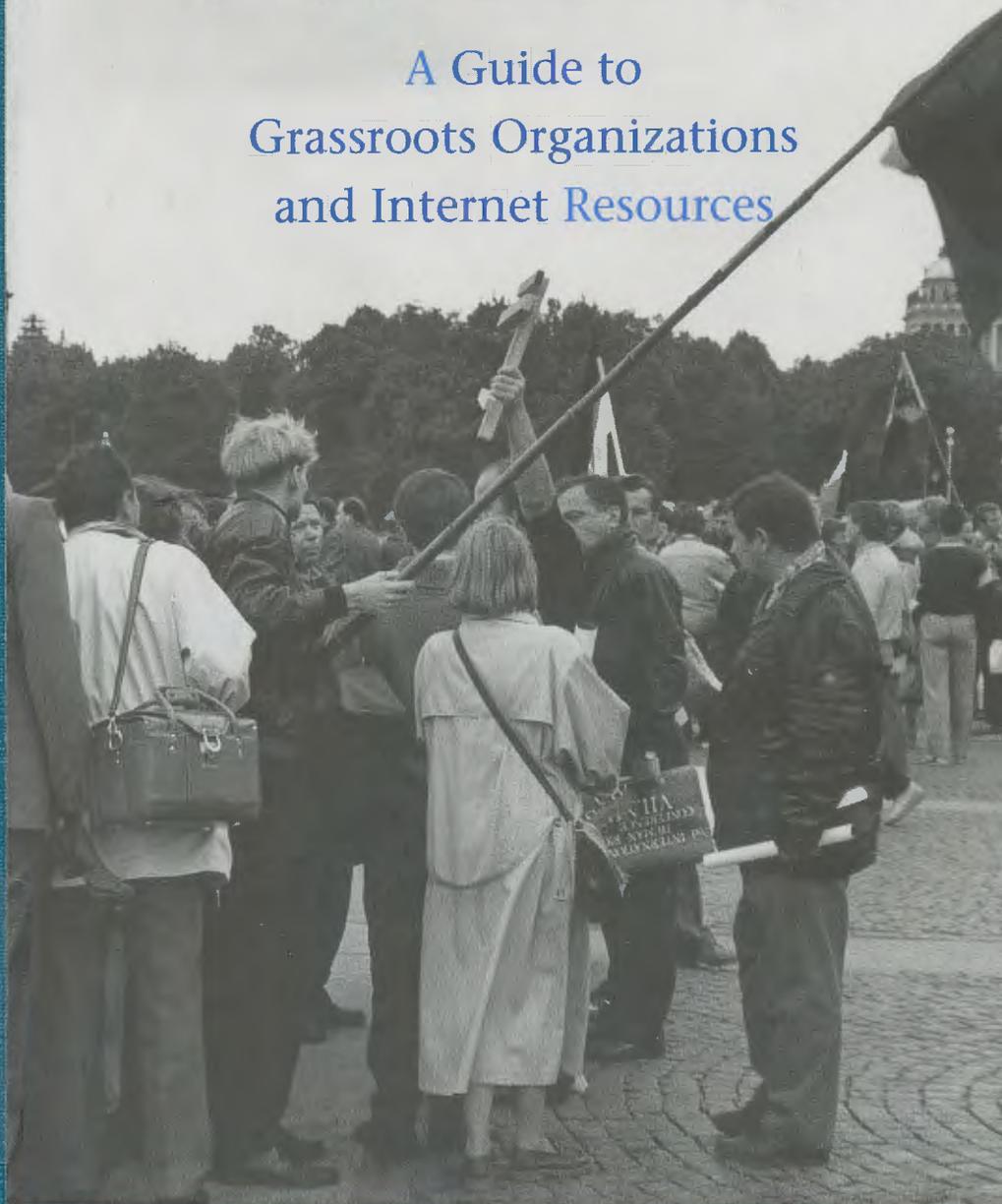


REVISED EDITION

The Post-Soviet Handbook

A Guide to
Grassroots Organizations
and Internet Resources



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*A Guide to Grassroots Organizations
and Internet Resources*

REVISED EDITION

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Foreword

This volume, prepared by Holt Ruffin and his staff at the Center for Civil Society International, is in many respects remarkable. On the one hand, *The Post-Soviet Handbook* is the best available practical guide to the independent sector in the countries carved from the former Soviet Union. It consists of two parts, the first profiling “third sector” organizations in the newly independent states and American organizations interacting with them, and the second consisting of a useful compendium of Internet resources in those same countries.

Soaring far above these issues in importance is this volume’s second identity, namely, as an insightful report on the state of civil society in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union, developed by an organization devoted to fostering and monitoring developments in this area. Thanks to this dual identity, *The Post-Soviet Handbook* offers something for everyone, no matter how practical and specific or how theoretical and general one’s interest may be.

It need scarcely be said that the editors have had to be highly selective. *The Post-Soviet Handbook* describes only a few hundred of the tens of thousands of NGOs active in the NIS today. Only a small fraction of not-for-profit groups in Western Europe and Japan, which have found their own points of interaction in the newly independent states, are listed here. Most difficult to document are the many independent groups in Russia and elsewhere that are not interacting with Western counterparts. It is hoped that indigenous researchers will soon begin detailing such groups. But until then, this volume will remain the standard reference.

Anyone connected with the Internet is ipso facto part of the new societal sector worldwide that exists outside the ready control of governmental organs; any guide to independent sector activity in the former Soviet Union must therefore include Internet users. Like airline pilots’ associations or ham radio operator networks, Internet users constitute a kind of supranational society in “cyberspace” whose links with one another are often as close as their ties with their local communities. Inevitably, even as substantial a guide to Internet resources as *The Post-Soviet Handbook* will not be comprehensive, so rapidly are these resources growing. The editors have wisely provided for regular updating through e-mail and through CCSI’s World Wide Web site. In keeping with the democratic and participatory character of civil society, readers are encouraged to help update this site and perfect this compendium.

As the independent sector in the NIS grows and comes to include an ever greater number of increasingly diverse organizations, it would be very helpful if *The Post-Soviet Handbook* spawned additional, more specialized guides to important subsectors. Four possibilities stand out.

First are scientific and technical fields. Highly organized and interactive, such disciplines have moved swiftly to participate both in third sector activity generally and in the Internet. Second and third are the many religious and ethnic-based organizations that exist within Russia and other newly independent states and which in many cases maintain close ties with kindred groupings abroad. It is worth noting that in Soviet times the vast majority of so-called dissident writings emerged from religious and national groups. Since the fall of the USSR, such groups have greatly expanded their activity and have extended their reach into the political realm as well.

The fourth sphere that deserves a special compendium consists of local and provincial organizations. Relatively few such bodies maintain links with Moscow or St. Petersburg, let alone with counterpart organizations abroad. Having grown up "from below," these essential elements of civil society are the hardest to document. It is to be hoped that over time some readers will carry *The Post-Soviet Handbook* idea forward in all four of these areas.



It is impossible to overstate the importance of the present guide to third sector organizations and Internet users in Russia and the other newly independent states. The astonishing proliferation of businesses and financial institutions in the former Soviet Union is well documented elsewhere, thanks to reports by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Deutsche Bank and various business groups. The independent sector has been far less accessible, however.

Perhaps it is too much to be hoped that those researching the rise of civil society in the former Soviet Union will adequately utilize a handbook like this. They should do so, however, for *The Post-Soviet Handbook* provides as revealing an index to this phenomenon as any in existence. More than three decades ago the MIT political scientist Karl Deutsch assessed the likelihood of political community embracing North America and Western Europe by counting the number of telephone calls and the amount of first-class mail between those two regions. The present volume provides the raw material for a similar study of civil society, and it is worth drawing here some of the obvious conclusions.

So rapidly does the past slip from our consciousness that we must pause to recall the situation as it existed only a decade ago. Soviet law permitted no truly independent organizations whatsoever. True, nominally "societal" (*obshchestvennyy*) groups existed, but only under the tutelage of a governmental or Communist Party patron. Even in the case of these governmentalized entities, the state exercised a monopoly of communication, both domestic and international. Unauthorized communications both within the USSR and with independent entities abroad was banned. The receipt of funds from foreign bodies, whether public or private, was grounds for stern legal action.

The political underpinnings of this unnatural order traced directly to Marxism-Leninism, with its ideal of the totally organized society, and also to notions of autarky that permeated the official ideology. All these traced in turn to an earlier era when the major channels of communication—the printed word, mail, and film—were readily controlled by the state. Such control was all the easier if the state was prepared to use force, as was certainly the case in the USSR.

Beginning in the 1960s, however, the willingness of the Soviet state to employ force to achieve its ends diminished. Meanwhile, the spread of education in the USSR created a growing number of men and women who were eager to participate directly in the leading cultural movements worldwide. Beginning in the realm of religion and movements for national identity and rapidly extending into such diverse realms as popular culture, jazz, ecology, and the arts, truly self-organized and independent initiatives sprouted throughout Soviet society. Long before the Internet, these hearty bands of enthusiasts exploited 35-mm film, tape recordings, telephones, and photocopiers to advance their cause and forge links with like-minded groups both locally and abroad.

By this process, a true civil society began to reemerge even during the “golden age” of Brezhnev’s rule. *Glasnost*’ existed long before Gorbachev’s *glasnost*’, and voluntary associations existed long before the state acknowledged them as legal.

Whence came this effervescence of independence in the very heart of the Marxist-Leninist state? Contrary to the claims of Soviet officialdom and Western kremlinology, Russians, Ukrainians, and many other peoples of the USSR possessed a strong tradition of self-organization. The progenitors of today’s not-for-profits in the newly independent states are the thousands of self-help and philanthropic societies that existed prior to the Bolshevik revolution. The fact that the Soviet government had to exert so much brutal force in order to wipe out these groups in the 1920s and 1930s attests to their vitality. Nor did the spirit of self-initiative stay dead for long. Obliterated by 1937, the volunteeristic urge in Russia reappeared like Lazarus in the 1960s, a mere quarter-century later. As the spirit of self-initiative came once more to the fore, it revealed the absolute limits of absolute power in the USSR, thus contributing directly to the system’s downfall.

What, then, is the state of volunteerism and the independent sector in Russia today? Besides the mere fact of their reappearance after so many years, the two most important features of the present situation are, first, that the new associations and groupings are far more closely interlinked with counterpart groups in Europe and America than were their predecessors, and second, that they are yet to obtain the solid legal basis that is essential if they are to be viable for the long term.

It is easy to be cynical about American and Western aid to the independent sector in Russia. Far too much of that aid—estimates range up to 90 percent—has ended up in the pockets of American and European organizations rather than of the

Russian groups they purport to champion. Nonetheless, wherever the money ends up, American assistance under USAID has helped forge close personal links between independent sector activists in the NIS and the U.S. Such ties are more enduring than any financial support, and over time they are bound to affect the "culture" and mentality of the third sector in Russia and neighboring countries.

Yet, for all the vitality of voluntary initiatives in Russia and elsewhere, they have yet to gain the firm basis in law that is essential for their long-term viability. Only in May 1995 did the first body of legislation in this area pass the Duma. Supplementary legislation validating foundations and political parties has, at this writing, yet to be approved.

Skeptics may find evidence in this of a kind of "Soviet hangover," i.e., the resistance of the new Russian government to true voluntarism and pluralism. For the time being, however, the evidence does not support this conclusion. On the contrary, the legislative delays are attributable not to opposition but to the serious effort of Russian legislators to "get it right," i.e., to produce legislation that is solid, enduring, and grounded in the best experience of other countries. The first section of the new Civil Code, approved early in 1995, is a solid piece of legislation based on the Napoleonic tradition. There is every reason to expect that subsequent legislation based on volunteerism will have an equally serious character, and will meet the needs of a modern society as Russians perceive them.

This leaves unanswered only one question, but a crucially important one. Already, there are many men and women of wealth in Russia. Thousands of other fortunes are bound to be made in the vast and increasingly privatized energy sector, the burgeoning service sector, banking, and even in the manufacturing sphere. Will those who possess such fortunes use them for the public good? Will they, in other words, adopt a philosophy akin to Andrew Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth*, which would obligate them to devote the fruits of their good fortune to civic uplift and the public's welfare?

It is too early to judge whether this will occur. However, public discussion of this issue within Russia henceforth will no longer be a purely Russian affair. Thanks to the channels of communication with many organizations described herein, and to the great river of transnational dialogue that is the Internet, this issue can be thoroughly aired not only by Russians alone, but by friends of the independent sector everywhere. If this dialogue fosters the further effervescence of volunteerism in Russia, as one might hope and even expect, then the present volume will soon be obsolete. One can pay no higher compliment to it than this!

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