest power of all” (p.253). In the EU’s relationship towards

Russia, this became particularly visible after the eastern enlargement in 2004. For Russian authorities the inclusion of post-Soviet states into the European Union became an example of how the EU is pushing forward their own interests regionally and ideologically. The eastern enlargement was not positively received in Russia, as expressed by the deputy of the Russian foreign minister at the time:

the EU enlargement is far more serious and far-reaching challenge to Russia than even the expansion of NATO, among other things because we are not only partners but also, by force of circumstance, competitors in some spheres of trade and economic relations (Chizhov, 2004, p. 81).

Following the eastern enlargement is not only geographical, but also ideological. In light of the enlargement, the EU established new agreements with the neighboring countries: the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The ENP promotes democracy, economical reformation and institution building (EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, 2013). EU wanted to include Russia in this new agreement, but Russia refused.

Russia has rejected the EU's attempt to make a new framework for cooperation. The two existing agreements between EU and Russia today are the "Partnership and Cooperation Agreement" (PCA) from 1994 and the Common Spaces framework with Russia (CS) from 2003 (EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, 2013). Haukkala (2008) explains that from a Russian perspective, the ENP does not first and foremost reflect norms and values conducive to post-Communist transition. Instead, it is a foreign influence and thus conflicts with the kind of "sovereign democracy" the Russian elite has been embarking on. Instead, Russia needs cooperation with EU without the premise of EU's normative power (Haukkala, 2008). The ENP is thus understood as a policy written on the EU's terms. Russia has not only rejected the agreement, but is also working to delegitimize the normative European power.

Russian authorities try to destroy the picture of EU's normative power, by accusing the EU of double standards in international politics. According to Headley (2015) the main argument in these accusations is that the EU is not consistent in its foreign politics. One argument is that EU's foreign policy depends on its interests, and is constantly critical towards Russia. One recent example, used by Russian authorities, is the war in Ukraine. The EU is blaming Russia for intrusion in Ukraine, while EU leaders openly supported the opposition in the country (Headley, 2015). The EU is concurrently criticizing Russia for involvement, while taking part in the conflict. Furthermore, the EU is turning a blind eye to the nationalistic development. These critics from the Russian government, however, do not have much effect on the EU. European policymakers perceive themselves as morally superior

to Russia in terms of normative power (Headley, 2015). The struggle of power shows that the EU and Russia is not only in conflict on geopolitical terms, but also ideological ones. Following the annexation of Crimea, the relationship has reached its coldest point since the fall of the Soviet Union. This obviously has consequences for the formal relationship between the regions, while at the same time this struggle can be reflected in the Russian civil society today.

Russian civil society is divided ideologically. It is divided between conservatives/traditionalist ideology and liberalist ideology (Chebankova, 2015). This division is in line with President Putin's adaption of a more nationalistic civil society. The conservatives/traditionalist favor a more state-centric approach to freedom and want Russia to represent a sovereign alternative to the Western, and liberal normative power. On the contrary the liberalists want Russia to adopt values and systems from the Western world. Chebankova (2015) argues that the ideologies will determine Russian civil society in the future. What also will determine the future is how the European Union manages to include the Russian civil society in its policies. So far the EU has not been very successful working with civil society.

One of the challenges for involving civil society in EU policies is that the EU is not one state, but represent 28 member states (O'Dowd & Dimitrovova, 2011; Scott, 2011). A challenge for the European following that argument is the lack of a consensus on how to approach civil society in the East (O'Dowd & Dimitrovova, 2011). Sagan (2011) argues that the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENPI), the economical mechanisms of ENP, does not consider civil society as a relevant tool in policymaking. EU needs to facilitate for the interaction between its own institutions and civil society organizations. Even though Russia is not part of the ENP, the question is whether this policy can be transferred to the cooperation with Russia. Sagan (2010) holds that EU has the opportunity to give some useful tools in order to facilitate cross-border cooperation by being more pragmatic. Belokurova (2010) argues that it can be done in Russia if EU pays attention to local context in inter-regional cooperation between civil society actors. One way of doing that can be to involve the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.

These are some of the main trends that non-state actors in EU-Russia Civil Society have to relate to in their work. On the one hand, they are constrained by Russian repressive NGO laws, which create an unpredictable environment for non-state actors to work in. On the other hand, they have to relate to these geopolitical struggles between EU and Russia in light of the political crisis in Ukraine, and Russia's rejection on normative European power. The question then remains how EU can support civil society in Russia, in the shadow of this



geopolitical struggle reflected in the Russian civil society. It is at that point that the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum can play a role.

## **5. The NGO Perspective: Pragmatism and Principled Views**

This chapter will address how the Forum can improve or constrain civil society development in Russia. The analysis is based upon the non-state actors' personal experiences, and my observation in the general assembly in Budapest. Several changes have happened with the Forum during its five years of existence, and this is related to power constraints both nationally and internationally. When the Russian state restricts NGOs through legislation, the non-state actors find that the Forum helps civil society development in Russia by creating a "common space". In light of Russia's repression on civil society, to meet and interact becomes crucial to the actors in the Forum. While the common space in the Forum represents an opportunity to strengthen Russian civil society development, members face challenges on how to act within this space. A division in the Forum occurs within the context of the geopolitical crisis between EU and Russia. Even if the Forum's members are divided, there still exists an opportunity for supporting Russian civil society in connecting this division to the common platform that the Forum represents.

### **5.1 The Forum: A Common Space for "NGOing"**

The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (CSF or Forum) creates a platform for different parts of both Russian and European civil society actors. By being a cross-border meeting place, the Forum facilitates the civil society development both in Russia and the EU. The annual general assemblies have provided an avenue for meeting and sharing of information. In light of the repressive laws coming from Russia, the Forum represents a free space for both discussing frustrations and opportunities. In the general assembly in Budapest, Russian and European non-state actors discussed common issues in working groups devoted to the topic of interest. Working groups are organized like small societies inside the Forum. They offer members the opportunity to discuss environment, human rights, education or more socially-oriented issues, just to mention a few. These meetings make actors feel connected to a common EU-Russian civil society, which can be one of the reasons why the Forum also attracts new members. As explained by Sasha, one of the informants, in Budapest, December 2015:

People join [the] Forum mostly because they want to feel connected. Russians want to be connected with European organizations and vice versa [...] in this sense the Forum

is successful, because it is growing, it's attracting new members, diverse groups from both organizations with different types of work. (Sasha, 07.12.2015)

The connection to a civil society not only cross-border, but also inside Russia becomes valuable. According to Sasha this desire to feel connected can be one of the reasons why the Forum attracts new members. Feeling connected to an international society becomes is particularly significant to Russian NGOs.

The number of NGOs is today tripled compared to what it was when the Forum was established in 2011. Out of the 156 member organizations, 85 organization today are Russian NGOs ("EU-Russia Civil Society Forum: About us," n.d). This implies that the Forum provides something sorely needed among its Russian members, in light of the political repression they experience in Russia today. This increase in member organizations gives possibility to interaction, thus also increase their possibility for "NGOing".

By creating a space for interaction, the Forum helps Russian civil society development. As mentioned in chapter 2, Morten Andersen (2015) claims that NGOs must be understood in relational terms as an actor partaking in "NGOing". Addressing the Forum, which is a platform for interaction, I will argue that the Forum is successful by facilitating "NGOing". Despite the fact that all the organizations work on different topics, the Forum facilitates a platform where they can meet in a common space. The most important objective is the idea of being interconnected "people-to-people" contact. Their possibility to interact is also one of the key elements in civil society.

As the civil society in Russia is under pressure there is not much opportunities for civil society meetings and arrangements inside the Russian federation. The legislation put forward by the Russian authorities hinders NGOs to interact and meet. The common space in the Forum is thus a response to the Russian authorities use of compulsory power. Barnett and Duvall (2005) draw on the realist notion of compulsory power, which is understood in materialistic terms. This type of power has its tradition to how Dahl (1957) defined power as the possibility *A* has to make *B* do something *B* would not do otherwise. The repressive laws imposed on non-state actors by Russian government can be an example of compulsory power. The foreign agent law forces NGOs in Russia to do things they would not otherwise do. The law pushes NGOs in Russia to register as foreign agents or go in exile if they receive funding from abroad (Flikke, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Mendelson, 2015). This internal repression of civil society in Russia is one way that compulsory power is at stake. The Forum attracts members in light of the Russian repression, thus creating an opportunity for the NGOs in Russia to meet and discuss the constant development of what is going on. The growing

number of organizations joining the Forum, as well as the national constraints on civil society in Russia, has necessitated organizational development within the body. While the Forum has succeeded in creating a common space, the organizational development of the Forum has become more difficult.

The organizational development of the Forum is related to both the content and structure in terms of professionalization. On the one hand, the increase in membership has required a structural development and made the Forum more professional. Today, the CSF has its own secretary located in Berlin devoted to coordinating the network and general assemblies. While the increase in member organization is considered successful, the Forum struggles in coordinating members' views on how the Forum should act in this common space. This challenge escalated in the aftermath of the foreign agent act in 2012. The diversity among the member organizations and the Russian repression made acting united more difficult. In light of the current challenges between EU and Russia and the hostile environment within Russia, this disagreement became visible in the issuing of statements.

#### **5.1.1 Exposed to Compulsory Power: Disagreement in Statements**

Since its very first general assembly in Prague 2011, the Forum has issued statements on behalf of the members in the general assemblies ("EU-Russia Civil Society Forum: General Assembly," n.d). These statements proclaimed the view of the Forum, and set out to represent the opinion of all the members. With the escalation in the political pressure on civil society actors in Russia, however, creating a common consensus on these statements became difficult. As the Forum widened its membership, the organization's interest and working-practice became more diverse, thus making it more difficult for the Forum to act united.

As the statements represent the opinions from the Forum, they are also the main messages that are communicated to national authorities. For example, there was fiery debate following the statement published after the foreign agent law in 2012, which criticized the Russian government and required Russia to abolish the law ("EU-Russia Civil Society Forum: General Assembly," n.d). Informant Sasha (2015) recalls how the tension within the Forum increased during the general assembly in 2013, just after the law on foreign agents:

we have different points of views where some people feel strongly about being more critical and more vocal, and other say that it this not very constructive and it might damage their future. Then the conflict arises. I mean I am not too worried about this because, what I am worried about is that sometimes people get very emotional about

discussion and they even physically attack each other. Which was the case in Hague (Sasha, 07.12.2015).

The general assembly in The Hague 2013, which informant Sasha refers to above, was the general assembly where coming to an agreement became particularly difficult. During this meeting there were discussions on how the Forum should respond to the current legislation in Russia. On the one hand you had non-state actors feeling that the Forum should condemn Russia for the foreign agent act and advocate this in front of the European Union. These were regime critical organizations working on issues related to international laws and human rights. On the other hand, there were actors who disagreed on the harsh wording against the Russian authorities as they worked on socially-oriented issues, thus they depended more on cooperating with the authorities. The discussions in the general assembly in The Hague led to an end of common statements. Since 2013 no statement has been published on behalf of the whole Forum. Creating a common consensus has become impossible, as explained by informant Lena (2015): “our statements are made by the Steering Committee members, not the members because if you want to adopt something by you know 151 organizations. Well, good luck. That is gonna last forever.”

The statements are now published by the Steering Committee itself, a working group or as a joint statement between some of the Forum’s members. During the general assembly in Budapest there was a discussion in the Human Rights working group, if the Forum could issue a statement to support organizations that were put on the list of undesirable organizations. In the end, the Forum did not make a common statement addressing that issue. Instead, the focus of the general assembly was on creating a meeting place for civil society actors lacking this space at home. The disagreement in statements became one concrete example on how the Forums struggles with organizational structure in the shadow of the repression they experience. This struggle is reflected in an internal division among the Forum’s members.

## **5.2 The Forum’s Division**

“Driven by a vision of ‘the civil society beyond borders’, the Forum brings together organizations and people and therefore contributes to the integration between Russia and the EU” (“Mission Statement of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum,” 2015)

The Forum's aim is to integrate Russia and the European Union relations by including civil society cross-border discussion. This is reflected in their mission statement, as quoted above. However, the challenge for members of the Forum in reaching this objective is that they operate in the context of ongoing political crises between the EU and Russia. These geopolitical structures affect their possibility to act. The disagreement during the general assembly in The Hague shows how it became more difficult to agree upon statements following the Russian restriction on civil society. In this section I will elaborate on how the geopolitical dimension of power after the annexation of Crimea also became visible in the common space that the Forum represents. In the analysis I identified a division between what I will call the pragmatic group (pragmatists) and the principled group (principled). I will now elaborate on how these groups differ, starting by identifying the principled view.

### **5.2.1 The Principled View**

The "principled" group is critical towards the Russian government and wants the Forum to advocate this position towards the policymakers. The principled group has held the leading role of the Forum's opinions, as the statements from the first general assemblies were more critical towards the Russian state ("EU-Russia Civil Society Forum: General Assembly," n.d). The Forum's role, according to the principled group, is to advocate a clear voice towards EU policymakers by that stating that Russia cannot continue violating human rights and international law. Advocacy and international support are tools to improve the civil society in Russia. The principled group is working on human rights and legal law, and critical towards the Russian state's policies. The group consists of people from both the Russian and the European side. I will place the informants I have called Sonya and Sasha as belonging to this view. Both are in favor of advocating the Russian human rights violation to the EU. In doing so, they seek to oblige the EU to confront Russia when it is violating its international obligations and values. According to the principled group, the EU needs the Forum to provide information on the situation at the local level (i.e. what is really going on inside the Russian society). This is described by the informants I have chosen to call Sonya: "because of the trends and quite negative development this communication should be much more prepared in advance and be much more "argument-ed" (Sonya, 08.12.2015).

As expressed by Sonya, the recent development in Russia makes their knowledge more important for the EU institutions. Sonya's claim is also confirmed by informant Mons (2016) from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on what the Forum's

members can bring to the EU: “Direct contact with this people we [get to] know what is going on, and we have their interpretation” (informant Mons, 03.03.2016). Mons stressed that the EU cannot always know the consequences of Russian legislation. That is why the interaction with civil society actors in the Forum can give them the necessary input on the situation. On the other hand, as explained by Sonya, the actors also needed support from the EU:

it’s obvious that we need international support and it’s obvious that we need international opinion and statements and clear position of what’s going on in Russia. Because when we are part of international community and we are part of many international obligations in the area of human rights then we have to respect [and] we have to follow them. So from my point of view, and Forum’s actually part of this position, being a part of international community give us a possibility to be heard on the international arena (Sonya, 08.12.2015)

The Forum should, as Sonya described it, relate to the international society for support. In this sense the EU represents the international society. To advocate the situation on the ground to the EU, is a priority for the principled views. In that way the EU can put political pressure on Russia. The principled group, thus, want a close relationship with the EU. They believe that attention from the EU can protect civil society actors in Russia against human rights violation. While the principled group favors a close relationship toward the European Union, it was first after the annexation of Crimea that the EU for truly began to listen to the non-state actors in the Forum.

The annexation of Crimea - and the geopolitical crisis that followed - can be characterized in what Adamson (2005) identifies as “geopolitical opportunity structures”. It was after the crisis between EU and Russia, that the EU took the Forum’s position seriously for the first time. Even though the non-state actors within the Forum tried to make the EU listen to their experiences when president Putin pushed forward the foreign agent law in 2012, it was only after the annexation that the EU sincerely became interested in their experiences. As the relationship between EU and Russia reached a deadlock, it became easier for the European policymakers to publicly criticize Russia for its repression on civil society. This deadlock in diplomatic relations made it easier to criticize Russia on other aspects, thus creating a possibility within the geopolitical political structure, as explained by informant Sasha:

when we raised these issues in relations to the crackdown on civil society which was unfolding early in 2013 it [EU] didn’t take us seriously (...) But when the Ukraine

crisis happened, they felt obliged this time to do something about it. (Sasha, 07.12.2015)

The experiences from the non-state actors in the Forum, is also confirmed by EU officials: EU increased its relationship towards the Forum as other diplomatic relationships became expelled due to sanctions (Malosse, 2015). The increase in attention, however, is not only positive. The increased attention the Forum has received from the EU has at the same time made the situation more challenging for many of the members in the Forum. The members who are being most vocal about that belong to another division: the pragmatic group.

### **5.2.2 The Pragmatic View**

The pragmatists experience that EU's pressure on the Russian state made the situation worse for their possibility to act inside Russia. The pragmatists believe that the common space in the Forum only can be used to discuss common projects and exchange experiences. The pragmatic group is characterized by its close relationship towards local authorities and the need for a more practical approach. They are not necessarily Russian NGOs, but often work on socially-oriented issues. Socially-oriented NGOs are often more pragmatic in their relationships towards the states (Bindman, 2015). These socially-oriented organizations are critical to the legislation that the authorities push on them, but at same time they need to closely cooperate with local governments (ibid).

This is the point in which the pragmatic and principled groups' views differ the most: the pragmatic group is much more dependent on cooperation with local authorities. The international pressure on the Russian government then comes in conflict with their work on the local level. At a local level, civil society organizations are more concerned about making the local engagement work through regional authorities, which also includes local branches of Civic Chambers (Stuvøy, 2014). It becomes more difficult to pursue their public objectives in an environment where there is more pressure coming from the Russian government. My informant who I will call Masha (2015) is part of this pragmatic group. She believes that there is a need to operate in the common space as addressing issues problematic for both EU and Russia. She is critical of how the Forum criticized Russia in statements issued in the general assemblies. These critiques may generate Russian skepticism within the EU, and as well blame the Forum for promoting the EU's policies. This becomes problematic for the pragmatic position on two levels. First, they are blamed by other member organizations for

not having the courage to stand up to the repressive laws. Second, they suffer Russian repression in the same way as the principled group:

I have been criticized from both sides. On one side, Office of Public Prosecutor, which claims that we are “fifth column” of the Government. On the other side, public organizations, which ask: “[...], how you can work with such regime?” And this is a problem, because there are some processes that have to be kept, because government authorities are instruments, which I am using for realizing public interests. I want to maximize an opportunity to create great partners instead of enemies. (Masha, 08.12.2015)

For the pragmatic group, their link with the EU negatively affects their activity on the ground. A key issue for Russian socially-oriented organizations is both to establish connection with sister-organizations within EU and to develop common agendas, where the main objective is to solve common problems (Belokurova, 2010). In order to do so, the civil society actors must pay attention to local context to approach cross-border agendas (ibid). This is what the pragmatists want the Forum to pay attention to: the local context inside Russia and the EU to set common agendas. To do that the pragmatic group favor a practical, instead of a principled approach. The conflict arises as the principled views hold the majority in the Forum, and has succeeded in promoting a more critical approach towards the Russian authorities.

This chapter explains that the Forum both constrain and improve civil society in Russia by being divided. The Forum succeeds in attracting more members and creating a meeting place for the different NGOs in a common space. The Forum, which traditionally has been more critical towards the Russian authorities, experienced difficulties in reaching a consensus on common statements after The Hague general assembly in 2013. Following the national repression on civil society and the geopolitical crisis between the EU and Russia, a division becomes visible between pragmatist and principled views. This division appears in how they want to act in the common space. The challenge for the principled and pragmatists relates to how the Forum should respond to the ongoing pressure from the Russian government, which is increasing with political pressure from the EU. The principled group believes that international pressure is needed to stand up for the values of human rights and democracy. While the pragmatists experience that this close connection to the EU does not improve their work in Russia. A question to be made is then if this division in the Forum is constraining Russian civil society development? So far, the Forum has been unable to unite these different views; nevertheless the civil society is strengthened through interaction.



Civil society actors are, in this thesis, defined as actors operating between family and state, that exist in interaction with each other and pursue public interests (inspired by DeMars & Dijkzeul, 2015a; Laura A. Henry & Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, 2006). It is the interaction that stands out to be what the non-state actors in the Forum find most valuable. The Forum provides a platform where they discuss common problems and projects, in other words a place they can feel connected despite the division. That can help civil society in Russia. Feeling connected becomes more essential in the light of the hostile environment that Russian civil society actors experience today. In regards to this, the actors in the Forum are not without power or possibility to improve the Russian situation. The question remains what kind of power non-state actors can access in this common space; what are the potential opportunities for “NGOing”?

## **6. In Light of a Political Crisis: How to Access Power?**

The objective of this chapter is to demonstrate how non-state actors claim power in an increasingly hostile environment. I will do this by analyzing the interviews and contextualizing them within the framework of power as relational, where agency is possible. In the previous chapter, I demonstrate how the division between the pragmatist and principled views became visible when they were exposed to external power. In these sections, I will focus on how the non-state actors describe their possibility to act in the light of these external power dimensions. In the analysis I will show that the principled and the pragmatists favor different forms of power. I will apply the framework of decisional / institutional and discursive / productive power (Arts, 2003; Barnett & Duvall, 2005) to demonstrate this. These dimensions of power are reflecting the change in the external environment that non-state actors have to operate. While they differ on what kind of power becomes most valuable in the Forum, the non-state actors still find it necessary to identify their work in the European ideas that the platform represents. The Forum then becomes a platform where non-states actors can develop projects that reflect the current situation, despite the disagreements.

### **6.1 Dealing with Institutional Power**

One situation that the Forum had to adapt to was the political crisis following the annexation of Crimea. The crisis strengthened the cooperation between EU and the Forum, through increased interaction with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Following the annexation, the Forum and the EESC have published mutual statements on the

conditions of civil society in Russia (EEAS, 2015; Malosse, 2015). The Forum succeeded in getting attention from the EESC. These mutual meetings between EESC and the Forum can be an example of institutional power at work. Barnett and Duvall (2005) define institutional power as interaction-based meaning where there is contact between A and B. Non-state actors' access to policymakers is a form of institutional power. The non-state actors indirectly try to set the agenda. The agenda setting is part of what Arts (2003) refers to as decisional power, which I understand as one way that institutional power is at work. The non-state actors in the Forum can have power over decisions by giving expertise knowledge, and establish contact with policymakers.

The Forum has after the annexation of Crimea succeeded in advocating their opinion towards the European policymakers through institutional power. In June last year the Forum and the EESC met and agreed upon a joint statement declaring that the EU should pay more attention to the ongoing repression of civil society in Russia (EESC & Forum, 2015). The close relationship and common statements, however, have not directly improved civil society conditions in Russia; the EU's rhetoric is not improving the situation for Russian non-state actors. The problem is not only stated by the pragmatists, but also visible among the non-state actors in the principled group:

the effect of sanctions is that Russia is somehow becoming more aggressive. This somehow affects the state of the civil society in the country, and somehow we do not have good expectations. Most probably he [Putin] is going to continue, he has probably the list of this donors who will be included in the list of undesirable [organizations 10.35] which reaches the point where no donor organizations are able to operate in Russia. (Sasha, 07.12.2015)

From Sasha's statement it is clear that despite the efforts to advocate for change in Russia, little progress has been made. In fact, the situation for the Russian civil society has deteriorated. The political pressure coming from EU makes Russian authorities more negative to NGOs that have close ties to the EU. This can also be seen as another way that institutional power works, this time from the EU's side. This is an example of institutional power working in indirect ways (Barnett & Duvall, 2005). Although the principled group understands that their connection with the EU is not making the situation on the ground better, they still advocate for a clear connection towards the EU. In contrary, the pragmatic group experience that the advocacy towards European policymakers limits their possibility to work in Russia.

In the pragmatic group, as explained in chapter 5, the NGOs are more dependent on close relationships with local authorities (see Bindman, 2015). Due to their dependency, they

are afraid of indirect consequences that the institutional power has on them. Informant Masha (2015) describes the tension:

Do we want that European governments put pressure on our government and Putin?  
No. Because we understand, that... With a public position we understand, that every pressure will be seen as an occasion to consolidate around the President and archaic sectors. And we see this risk. (Masha, 08.12.2015)

Masha from the pragmatist group is afraid that European advocacy leads to more popularity for the Russian president. The pragmatists see that the involvement can be part of a political game, or already is. Russia has been reluctant to the EU's attempt for common agreements cross-border (Haukkala, 2008). The pragmatic experience that EU's involvement in the Forum can be understood as another form of how EU is pushing forward its normative agenda. The intergovernmental crisis between Russia and Europe not only created troubles for non-state actors in Russia, but it also stopped the visa liberalization project between the EU and Russia. After the annexation of Crimea this project - one of the priorities in the Forum - was completely suspended.

#### **6.1.1 Confronted with Compulsory Power: Visa Liberalization**

Advocating visa liberalization for policymakers became impossible following the annexation of Crimea. While EU gave increased attention to the Forum on issues related to the condition of civil society development in Russia, projects involving political-decision makers from the EU and Russia were completely suspended. As a result of the sanctions, which followed the annexation of Crimea, the EU officially stopped all cooperation on the visa-issue. This is another way of in which the geopolitical crisis had concrete consequences for the non-state actors in the Forum.

The visa liberalization project has been of central importance to the Forum for many years and had been characterized as one of its most successful projects. Since the beginning of this project in 2012 the expert groups have worked systematically to influence decision-makers on the possibilities of visa liberalization ("Expert Group Focused on Visa Facilitation and Liberalisation between EU and Russia," n.d.). This project has resulted in direct positive consequences such as visa liberalization between EU and Kaliningrad. It is a project that both the EU and Russia had previously been positive about. While the visa expert group has performed institutional power through lobbying and advocacy towards decision makers, this form of interaction encountered problems after the annexation of Crimea.

After the annexation of Crimea, the non-state actors working on visa liberalization had to change their strategy. According to one informant I have chosen to call Roman, the crisis suspended the political dialogue, and they were forced to approach the issue differently: “We had to adopt different, other point of view [of what] this mostly focus on. Not the states – the advantages of the state, but for the ordinary people” (Roman, 08.12.2015). As a consequence of the annexation of Crimea, visa liberalization became a very difficult topic to lobby towards decision-makers. That is why, as Roman (2015) stated, they had to focus on another way of influencing: addressing ordinary people. The visa liberalization project is a concrete example on how the non-state actors in the Forum had to approach power differently after the annexation of Crimea. This is relevant for the analysis as the most favored means of power, institutional power, was no longer as effective.

When institutional power became less applicable, the task for the visa liberalization group changed to organizing meetings, drafting reports and addressing the media to receive people’s support. According to informant Roman (08.12.2015), when reaching out to the societies they had to work differently: “this is more difficult, because you need more resources you need more effort to get your target groups there, but we try to spread this on media we prepare press-releases, public debates”. Informant Roman explains that this form of work is more difficult than addressing policymakers. The objective is to make the people understand the possibilities of visa free zones so that the people can push the policy-makers to work for visa liberalization.

Advocating visa liberalization is dependent on benevolent policymakers. When the interaction between the non-state actors and the policymakers is suspended, a different approach is necessary. In one way, one may say that this represents a need to move from institutional power to productive power: a process where the focus is moved away from the authorities to the people on the ground. By directing its activity toward people on the ground, they want to change the way people think about each other and encourage interaction and communication. The political crisis between the EU and Russia demonstrated that a more diffuse approach could be applied: productive power.

## **6.2 An Alternative View: Pragmatic Possibilities**

While the principled group focuses on institutional power, the pragmatists focus on productive power. In that sense the pragmatists do not focus on accessing power towards the policymakers (e.g. EU or Russian authorities), but rather focus on addressing ordinary people. This is where I find it necessary to draw the distinction between institutional (or decisional)

power versus productive (or discursive) power. While Arts (2003), as well as Holzscheiter (2005) and Del Felice (2014), describe discursive power as a form of power which is related to decisional power, Barnett and Duvall (2005) make a distinction on how these two operate. Institutional power is directed in interaction between the Forum and the EU through lobbying and advocacy. Productive power, on the other hand, operates in diffuse social relations making it more difficult to capture and target by policies. The productive power aims to go beyond the underlying structure (Barnett & Duvall, 2005), thus becoming harder to target.

It was not only the visa group in the Forum, which turned its activity towards the people on the ground. The pragmatic group also focuses on changing discourses by directing its effort towards people. Productive power becomes possible in practice, as it is not controlled by the actors directly (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 55). Informant Masha belongs to the pragmatist group. She addresses these practices and explains how she tries to mediate and normalize the situation between people. By talking to people, the aim also includes changing the political discourse. Informant Masha (08.12.2015) describes a situation in Russia, which is developing into a “civil war”, and it is this situation she wants to change. The main issue as she sees it is not necessarily to advocate to EU policymakers, but rather focus on changing the discourse and focus on Russian citizens: “I think that only what it is possible now -is to try everywhere to “cut this connection” as “West- bad. Russia- only Putin.” We have to “cut” it everywhere or otherwise we will not have any chance” (Masha, 08.12.2015). The productive power aims to change this discourse, and according to Masha that is what becomes most essential in the current crisis. In shadow of the geopolitical crisis between the EU and Russia, this is a prerequisite to hindering further division. This division is not only reflected between the EU and Russia, but as well visible within the civil society in Russia.

The real division in the Russian civil society is not a division between pragmatist and principled views, but an ideological division between traditionalist and liberalist (Chebankova, 2015). While the Forum’s members agree on the overall objectives of the CSF and closer relationship between EU and Russia, they belong to what Chebankova (2015) calls the liberalist fraction. The liberalists have more in common with European values, favoring freedom for individuals. On the other side, there are civil society actors that favor a traditionalists’ ideology. In Russia this becomes visible as those supporting Putin’s interpretation of civil society as something supplementary to the state. Thus understanding freedom in terms of Russian’s sovereignty (Chebankova , 2015). Masha describes how this division is visible in the political discourse that she works in. The discourse as the “West”

representing something bad, as explained by Masha, is part of the discourse that needs to be destroyed.

Russian authorities have been resistant to EU's attempt of normative power, and work to delegitimize European Union in the international arena (Headley, 2015). In the shadow of the increasing crisis between EU and Russia after the annexation of Crimea, Masha's experiences, and Chebankova's (2015) analysis, demonstrate that this geopolitical crisis become ideological and reflected among the people on the ground. Fighting this must happen with productive power to change the discourse.

Productive power becomes a tool for non-state actors to perceive power in the light of the political crisis between EU and Russia. This is because it operates in diffuse relations and is thus difficult to target by state policies. Non-state actors can be constrained or supported by states, but their access to the people is unique. In times when civil society actors inside Russia are pressured by legislations they need to find creative ways around compulsory and institutional power, and productive power can contribute to that. The question then becomes how the non-state actors can use the Forum in relation to this form of power.

### **6.3 Complication and Possibilities for Power in the Forum**

In light of political crisis between the EU and Russia, the pragmatists seem to prefer a more subtle form of power, such as productive power, to change discourses. On the contrary, institutional power, which is dependent on benevolent policymakers, has created challenges for the Forum. First of all, the closer relationship towards the EU has not improved civil society development in Russia. Second, in the case of the visa liberalization, it has completely halted interaction following the EU's sanction policy towards Russia. In light of these restrictions, however, the principled group still favors an institutional power approach. According to informant Sonya, this is because advocacy towards EU institutions has a value in itself, as it contributes to what I identify as a process of identification. Promoting certain values becomes a way for non-state actors in the principled group to demonstrate who they are and what they stand up for:

This is about values that Europe agrees after the Second World War. And [if] these values are not respected anymore, and if Europe because of real political reason or some pragmatically issues decides to step down (...) we can find ourselves in very bad situations, not only in Russia but in Europe as well. And it is very much important to influence right now European authorities and push them to stand for these values and be strong in defending these values. (Sonya, 08.12.2015)

Promoting values on human rights, international law and social justice constitutes a part of the identity not only for the principled group, but for the Forum as a whole. These values are also the foundations for the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, which has the objective of promoting human rights, the rule of law, social justice and democracy in Russia and the EU ("Mission Statement of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum," 2015).

Even though informant Masha (08.12.2015) from the pragmatists believes that the CSF's close relationship to the EU creates troubles for her work, she still identifies with Europe as it gives her: "[it is] credibility for being in the European cooperation now. This gives credibility in Russia. In this sense, it helps you to be more certain in your position." As described by Masha, it has also become important for the pragmatists to feel connected to Europe and international society. This also represents a form of identification. I draw out of this that both the principled group and the pragmatists believe that the Forum can represent a sort of identity. On the one hand, non-state actors are afraid of the unpredictability that is reflected in Russia's repression of civil society. That is why they want to operate in diffuse relations and change the political discourse. On the other hand, it is an ongoing process within the Forum to identify its role in between the EU and Russia in light of the current crisis. In this identification process there exists a possibility for power within the Forum in adapting to the current situation.

Non-state actors in the Forum are dependent on adjusting to the current situation. The Forum is constantly in development, which also can be understood as a way of identification. During the general assembly in Budapest, several participants mentioned that the Forum should focus on common problems with which civil society actors from both EU and Russia can identify. In Budapest they attempted to accomplish this by focusing on the topic migration. This topic is on the agenda both for EU and Russia. The members in the Forum discussed the possibility of creating a new working group addressing "migration". This is one way that common challenges can help the Forum in finding its place between EU and Russia, in light of the current political crisis. In focusing on the migration crisis during the general assembly in Hungary, the Forum strove to also address issues that can be challenging across borders. When adapting to this current situation, new and more specialized working groups can be one way of doing it.

The development of more specialized working groups is pointed out by the informants as a way for the member organizations to cooperate. Both the pragmatic and principled groups believe that including working groups, which reflect contemporary challenges are a necessity for the Forum's development. The working groups become more specialized, and as well an

avenue for following the constant adjustment that is needed in the Forum. While at the general assemblies the working groups are given time to discuss and meet, the possibilities that exists in the working groups are not yet completely explored. Informant Sasha reflects about how the Forum can develop the cooperation through working groups:

maybe they don't see the potential of using the Forum as a platform for building the coalitions [...] building initiatives, building projects, doing fundraising [...] we need to maybe somehow explain this better to the members: that we are here to create some spaces whereby you can find people who are like minded across the border and you can develop something which will be more meaningful (Sasha, 07.12.2015)

Despite the fact that the Forum has no direct possibility to improve the situation for civil society development in Russia, the working group can be a tool to agree on different issues. Common projects addressing the existing discourse in form of productive power can be a goal. As the Forum consists of European and Russian NGOs, as well a diverse range of NGOs within Russia, the Forum facilitates a platform for communication. While it has limited possibilities of direct power, the working groups can access power through cooperation and interaction in “NGOing”.

The objective of this chapter has been to see what kind of power non-state actors can access in light of the political crisis between the EU and Russia. A division between the pragmatic and the principled views in the CSF is visible in how they access power in an increasingly hostile environment. The principled group favors an institutional power approach, by creating a political contact towards the EU institutions towards advocacy and lobbying. This institutional approach has been successful after the annexation of Crimea, but has at the same time been easier for Russian authorities to target. The pragmatic group, on the other hand, favors productive power. Productive power does not operate in interaction, but work in social constitutions addressing the political discourse among the people on the ground. This form for power is more difficult to target by the states, thus more possible to use among the non-state actors in the Forum. While the principled worry that the Forum risks its own fundamental values when not advocating human rights violations towards the EU, the pragmatist believe that the change must happen among the ordinary people on the ground. A possibility exists in a process of identification and constant adjustment that can be reflected in more specialized working groups.

While the Forum can provide a possibility for non-state actors to become more powerful in the shadow of the geopolitical crisis, it is challenged by two factors. The first is that today a lot of these working groups lack funding. The lack of funding makes it difficult



to meet and discuss common projects. The second challenge is that Russian authorities appear to look at the Forum as another way for European countries to assert their normative power. As such, they try to delegitimize the network by not being that involved in the Forum. The next chapter will discuss how the EU- Forum relations have implications for both the access to power, and the possibility for the Forum to improve the situation for civil society in Russia.

## **7. The Future of The Forum and The EU Dilemma**

In this chapter I will elaborate on the consequences of the close ties between EU and the Forum. In the analysis I will draw on the experiences from non-state actors and the representative from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), together with literature on EU-Russia relations. In the shadow of the political crisis between EU and Russia, the Forum has become a contact point for the EU's interaction with Russian civil society. At the same time, Russian authorities criticize the Forum for taking the European side on political disagreements. The Forum strives to balance its position in light of this geopolitical crisis by also trying to include Russian authorities in general assemblies and meetings. The increased repression on Russian civil society actors makes this, however, difficult for the Forum. Furthermore, the non-state actors experience that the close relationship towards the Forum makes them increasingly political. The future for the Forum, and its members, depends on how these non-state actors manage to balance this precarious role in the ongoing crisis between the EU and Russia.

### **7.1 Supported By The EU, Blamed By Russia**

The Forum has become a key actor for the European Union in its connection to Russian civil society after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. The EU supports the Forum both economically and politically. As the EU institution is big and divided the Forum maintains contact with different departments of the EU bureaucracy. The EU's foreign department, the European External Action Service (EEAS) is responsible for financial support. In September 2015, the EEAS granted the Forum with € 1,5 million Euros within a periodical term of 30 months, as part of the Partnership Instrument (Delegation of the European Union to Russia, n.d). While the Forum receives funding from EU, it also has a political connection with EESC. As mentioned in chapter 6, this relationship grew closer after the EESC ceased cooperation with the Civic Chamber. This unfolded following Russia's

refusal to allow the former president of EESC Henri Malosse to enter Russia (Malosse, 2015). According to informant Mons (03.03.2016) in the EESC this came as a surprise “ [it] was kind of a shock wave [...] we just stopped the cooperation with civil society both in Russia and with representatives of Russian authorities for Civic Chamber.” As a result of this unexpected move from Russia, the EU increased its focus on the Forum, organizing two meetings since 2014 (EESC & Forum, 2015). While the Forum has become a contact point between the EU and Russian civil society, the relationship towards Russian authorities is more complicated.

The Forum strives to balance its interaction with the EU by addressing Russian authorities. During the general assembly in Budapest, only two out of 200 participants and contributors represented the Russian authorities. The representatives from Russia were Mikhail Fedotov, Head of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, and the ambassador for the Russian Federation in Hungary: Vladimir Sergeev. While Mr. Fedotov was the only one who participated during the whole general assembly, the EU had six people for the three days’ duration of the general assembly. These people came from EEAS, the EESC and the EU-delegation to Russia. There were no representatives of the Civic Chamber (CCRF). The Forum, nevertheless, tries to organize other meetings to involve the Russian government. As explained by one of the informants I have called Lena, this is part of the Forum’s attempt to balance the situation:

We try to be balanced in that sense too so whenever we are in Russia, we will request meetings with again relevant bodies and well they seem to be, I mean, we are quite happy with getting these meetings, these are sometimes difficult conversations. We still think it is important to talk so at least [have] face value (Lena, 06.12.2015)

According to Lena this interaction is not easy, and is not necessarily bringing anything more than “face value”. The interaction with Russia becomes more difficult as the Russian members experience constraints with the Russian repressive laws on NGOs. On the other side, Russia blames the Forum for promoting the EU’s policies:

The blame is of course [...] what we say is always in line with the EU. That is what you will get from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation: “you never say anything that is critical of the EU”. Which is not true, but still yes that is a law coming from unfortunately Russia, which influence Russian members and we work with what members brings. (Lena, 06.12.2015)

As explained in the quote above, the non-state actors in the Forum experience that Russia accuses the Forum of taking the EU side. In that respect, it may be reasonable to question

whether Russian authorities are trying to delegitimize the Forum by not getting involved in it. If the Russian authorities perceive the Forum as just another means for the spread of normative European power, they will shun it. History has shown that Russian authorities reject any attempt at normative power from the EU: Russia rejected the European Neighborhood Policy after the eastern enlargement, blaming the agreement for only capturing the interest of EU (Haukkala, 2008). While the Forum is a non-state initiative, Lena experiences that Russia already relates to the Forum as an extension of the EU. This makes it difficult for the Forum to involve the Russian side. Is Russia deliberately keeping away from the Forum's general assembly to delegitimize the Forum's position in EU-Russia relations?

The Russian state has worked to delegitimize the EU's normative power by accusing it of double standards in its foreign policy (Headley, 2015). After the annexation of Crimea, the EESC ceased all activities with the Civic Chamber, while continuing to work with the Forum. The Civic Chamber was set up by President Putin to represent civil society in Russia, thus acting as an institution between the state and the people (Evans, 2006). When the EU cuts off this connection due to the crisis following the annexation of Crimea, one can ask if Russia perceives this action as a "double standard". When the Civic Chamber is not in line with European ideas, the EU no longer wishes to cooperate with it. Is Russia's reluctance to the Forum a response to EU's interaction with CSF? The question remains if Russia then will accuse the EU of a double standard, since it interacts with the Forum and not the Civic Chamber. These speculations are not confirmed, as I have not spoken to the Civic Chamber. However, the non-state actors in the Forum experience that Russia's approach is very reluctant towards the Forum. This is an example on how a bottom-up, non-state initiative such as the Forum can suddenly find itself in the middle of a political tension between the EU and Russia. This situation described above represents a form of unpredictability to which the actors in the Forum have to relate. However, the non-state actors understand that Russia's next move can have sudden and dire consequences for the future of the Forum.

## **7.2 The Unpredictable Future**

Both Russian and European organizations run a risk when they partake in the Forum. As described by informant Lena above, the Forum works on member contributions, while their activities are constrained by the foreign agent law, the law on public control, and the law on undesirable organizations (Flikke, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015). These laws all restrict non-state actors in Russian civil society today. The pragmatists explain that they are

blamed on both sides. Their connections to the Forum make them susceptible to accusations of being in the “fifth column” (Masha, 08.12.2015) by the Russian authorities. This is the situation for NGOs today, and what both pragmatists and the principled group face. To protect their members, the Forum has taken some preliminary measures over the last year.

When I began this research in June 2015, I could easily gain access to the names of member organization on the Forum’s website. During the general assembly, six months later, I learned that this membership list is now removed from the webpage, and nobody outside of the Forum is given access. The Forum has to take into the consideration the unpredictable situation that their members face. As explained by informant Sasha, is that this becomes a real problem if the Forum itself will be declared an unwanted organization in Russia:

The Forum is a membership-based organization, and if the Forum in itself is declared undesirable what do we do? If the Forum is declared undesirable it means in practice that all the members, all the Russian members, more than half of the members are Russian, have to stop basically attending any Forum events. Or you know, stop any form of activity, which relates to the Forum. (Sasha, 07.12.2015)

If the Russian authorities declare the Forum an undesirable organization, it means that it would have to stop its activity in Russia. Members from the 85 Russian organizations can risk accusation and prosecution for having been actively involved in the Forum. In the worst case scenario, non-state actors in the different NGOs could be prosecuted by the Russian state. That would spell the end of the Forum.

This demonstrates the dimension of unpredictability that non-state actors in the Forum face. This begs the question, if non-state actors in the Forum experience an inherent risk just by being members of the network, then why do they join in the first place? One answer may be that the Forum represents a kind of identification for them as discussed in chapter 6. By being part of the Forum, they are also part of the common EU-Russian society. This gives non-state actors credibility inside Russia, though this credibility depends on the condition that the Forum is not declared an undesirable organization. In light of the close attention the EU gives to the Forum, and in the shadow of the crisis, the non-state actors are becoming increasingly political.

### **7.3 Political Actors in EU-Russian Civil Society**

Sharing a common political agenda and publishing common statements with the EU makes the members in the Forum political actors. Following the annexation of Crimea, the

future of the Forum is in peril not only because the body has become divided, but also because it has become politicized due to the close ties to the EU. One aspect to be addressed is to what extent the EU is aware of this strain on the organization. Some members describe how interacting within the Forum can make the situation more difficult for them on the ground. According to the representative from the EESC, however, it does not seem like this phenomenon has been on the agenda so far. When informant Mons (03.03.2016) was asked on whether the consequences of the EESC's increased attention to the Forum can make the situation worse for the non-state actors, he replied:

M: I have not heard anything like that, but it could be a problem yeah. But there are some things that are very difficult for the Russian authorities, but some things, but they don't care so much of things over all in that way. You never know when and how and if.

Interviewee: Is that sort of something you think about as sort of a risk in your more long-term relationship with the Forum?

M: Absolutely, any day we may have a message. Just like that we got a message from the moon that Mr. Henri Malosse president of this committee is on the blacklist. Never in Russia with any explanations. We will see, one day we may have a message from the ministry of foreign affairs in Moscow: "ohh your cooperation with that, oh what are you planning?"

The EESC as well as the Forum have to react to this unpredictable and dynamic circumstance. However, among the non-state actors as elaborated above, both informants Sasha and Lena find that Russian authorities blame them for having too close relationship towards the EU. Hence, they clearly run a risk by being part of the Forum. From the EESC's point of view involving the Forum has so far not had negative consequences for them, though – as explained by Mons above – the situation can turn on a dime.

This can be a way in which the EESC's benevolent intentions can turn the Forum more political, as they become part at what Neumann and Sending (2010) refer to as the new form of governmentality. NGOs can become both subject and object for policies when they become part of states' policies (Neumann & Sending, 2010). As explained in chapter 2, this is a way that NGOs and the state interact and benefit from each other's power. When reflecting upon the unpredictability non-state actors' experience in the Forum by becoming political actors, one can question to what extent the EU's connection is beneficial for non-state actors in the Forum. When non-state actors in the Forum clearly become a part of the EU's policies this becomes problematic not only in the light of the geopolitical crisis between EU and

Russia, but also on the ground in Russia. It can contribute to a picture of the “West as bad”, as problematized by informant Masha (2015) in chapter 6.

The Forum consists of non-state actors that wish to integrate EU and Russian civil societies. However, the non-state actors find that they are becoming increasingly political, in light of the crisis between EU and Russia. This contributes to a stigmatization of Russian NGOs that identify with the European Union and thus represent the “fifth column” (Masha, 08.12.2015). The geopolitical crisis between the EU and Russia therefore also gets reflected in Russian civil society. The traditionalists want Russia to be independent from the EU, believing that people’s loyalty should be towards the Russian state (Chebankova, 2015). The Russian non-state actors in the Forum, however, belong to the other dimension and favor a liberalistic ideology. Understanding this division becomes relevant for the EU in order to engage civil society. Inside today’s Russia exists an internal conflict among those liberalistic views, on the one hand, and the conservative / traditionalistic view on the other hand (Chebankova, 2015). Informant Masha explains (08.12.2015): “especially in Russia, they are in such a condition that it can become a war. And at one moment we have to propose them civil services as mediators and arenas”. According to Chebankova (2015) it is the development of this division that will determine the future of Russian civil society. That is why it also becomes important for the EU.

Sagan (2010) suggests for the European policies to succeed a pragmatic approach towards the civil society is needed. The EU can attend to civil society in a pragmatic way by paying attention to the local context in inter-governmental cooperation (Belokurova, 2010).

As explained in chapter six, the pragmatists in the Forum describes their role as a “mediator” between liberalistic views and traditional views in Russian civil society today. The pragmatist believes that the most important contribution of her work is to unite the people on both sides. As informant Masha explained above, there is a caricature of “The West” as being something bad in Russia today. This negative picture of the “West” in Russian civil society has also reached informant Mons (2016) in the EESC. He claims that today everything that carries the label European Union “Yevro Sayous” (the Russian word for European Union) can cause serious problems for their activity: “there is a massive propaganda towards the people. They are the bad “yevro sayouse” they say. Universities, foreign agents, doctor, researchers as well and it is getting worse and worse that is the spirit.” (Mons, 03.03.2016). Informant Mons (2016) captures the anxiety from the European Union side, but it also demonstrates how the European Union - in light of the political crisis - carries a stigmatization of something bad, at least in Mons’ (2015) experience. Both the

representative from the EESC and Masha from the pragmatist group wish to shatter this stigma. The members in the Forum can have a possibility to contribute to the prevailing discourse in Russia today, by providing this common space. However, as long as the Forum is perceived as a political pawn in this geopolitical game, it is impossible to know what the future will bring.

The aim of this chapter has been to shed light on the consequences of EU's policies, supporting the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. After the annexation of Crimea, the Forum has become a contact point for EU policies towards Russian Civil Society. The Forum receives support from the EU both politically and economically, while struggling to create a similar connection with Russian authorities. The non-state actors explain that they experience that Russian authorities blame them for their close relationship and that they clearly feel a risk of being a part of the network. In that respect, the non-state actors become political actors in terms of relating to EU. Their activity becomes political and thus challenges their possibility to act inside Russian civil society, and makes them more vulnerable for both the geopolitical crisis and further restrictions coming from the EU.

## **8. Conclusion: from Medvedev's Child to a New Cold War?**

The point of departure for this study was to address non-state actors' role in International Relations. I have argued that power works on different levels, thus a broad understanding of power is needed to understand Russian civil society development in EU-Russia relations. A broad focus on power comes with quite a few challenges. In this study I have aimed to contribute to this discussion on the basis of a conceptually informed empirical analysis. In my conclusion, I therefore begin by summarizing the results from the case study.

In the case study of civil society actors in the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, I observed power in many dimensions. The way non-state actors think that they can improve civil society in Russia, reflects how they relate to power. Hence, both the national constraints they experience inside Russia through repressive legislation, as well as the political crisis between EU and Russia become significant to their everyday activities and how they talk about long-/medium-term developments. Power and "NGOing" are key terms in this thesis. They are both defined as relational, which implies that they also relate to each other. "NGOing" is also a form of power that can be exercised in endless ways – in the relations with whom or how NGO's engage. To capture this dimension of agency in power, productive and discursive power are relevant approaches. In this perspective, it also becomes possible to

see that the struggle between the principled and pragmatist in the Forum is also related to power. My analysis shows that the non-state actors take considerations and make decisions with a concern for the increasingly hostile and unpredictable environment surrounding them, and this cannot be ignored.

### **8.1 Civil Society Development in Russia: Power And Political Actors**

By addressing non-state actors in EU-Russia relations, this study had two main objectives. The first objective was to show that different dimensions of power are needed in studies of non-state actors in international relations. The second objective was to exemplify this with an empirical case study from the sixth general assembly of the non-state initiative EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. This case was particularly interesting because the members in the Forum work to improve civil society development cross-border between EU and Russia thus have constantly to adjust to the ongoing political crisis between the regions.

The theoretical framework is based upon Barnett and Duvall (2005) relational understanding of power as it implies both a structural and an agentic dimension to how it works. While Barnett and Duvall (2005) capture the different dimension of power, I have also made use of decisional and discursive power as ways non-state actors think about their possibilities to act (Arts, 2003). Attempting to fulfill two objectives, one theoretical and one empirical, has been challenging. The theoretical aim was puzzling as I used long time to find a theoretical framework applicable to the case. Unfortunately, I have not managed to find one framework that includes both the structural and agentic dimensions of power, and at the same time is applicable to non-state actors. This is, as far as I have reached, a caveat in International Relations Theory today. The empirical aim, on the other hand, was to apply the conceptual framework in practice, which came with its own set of challenges.

The empirical objective was to demonstrate how power matters for non-state actors in the CSF. The empirical data consists of six interviews, and observation in the Forum's sixth general assembly in Budapest. The interviews are analyzed in accordance with the three step-model of Pouliot (2007). The personal experiences of my informants, Masha, Sasha, Lena, Sonya, Roman and Mons are analyzed, and also contextualized together with theory on power and civil society. I have strived to be transparent in the process and used first person to remind the reader that the analysis is based upon my own interpretations.

The EU-Russia CSF both improves and constrains civil society development in Russia, despite being divided. The Forum improves civil society in Russia by creating a common space where people can meet and interact. I have argued that this interaction



between NGO's can be understood as "NGOing"(DeMars & Dijkzeul, 2015b), and is a condition for civil society activity. A division among the members in the Forum becomes visible in the light of the political pressure from the Russian state, as well as the political tension between EU and Russia. In this division I have identified two groups: the pragmatists and the principled. The internal struggle between the pragmatists and the principled group is reflected in how they disagree on what the common space should consist of, and most of all on how to act within it. This division within the Forum has had some implications for civil society development as they lack the unity to agree upon a common approach to confront the repression they experience. The Forum is unable to directly assist civil society development inside Russia. Nevertheless, by creating a common space, non-state actors can meet and feel connected with a greater civil society community. The discussions and disagreements become a value in itself through this common space that the Forum provides. Furthermore, the identity of belonging to this common space is also reflected in how the Forum has developed. It has now stopped issuing common statements, focusing instead on providing this common space where non-state actors can meet and discuss their differences.

Differences among the non-state actors became more visible in how they relate to power in the context of the current political crisis between the EU and Russia. While the principled group favors institutional power, the pragmatic group favors productive power. Institutional power refers to power through advocacy and lobbying towards policymakers. This power became less effective after the annexation of Crimea, and was demonstrated in the example of visa liberalization. All interaction with Russian policymakers was suspended following the EU's sanctions, thus making addressing policymakers impossible. Another implication for the institutional form of power is related to the fact that even though EU was criticizing Russia for repressive laws, Russia continued its repressive actions. That is why the pragmatic group favored productive power.

Productive power aims to focus on changing the discourse, and the pragmatic group refers to apolitical measures when addressing ordinary people. This form of power became more important than addressing EU policymakers, and at the same time set out to fight the existing political discourse, visible in the light of the geopolitical crisis between EU and Russia. This form of power can also contribute to alleviating the crisis in EU-Russia relations, and then also have a positive effect on the close relationship between EU and the Forum.

The EU has given the Forum more attention after the relationship with the Civic Chamber was suspended following the annexation of Crimea. This relationship is both economical and political. For the EU, the Forum becomes a contact point to Russian civil

society development. However, the political dimension of the relationship becomes more complicated as the Russian authorities blame the CSF for promoting European policy. Non-state actors in the Forum feel that they run a risk by being part of the Forum, and that the Forum can be declared an undesirable organization. If that were to occur, the Forum would not have opportunity to represent the link to the EU as it does today. The Forum's strength lies in productive power according to the pragmatists, changing the discourse of the EU as being inherently bad. The question remains if it is possible to the Forum to operate as an apolitical body, outside of these political dimensions that institutional power implies.

## **8.2 The Forum and EU-Russia Relations: Avoiding a New Cold War**

The situation for NGO's in Russia and the EU-Russian relationship is currently in crisis, and remains unlikely to change in the near future. The major challenge for the civil society in both Russia and EU, as described by the informants, is the growth of hostile discourse and the return to a "new cold war" between the West and the East. One major question remains on how the EU can use civil society to promote rule of law and democracy in Russia. There is no obvious answer to the problem. However, for the EU to succeed in addressing its objectives in Russia through civil society, in the current political context, it needs to work apolitically, and that is becoming increasingly difficult.

While the intentions of the EU is to support civil society activity in the Forum, acting united and proposing joint statements on the civil society development in Russia becomes problematic. The joint statements, and the political unity from the EU and the CSF allow Russian authorities to blame the Forum for promoting the EU's normative power. Institutional power is easily tracked and rejected by states. Productive power, on the other hand, operates in diffuse relations and is thus more difficult to address.

Drawing on the answers from the research questions I see three major possibilities for the Forum in the future. First, the Forum should maintain a relationship to both the EU and Russia as long as possible, while not involving itself politically. The Forum is dependent on economic support, but the Forum should avoid political meetings and publishing "joint statements" with the EESC. In order to remain a non-state initiative, it is essential that the Forum maintain a political distance from the EU. Following that argument, the CSF should also continue to work to establish channels with Russian authorities. One restriction in this case can be the geographical position of the secretary of the Forum. Today the secretary is located in Berlin, Germany. However, the responsibility for increased contact lies not only

with the Forum, but with the Russian side as well. So far, progress on this front appears unlikely in the near future.

Secondly, the Forum has a possibility of serving as a common and free space for Russian NGO's. The possibility lies in their access to productive power. Productive power, or discursive power, aims to change the political discourse in order to put an end to the discourse that West represents something bad, and Russia is only Putin. The productive power can thus be reflected in the Forum as a "common space" for political discussion, where new creative projects can develop.

Thirdly, EU's foreign policy can use the Forum to obtain its objectives in its biggest neighbouring country. This thesis argues that a civil society only working from outside of the Russian borders will not help reach the long-term perspective of a united and democratic EU-Russian relationship. The EU needs to cooperate with Russian civil society actors and the Forum provides such a platform. Since it is inevitably important for Russian civil society to keep in contact with the EU and not separate it self even more from the union, the Forum can play a key role in that relationship. The question remains how it can access this role, and how Russia will respond. Predicting the future goes beyond the scope of this thesis. The only point I wish to make is that non-state actors working with the Russian civil society, also in the future, will have to pay attention to the geopolitical and national power structures surrounding them.

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# Appendix

## Interview guide

The interview guide will be used for interviewing participants in the EU-Russia civil society forum.

*Research questions:* How does an initiative for non-state collaboration in international politics, such as the EU-Russia Civil society forum, sustain or improve conditions for civil society in context of increasing tension between Russia and the EU (the West)? What kind of power can non-state actors exert in the shadow of global power structures? To what extent is increasing politicization of non-state involvement in international politics, including the intrusion in global power relations, contributing to democratization of a global public sphere?

*Groups of interviewees:* representatives working with EU relations; working group leaders, and other NGO representatives with specific experiences from the Forum.

*Questions:*

### **A. The Forum: members, objective and organizational structure**

1. Why did your organization join the Forum? Have your expectations been met?
2. Since its foundation in 2010, the Forum has changed its structure considerably: In 2010 a steering committee and working groups were established, and in 2014 a secretariat was put in place; how will you describe these organizational changes? What are the effects of the re-organization? Has it for example led to inclusion of new members? Or exclusion? Has it improved the coherence of the forum? In what way?
3. The statements issued by the Forum have also changed character during the previous years and at the general assembly this year, and a new steering structure on the agenda. The forum is becoming increasingly professionalized, but why are these changes necessary? How may this improve the Forum's ability to be heard politically? For example to improve the situation for NGOs in Russia? Does an increasing professionalization and may be politicization of the forum change the relationship to the members, the grassroots anchoring of civil society development in Europe?

### **B. Relationship with the EU: Advocacy, cooperation and funding**

4. The Forum has numerous connections to different EU institutions, such as European Economic and Social Committee and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society; does your organization benefit from these connections? To what extent do these relations improve the role and power of the forum?
5. Relations between the EU and the Forum are obviously characterized by the fact that the Forum receives funding from EU bodies; what other kinds of resources do you think that the EU has to offer the Forum in order to strengthen civil society? On the contrary, what do you think that the Forum can offer the EU? Does the financial aspect affect the Forum's relationship towards Russia?
6. In the survey during the latest GA in Tallinn 2014, influencing EU policies was mentioned as an important aim for the member organizations: How do you



experience that the interests of the members are assured in the communication towards EU? *Background: since 2012 no policy papers have been published on behalf of the GA, or GA statements since 06.10.2013. The steering committee has been more active (latest 25.09.2015); what role does this paper have in the agenda setting and the advocacy towards EU.*

7. What obstacles do you see in the forum's effort to influence EU policy? Has increasing political tension between EU and Russia affected these efforts?

### C. Political situation in Russia and the power of the Forum

8. Members of the forum have also been asked to respond to another aim; "the influence on EU-Russian relationship". *Here we see a decrease among the Russians respondents while an increase among the EU respondents in relation to the year the organization joined the Forum to what extent the Forum's relationship towards EU-Russian relationship is an important aim).* To what extent do you experience that the Forum is able to influence EU-Russia relations? Do you have any specific examples of how the Forum has strived to or managed to for example set the agenda in regard to EU-Russia relations?
9. Since the establishment of the Forum; NGOs in Russia have experienced increased restrictions imposed by the Russian government; How has the forum attempted to influence this development? Has your organization been involved, and if so, how? Have you been involved in addressing this political situation?
10. Has the cooperation between Forum members from Russian and EU changed during the increasing political tension that has developed in recent years? In what way?
11. Considering the situation for the Forum today, what are your thoughts about the future? How can NGOs influence conditions for civil society development in Russia and the EU, where there are also challenges, for example in regard to the access to funding?

### Overview of Informants

Informant	Position	Time and place	Comments
01- Lena	Position in Forum	Budapest, 06.12.15	Recorded interview
02- Sasha	Position in Forum, European NGO	Budapest, 07.12.15	Recorded interview
03- Roman	Position in working group, European NGO	Budapest, 08.12.15	Recorded interview
04- Sonya	Position in Forum, Russian NGO	Budapest, 08.12.15	Recorded interview
05- Masha	Position in working group, Russian NGO	Budapest, 08.12.15	Recorded interview
07- Mons	EESC	Brussels, 03.03.2016	Recorded interview

## **Information for informants about ongoing research**

You receive this letter because your work, and the organization you represent are relevant to our ongoing research on non-state actors in international politics. Hoping you may be willing to meet for an interview, we explain in short below what this research is about.

### *About the research:*

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are today considered central to global discourses on democracy, human rights, environment, education and social issues, etc. As representatives of civil society, NGOs are seen as a moral compass in international politics, and may have consultative roles, set the agenda and advocate certain positions towards for example national authorities and international organizations. To do that, NGOs use various methods, but they also need to take into consideration the political context in which they want to influence developments and achieve change. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's transition to democracy has faced various obstacles, and for civil society development, a most recent challenge has been the introduction of the "foreign agent"-legislation putting severe constraints on Russian NGOs and their international collaboration. Attempts to improve the situation for civil society in Russia have been initiated, but face the possibility of being accused of meddling in internal Russian politics, thereby imposing ideas of certain NGOs as acceptable "insiders" and others as "foreign" and thus lacking legitimacy. In our research we are interested in how NGO activities are affected by these kinds of struggles, in which certain visions of what is right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, are imposed. How, we ask, do NGOs deal with this kind of political tension in their efforts to further international partnership and collaboration for developing civil society in international politics? We have identified the EU-Russia civil society forum as one meeting place in which these issues are relevant to the strategies NGOs pursue in regard to the political situation in Russia and the tension between Russia and the West.

### *Request for participation in interview:*

We participate as observers in the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum's General Assembly in Budapest this December and would like to use the opportunity to conduct interviews. We expect the interview to last 45-60 minutes. We are for example interested in interviewing administrators in the Forum; representatives working with EU relations; working group leaders, and other NGO representatives with specific experiences from the Forum. Thematically the interviews will focus on (1) the objectives and achievements of the forum, including re-organization; (2) relations between the Forum and the EU; (3) political developments in Russia and how the Forum approaches this; including possibilities and constraints NGO activists may face in dealing with this situation.

### *Questions of recording, anonymity and citation*

In order to keep the transcription correct, we will provide a recorder for the interview session. In case you would not like recording, please notify us and one of us can take notes during the interview session. All personal information will be kept confidential and the interview will be used for this research purpose only. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage of the process, in which case all information about you will be anonymous.

*Result of the research:*

This research will result in a master thesis due 15 May 2016 and subsequently be part of scientific publications.

*Who we are*

*Kirsti Stuvøy* is associate professor in the Department of international environment and development studies at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) in Norway. She is currently supervising *Marianne Holden*, who pursues a master thesis in International Relations. Marianne, amongst other, has experience from working with human rights education in Russia, in the Norwegian NGO the Human Rights Academy. We jointly prepare and conduct interviews for this research.

Stuvøy has since 2004 interviewed several Russian NGO representatives on Russian politics and civil society development. She has researched topics such as violence against women and the emergence of crisis centers for women across northwest Russia, the establishment and operation of public chambers (i.e. consultative bodies), and analyzed trends in post-communist civil society development in Russia. One of her recent publications addressed consultative bodies and state-society relations in Russia, and was published in the English-language journal *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* (2014). For more information about Stuvøy:

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*Full contact details:*

Please get in touch if you have questions.



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