

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Daria Venikova

**RESISTING DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN AUTOCRACIES:  
THE CASE OF FOREIGN AGENT LAW IN RUSSIA**

MA thesis

Supervisor: Viacheslav Morozov, PhD  
Co-supervisor: Alexander Libman, PhD

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## Abstract

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are important actors on the international arena and their role in global governance cannot be downplayed. This thesis investigates the concept of democracy promotion and how authoritarian regimes might resist it, specifically by applying pressure to NGOs funded from abroad. I use a case study of a law on foreign agents in Russia in order to understand which tools can an authoritarian regime apply to foreign-funded NGOs and how effective it can be in this goal. To investigate that, I use in-depth interviews with employees of the organizations declared foreign agents in Russia to analyze their experiences and make conclusions about the role of foreign funding in their respective organizations, and the impact of the law on them. I conclude, that foreign funding plays a crucial role in support of the functioning of civil society in Russia, and even in the context of repressions, people find a way to work their way around them. At the same time, the law on foreign agents has become a major restriction for the functioning of civil society in general and for the foreign-funded NGOs in particular, which in turn became a major obstacle for democracy promotion.

*Keywords: democracy promotion, civil society, foreign aid, nongovernmental organizations, Russia*

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## Introduction

In 2012, shortly after massive protest uprisings on Bolotnaya Square in and the start of the third presidential term of Vladimir Putin, the Federal Law Introducing Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation Regarding the Regulation of Activities of Non-commercial Organizations Performing the Function of Foreign Agents (or simply the law on foreign agents<sup>1</sup>) was introduced in Russia. It requires NGOs that receive funding from abroad and are engaged in political activity, to be registered in a special public database of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation. Other requirements include providing frequent detailed financial reports on their activity to the authorities, and, more importantly, to label all of their printed and online materials as those “produced by an entity performing the function of the foreign agent”. The law was further amended several times, with every amendment adding more requirements and further broadening the definition of who can be affected by it and added to the database. Having started from affecting only NGOs and being used relatively rarely, as of the end of 2022 the database includes media sources and individual persons, ranging from opposition politicians and journalists to rap performers, overall accounting for more than 200 entries. The status of the “foreign agent” severely restricts the work of entities having it, with some of them shutting down activities, losing funding and income, and their employees prosecuted, threatened and having to flee abroad<sup>2</sup>.

This law has undoubtedly become one of the most serious administrative repressions of the Russian state, directed towards suppressing any protest activity within the country, alongside tough Internet freedom regulations and introducing criminal punishment for participation in unsanctioned meetings and rallies<sup>3</sup>. They are usually studied in academic literature alongside each other, as a complex of repressions, signifying a turn to a more hostile domestic policy and deeper autocratization, the trajectory of which Russia has been reportedly following since the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, this is not the only way to look at this law, since it directly affects only organizations sponsored from abroad, or at least claimed to have been sponsored from abroad. In this thesis, I propose to study the law on foreign agents as a tool of resistance of an autocratic regime to democracy promotion efforts and assess the effectiveness of this tool for this purpose. I argue that this approach allows to contribute to the research on democracy promotion and make

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<sup>1</sup> Here and further in the text I refer to it either as the “law on foreign agents” or the “foreign agent law”.

<sup>2</sup> Goncharenko, G., & Khadaroo, I. (2020). Disciplining human rights organisations through an accounting regulation: A case of the ‘foreign agents’ law in Russia. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 72, 1-19.

<sup>3</sup> Gel'man, Vladimir. "The politics of fear: how the Russian regime confronts its opponents." *Russian Politics & Law* 53.5-6 (2015): 18.

conclusions about the role of foreign aid in civil society building and the ways in which autocrats resist the attempts to spread democracy in their countries.

I believe that there are several reasons to look at the law through this prism. First of all, many researchers have named Russia as a country on the forefront of autocracy promotion, and as a state actively engaged in fighting the spread of democracy inside the country, as well as in other countries<sup>4</sup> and restricting the work of NGOs, receiving foreign funding is one of the tools used for that purpose. The law is directly referenced by Charles Ziegler as a means of resistance to “Western democracy promotion efforts [which Russia perceives as] as destabilizing and directed towards regime change”<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Thomas Ambrosio describes five tactics which autocrats can use in order to provide backlash against democracy, and one of the tactics is insulating regime from within, removing the influence of all possible democratic trends. The purpose of that is preventing popular uprisings and possible challenges to existing regime. And again, undermining foreign NGOs is named as the first solution that Russia has used to address this issue<sup>6</sup>. The first law of this kind was introduced in 2005 and was banning foreign NGOs on the territory of Russia, if their activity “creates a threat for sovereignty and political independence of Russia”<sup>7</sup>. It was widely perceived by public, as well as researchers, as a reaction to “color revolutions” happening at the time in post-Soviet space. And since the Kremlin believed in the central role of “the collective West” and foreign-funded NGOs as the catalyzers of these revolutions and felt threatened by those, it was a logical step to introduce laws, restricting their activity on the territory of Russia. Since then, there have been more laws introduced with similar purposes, however the Law on Foreign Agents has become the most broadly used and talked about in the press in the past 10 years.

The second reason has been already partially referenced and lies in the Russian state’s perception of civil society movements, especially foreign-funded ones, as a threat to regime stability. Despite the fact that the main justification of the introduction of the law was the idea that similar law on foreign agent exists in the US, Russian authorities have described this law specifically as a prevention measure against “foreign intervention”:

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<sup>4</sup> Ambrosio, Thomas. *Authoritarian backlash: Russian resistance to democratization in the former Soviet Union*. Routledge, 2016.; Carothers, Thomas. "The backlash against democracy promotion." *Foreign Affairs* (2006): 55-68.

<sup>5</sup> Ziegler, Charles E. "Great powers, civil society and authoritarian diffusion in Central Asia." *Central Asian Survey* 35.4 (2016): 553.

<sup>6</sup> Cit. opt. Ambrosio, Thomas. *Authoritarian backlash: Russian resistance to democratization in the former Soviet Union*. Routledge, 2016: 46.

<sup>7</sup> Here I am referencing the law “On Introducing Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation”, which apart from that banned foreign nationals from registering NGOs in Russia

As we can see from above, the Russian state has a history of adopting legislation directed at foreign and foreign-funded NGOs, as a reaction to popular uprisings internally and abroad, while explicitly expressing feeling threatened by foreign-funded organizations. At the same time, the state is described in the academic literature as an active player against democracy promotion, where one of the important tools is preventing popular uprisings through restricting foreign funding for civil society. At the same time, one needs to take into consideration the fact that even though the law has affected many foreign-funded NGOs, it been interpreted rather widely and applied to organizations and individuals who did not receive any substantial foreign funding. However, it still has an effect of countering democracy promotion because it hinders the work of organizations, funded from abroad. Therefore, I argue, that we can study the law on foreign agents in Russia as a tool of resistance to democracy promotion.

I believe that the study of crackdown on foreign-funded NGOs as a tool of resistance to democracy promotion is valid and relevant for three reasons. First of all, previous research has revealed contradicting evidence for the effectiveness of democracy promotion efforts in general, specifically on the case of Russia, plus the regime has transformed significantly in the last 10 years, whereas most research findings on democracy promotion in Russia and Eastern Europe date back to the period of 2000-2010 with some exceptions. At the same time, different types of democratic promotion have revealed different results in Eastern Europe and in Russia, while the type of democracy promotion studied in the framework of this research stays one of the most contested and controversial ones. More thorough overview of theory on this topic is presented in chapter 1 of this thesis. Secondly, there has been mixed reaction in society to the implementation of the new law in Russia. For some organizations it has not hindered the work significantly, while for others it was a sentence to stop existing. Some organizations have registered themselves in a list of foreign agents voluntarily, while others close their organization and open it again every time they are added to the database, since they deem unacceptable to live with this status. Does foreign funding play a role in the organization's complying with the law, or are there more important factors in place? Finally, the research shows that restricting the foreign funding for NGOs is a global trend, that can be traced in 40+ countries all over the world and that is and growing every year<sup>8</sup>. Similar to Russian ones, policies against civil society organizations and activists are adopted

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<sup>8</sup> Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash. "Hands off my regime! Governments' restrictions on foreign aid to non-governmental organizations in poor and middle-income countries." *World Development* 84 (2016): 299-311.

for example in Venezuela and Ethiopia<sup>9</sup>, and in Central Asian countries and Belarus this trend has been directly attributed to influence from Russia. At the same time, NGOs are an important factor in global politics. Their role in global governance has significantly increased in the past 50 years<sup>10</sup>, and they serve as catalyzers for social change and advocate for human rights, especially in non-democratic regimes<sup>11</sup>, when the state is not performing this function. Researchers have referred to this trend as alarming and called for “examining the implementation and enforcement of restrictive NGO finance laws to better understand their impact, as well as the non-legal methods states use to clamp down on civil society”, which is exactly what I am focusing on in this thesis<sup>12</sup>.

The research problem is outlined as the following: there is an autocratic regime pushing on repressions on the actors sponsored from abroad to do work, mostly related to human rights and protection and promotion of democratic values. Specifically, it is done by introducing a law naming these actors “foreign agents” and severely restricting their working capabilities. We look at this law as the case of an authoritarian state resisting democratic promotion. Previous research has revealed contradicting evidence for the effectiveness of democracy promotion through financing NGOs, as well as called for more thorough investigation of ways, in which countries resist democracy promotion. The research question of the paper is as follows:

*How effective has the Foreign Agents law in Russia been against the process of democratic diffusion?*

The research question focuses on the effects that the law on foreign agents has had on those actors that it directly influences, namely civil society organizations that ended up in the database of the foreign agents. These actors are also targets of democracy promotion efforts, since they receive funding from abroad for the goals of human rights protection, monitoring and reporting. Ziegler writes that “support for civil society and democracy-building programmes has become a source of contention between democratic Western states and [their authoritarian challengers]”<sup>13</sup>, therefore, having a close look on one case where an autocrat has challenged civil society in this way, we will be able to learn more about how civil society reacts to challenges and which role do the democracy promotion efforts play in its reaction. The main argument that the study makes is that democracy promotion efforts in the sphere of civil society, represented mainly by financial

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<sup>9</sup> Gilbert, Leah, and Payam Mohseni. "Disabling dissent: the colour revolutions, autocratic linkages, and civil society regulations in hybrid regimes." *Contemporary politics* 24.4 (2018): 455.

<sup>10</sup> Chaudhry, Suparna. "The Assault on Civil Society: Explaining State Crackdown on NGOs." *International Organization* (2022): 550.

<sup>11</sup> Ishiyama, John, Lia Mezvrishvili, and Nina Zhgenti. "An oasis of democracy in an authoritarian sea? Civil society, social, and institutional trust in Georgia." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 51.1 (2018): 19-26.

<sup>12</sup> Cit. Opt: Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash: 307.

<sup>13</sup> Cit. Opt. Ziegler, Charles E. "Great powers, civil society and authoritarian diffusion in Central Asia.": 549.

aid, are able to support the building and development of civil society, even under repressions in an authoritarian state, however these repressions make it virtually impossible for civil society to achieve policy or social change. Hence, I formulate two separate hypotheses for the study:

*Hypothesis 1:* The work of foreign-funded NGOs in Russia has been significantly restricted by the law on foreign agents.

*Hypothesis 2:* Foreign-funded civil society organizations in Russia are able to continue their work with foreign partners even under the law on foreign agents, using informal and innovative solutions.

These hypotheses are formulated from research on democracy promotion effects as well as from research on survival strategies of NGOs under repressions, including studies already done on the Russian case. Testing these hypotheses will help provide an answer to the research question, and assess the effectiveness of the foreign agent law in Russia as a tool against democracy promotion. I consider the law effective against democracy promotion, if it has managed to hinder the capacity of these organizations to produce societal change and if it has managed to disrupt the partnerships of these organizations with their foreign partners.

Therefore, the thesis proceeds as follows: in the first chapter I discuss the concept of democracy promotion and review the general literature on the concept, research on democracy promotion efforts in Eastern Europe and Russia and research on autocratic regimes resisting the process of democracy promotion, in order to provide theoretical background for the research. In the second chapter I provide an overview of the Russian case, which includes an analysis of assumptions and foreign policy decisions, that led to the adoption of the law on foreign agents, as well as a brief history of enforcement and implementation of the law. In this chapter, I also provide justification as to why the case of Russia and this specific law were chosen to study resistance to democracy promotion in autocracies. The third chapter represents research methodology, and an outline of how the empirical part of the thesis was determined and conducted. I employ the method of in-depth interviews with representatives of foreign agent NGOs, in order to assess the change in their working methods after the implementation of the law and their cooperation with foreign donors to assess the scale and methods of democracy promotion in Russia. Finally, chapter 4 provides the analysis of the interviews and findings of the thesis. In the conclusion, I discuss the results and possible applications of the research, practical and theoretical.

This research contributes to the field of democracy promotion research by revisiting the theory about interaction of democratic and autocratic diffusion and looks into specific instruments used for democratic promotion, namely sponsorship of civil society organizations. I view the case as a case of contestation of actors promoting democratization and actors pushing for further

autocratization in Russia. On a practical level, we will see how effective authoritarian practices are in suppressing the process of democratic diffusion. The results of this research might be helpful for donors, that consider supporting projects in Russia or in autocratic countries in general. The conclusions can be made about the effect of societal change brought about by funding from Western institutions for certain organizations in autocracies.

## **Chapter 1: Democracy promotion vs. authoritarian states**

In this chapter, I will unpack the main theoretical concepts and research problem. In order to examine how foreign funding may affect the survival strategies of NGO networks I use the concepts of democratic diffusion and democratic promotion, in combination with studies on repressions in authoritarian states. Previous studies on the foreign agent law specifically were done predominantly in the framework of comparative politics and sociology<sup>14</sup>. Considering the fact that some of the organizations were funded from abroad with specific purposes and programs, as well as the fact, that restricting activities of foreign-funded NGOs is a global trend, it is relevant to study this topic in the realm of international relations, and namely with concepts of authoritarian diffusion and promotion.

### **1.1. The concepts of democracy promotion and democratic diffusion**

I look at the foreign agents law in Russia as the case of resistance to attempt of democracy promotion from the West, therefore the first step is to conceptualize democracy promotion. In this section, I set up the conceptual framework for the research and answer the following questions: What is the difference between the concepts of democratic diffusion and democratic promotion and which one of those would work better for this research? What are the general trends in this research field and how is this research project fit in the broader scholarly literature?

Democracy promotion and democracy diffusion both refer to process of a state adopting democratic values and institutions as a result of cooperation with a more democratic state<sup>15</sup>. The processes are fairly similar and interconnected, in some research articles the two terms are used interchangeably<sup>16</sup>. The main difference is that promotion is a more active action, with concrete efforts from a democratic state to influence policy decisions and outcomes in another state. At the same time, diffusion is passive, with the state “learning” norms from a democratic state. More broadly, diffusion refers to the process, where “policymaking and policy outcomes in one polity influence policymaking and policy outcomes in other polities”<sup>17</sup>, so there is not only democratic diffusion, the concept of autocratic diffusion also exists and is being actively researched.

The first works on diffusion of democracy date to late 80s and early 90s, where scholars were reflecting on the state of world post-World War II, and on the process of regime change and

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<sup>14</sup> These works are reviewed in 2.3.

<sup>15</sup> Burnell, Peter. "Promoting democracy." *Government and Opposition* 48.2 (2013): 274.

<sup>16</sup> Beichelt, Timm. "The research field of democracy promotion." *Living Reviews in Democracy* 3.1 (2012): 2.

<sup>17</sup> Blatter, Joachim, Lea Portmann, and Frowin Rausis. "Theorizing policy diffusion: From a patchy set of mechanisms to a paradigmatic typology." *Journal of European Public Policy* 29.6 (2022): 806.

building all over the world. The diffusion concept was among the arguments against path dependency, when it became clear that not all countries are following the path to democracy, and some are more prone to democratization than others, and there is a lot of variation when it comes to regime development. In general, researchers agree that spatial dimension plays an important role in whether the country is going to democratize or not<sup>18</sup>. In this research, I am interested in intentional democratization actions, therefore I will mostly refer to the concept of democracy promotion, however in some research articles that I am going to mention, the same process is framed under diffusion concept.

Norms promotion can be done in different forms and there are various tools with which countries could engage in it. These tools range from more to less obvious and direct, based on how they are incentivizing countries for a policy change<sup>19</sup>. The most prominent would be military intervention, which is a highly-contested measure and is used extremely rarely. Other tools include clear ultimatums or sanctions, which are used to signal dissatisfaction with certain policies of the country a call for change in them. These are applied more often, but still in pretty extreme cases, although with high effectiveness<sup>20</sup>. Other efforts can take forms of conditionality, where certain benefits like membership in international organizations, would be available to the country in case it fulfills a set of conditions, usually ones leading to establishment of democratic institutions. This was used a lot in Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War period, and I will have a closer look on that phenomenon in the next section. Finally, the softer approach to democracy promotion includes incentives, usually in the form of financial assistance. Exactly financial aid aspect of democracy promotion is in the focus of this research. Financial aid or financial assistance in this case refer to funding from donors directed at political or economic transformation in the receiving state, or aid given with the explicit goal of advancing democracy<sup>21</sup>. It can differ based on the fact whether aid is given to state or to non-state actors. Recent research on financial aid for democratization has shown mixed results with some researchers claiming that it does lead to a positive change, while others say that it is incentivizing autocrats to armor against actors receiving aid, and therefore turning to repressions as a mechanism to fight them<sup>22</sup>. More closely the topic of financial aid is discussed in the third section of this chapter.

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<sup>18</sup> Kopstein, Jeffrey S., and David A. Reilly. "Geographic diffusion and the transformation of the postcommunist world." *World politics* 53.1 (2000): 4.

<sup>19</sup> Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*. Cambridge University Press (2015): 4.

<sup>20</sup> Marinov, Nikolay, and Shmuel Nili. "Sanctions and democracy." *International Interactions* 41.4 (2015): 776.

<sup>21</sup> Cit. Opt. Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*

<sup>22</sup> Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash. "Hands off my regime! Governments' restrictions on foreign aid to non-governmental organizations in poor and middle-income countries." *World Development* 84 (2016): 299.

In general, actors engage in democracy promotion with these tools for different purposes. These reasons can be cultural (like the UK and France offering aid and facilitating reforms in their former colonies)<sup>23</sup>, as well as economic (as an attempt to facilitate more productive economic cooperation between the promoter and receiving state). Some countries engage in democracy promotion as an ideological mission and a foreign policy goal. Similar commitments can be traced primarily in countries considered Western, for example in the USA<sup>24</sup>, the Netherlands, and on the EU level<sup>25</sup>. It is not surprising, since overall democracies make better neighbors and economic partners<sup>26</sup>, that states would have an incentive to invest resources in promoting democracy.

The most active countries, engaged in democracy promotion, are the USA and European Union member states. As T. Beichelt has admitted, no less than 4 European states have spent more than 400 million Euro on democracy promotion in 2006 and 2007<sup>27</sup>. To “develop and consolidate democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights & fundamental freedoms”<sup>28</sup> is named under priorities of EU’s foreign policy. As for the US, the Department of State says that “...a central goal of U.S. foreign policy has been the promotion of respect for human rights, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [...] The United States *uses a wide range of tools to advance a freedom agenda*, including bilateral diplomacy, multilateral engagement, foreign assistance, reporting and public outreach, and economic sanctions”<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, the number of countries actively admits to engagement in democracy promotion and considers it to be an important part of their identity and foreign policy.

The other question is how effective their attempts are, and whether it goes beyond simple claims and intentions. There is plenty of evidence on effectiveness of democracy promotion. With regards to the fact that different tools produce different outcomes, and the result of the efforts varies depending on many circumstances, there is evidence, that democracy promotion gives positive results. Some of the most notable cases of democracy promotion are found in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War period. I discuss them in more detail in the next section. Generally, it is evident that regime development in general, and democratization in particular, does

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<sup>23</sup> Lankina, Tomila. "Explaining European union aid to Russia." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21.4 (2005): 310.

<sup>24</sup> McFaul, Michael. "Democracy promotion as a world value." *The Washington Quarterly* 28.1 (2004): 147.

<sup>25</sup> Lavenex, Sandra, and Frank Schimmelfennig. "EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance?." *Democratization* 18.4 (2011): 885.

<sup>26</sup> Zielonka, J., Pravda, A. (Eds.). (2001). *Democratic consolidation in eastern Europe: International and transnational factors* (Vol. 2). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press: 31

<sup>27</sup> Beichelt, Timm. "The research field of democracy promotion." *Living Reviews in Democracy* 3.1 (2012): 1-13.

<sup>28</sup> "Foreign and Security Policy." European Union, [european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/foreign-and-security-policy\\_en](http://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/foreign-and-security-policy_en). Accessed 4 Dec. 2022.

<sup>29</sup> "Human Rights and Democracy - United States Department of State." United States Department of State, [www.state.gov/policy-issues/human-rights-and-democracy](http://www.state.gov/policy-issues/human-rights-and-democracy). Accessed 4 Dec. 2022.

not happen in a vacuum, and I should consider external influence variable when talking about regime change.

In this thesis, I focus on a more contested tool of democracy promotion, which is financial aid to non-state actors, namely to NGOs. Some researchers find its effectiveness close to non-existent<sup>30</sup>, while others argue that it has an impact on regime development, though this effect is determined by many factors, including the approval (or lack thereof) of these action in a receiving state. More closely the topic of resistance to foreign aid for NGOs is discussed in the third section of this chapter.

Overall, this paper contributes to the field of literature, studying democracy diffusion and democracy promotion. I am looking at the concept of democracy promotion, which I define as intentional attempts to influence policy decisions and values in another state, and its specific kind, which is financial assistance to NGOs. In the upcoming sections I will review research, more specific to the case study, and formulate expectations and hypotheses.

## **1.2. Financial aid and conditionality: forms and effectiveness of democracy promotion in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet states**

A big part of research on democracy promotion in early 2000s was dedicated to democracy assistance in Eastern Europe in the post-communist period, and to question of its effectiveness. In this section, my goal is to revisit this literature and consider its main findings and assumptions for this research. The field of democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of Soviet Union has been thoroughly studied by researchers such as Tomila Lankina and Anastassia Obydenkova. The most research articles in this field date back to years 2000-2005, when the first results of democracy promotion programs could be assessed. Nevertheless, the research field is still active and relevant, due to the developments and changing regime dynamics in the region. In this section, we will refer to earlier works in the field a lot, as well as review the most recent ones. The two main arguments that I am developing here is that first of all, democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe has been an overall effective project, and second of all, promoting countries have applied different tools and approaches to different countries, and the results of their efforts were heavily dependent on the chosen tools.

In the previous section, I have mentioned the spatial dimension aspect of democracy diffusion. Geographical proximity to a democratic country can provide options that shape the choices

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<sup>30</sup> Ethier, Diane. "Is democracy promotion effective? Comparing conditionality and incentives." *Democratization* 10.1 (2003): 99.

available to the elites in transition period<sup>31</sup>, but this is not necessarily an active attempt for democratization from another country, this effect is more often unintentional. I need to distinguish between direct and indirect influence on the regime, and the concept of diffusion fits this phenomenon better, since it is indirect and entails that geographical proximity to a democratic country can encourage democratic transformation. The case of Eastern Europe demonstrates that well, some researchers have noted that countries closer to the West have demonstrated the biggest susceptibility to the Western influence<sup>32</sup>, and therefore I can see countries closer to the “core” of Western Europe having had an easier transition to democracy<sup>33</sup>. Examples of these successful cases would be Poland, the Baltic states, Czech Republic, or other states that have joined the EU during the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. In these cases, close proximity to the West has made their transformation easier. With that being said, one needs to remember that regimes are evolving and changing, and initial fast transition to democracy did not mean stability for all the countries, with notable examples of Hungary and Poland undergoing a process of democratic backsliding.

There are other factors that play an important role in regime building, and many ways that other countries can influence the regime externally. Talking about intentional democracy promotion, Western countries, namely the USA and countries of the EU have been taking active part in the democratization process in Eastern Europe post-1989, and are proved to be successful in this<sup>34</sup>. Some researchers have gone so far as to name the role of Western countries in democracy building in CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) “unprecedented”<sup>35</sup> and that democracy in this region is “foreign made”<sup>36</sup> to a large extent. The main objectives for active engagement in the process are believed to be economic, as well as historical ties of this region to Western Europe. The main tools used for democracy promotion in the region can be divided into two groups: with top-down and bottom-up approach<sup>37</sup>. Top-down approach entails working directly with governments and includes among other loans, financial aid, election observation and conditionality. Bottom-up approach includes working with non-state actors, such as civil society representatives, NGOs,

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<sup>31</sup> Kopstein, Jeffrey S., and David A. Reilly. “Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World.” *World Politics*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2000): 1–37.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, Karen E. “Western actors and the promotion of democracy.” in Jan Zielonka, and Alex Pravda (eds), *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe Volume 2: International and Transnational Factors* (2001): 31-57.

<sup>33</sup> Cit. opt. Kopstein, Jeffrey S., and David A. Reilly.

<sup>34</sup> Dimitrova, Antoaneta, and Geoffrey Pridham. “International actors and democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: The integration model and its limits.” *Democratization* 11.5 (2004): 91.

<sup>35</sup> Cit. opt. Smith, Karen E: 31.

<sup>36</sup> Mendras, Marie. “Russia and the West: To Belong or not to Belong?.” *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe 2* (2001): 510.

<sup>37</sup> Cit. opt. Smith, Karen E: 36.

grassroots movements and sometimes local governments. In this approach, the instruments include financial and consultation aid for practices that help build democratic institutions and practices<sup>38</sup>.

One of the most popular tactics used in Eastern Europe was conditionality. It means setting up conditions, by fulfillment of which the state will receive certain benefits. The conditions would usually include development of the democratic institutions and practices, and benefits would include participation in international associations, beneficial trade agreements or membership in international organizations<sup>39</sup>. In the case of Eastern Europe, a strict set of conditions was developed for consideration for EU and NATO membership, which is the most obvious case of conditionality. As a result, eight countries joined the EU in 2004 and two in 2007. Conditional enlargement is described by some researchers as “the most successful foreign policy of the European Union”<sup>40</sup>. Among the later examples of applying conditionality there is European Neighborhood Policy. Apart from economic integration and resilience, objectives of European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) include “accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; gender-equal, fair and inclusive societies”<sup>41</sup>, and its targets for 2025 include “2,500 local civil society organizations, 120 independent media outlets and 2,000 journalists supported”<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, I can conclude that the EU still applies conditionality and engages in democracy promotion as a part of foreign policy.

Not all countries in CEE region were affected by EU’s conditionality policy equally. In cases of Poland and Hungary, there is evidence that European efforts were called “too eager” and even “patronizing” in these countries<sup>43</sup>. The main difference is whether EU membership was offered or not. In countries, where EU membership was not offered from the beginning and in general signals from Europe were described as inconsistent, the process of transition has been much slower and with more complications. Examples of such countries include Ukraine and Moldova, which for some time have kept (voluntarily or not) their ties closer to Russia. Overall, the most effective democratization efforts were in the countries where EU membership was offered.

One should be careful so as not to assume that it is suggested that the European policy and conditionality were the only decisive factor in regime transitions in Eastern Europe. Indeed, this has an important influence, but internal countries’ policies exert a greater influence on whether they would be susceptible to democratization attempts from within or not. In return, susceptibility

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Schimmelfennig, Frank, and Hanno Scholtz. "EU democracy promotion in the European neighbourhood: political conditionality, economic development and transnational exchange." *European Union Politics* 9.2 (2008): 190.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid: 188.

<sup>41</sup> “Eastern Partnership.” *European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations*, 17 Dec. 2022, [neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/eastern-partnership\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/eastern-partnership_en)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Cit. opt. Smith, Karen E: 57.

is largely influenced by historic memory and historical ties to countries, offering help in democratization.

Apart from conditionality, other tools were used to support democratic transition in the region. One of these tools was direct financial aid to civil society actors with the aim of spreading liberal norms and promoting human rights<sup>44</sup>. Researchers have admitted the effectiveness of this, and that overall aid from the EU has been helpful in countering external authoritarian influences<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, I see an overall positive regime dynamic with foreign aid from Europe, which I can expect to be replicated in different other countries as well. However, the Russian case was special both on the side of attitude and policy from Europe, and from the perspective internally. In the next two sections I will dive deeper in problems of authoritarian promotion in autocracies and specificities of EU-Russia relations that influenced this process.

### **1.3. Obstacles for democracy promotion**

In this section, I will give an overview on obstacles to democracy promotion programs in certain countries in general and in autocracies in particular, as well as opinion of researchers who claim that we need to treat such efforts with more caution and skepticism. This will allow for a better picture of the concept of democracy promotion, outside the successful case of Eastern Europe. I am looking more closely at research on foreign funding of NGOs and cases, where governments interfered and disturbed this funding.

Foreign aid to civil society, local activists and NGOs is a more subtle way of democracy promotion than conditionality, incentives or economic sanctions. There is multiple evidence of donor organizations in European countries and in the US sponsoring dissidents, political parties and political activists in general all over the world<sup>46</sup>. By donors I understand any entities that issue financial aid or grants with an objective of democratization. Examples of donors include the National Endowment for Democracy in the US, a non-profit largely sponsored by the US Congress, with their objective to “growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the

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<sup>44</sup> Cit. opt Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash.

<sup>45</sup> Lankina, Tomila, Alexander Libman, and Anastassia Obydenkova. "Authoritarian and democratic diffusion in post-communist regions." *Comparative political studies* 49.12 (2016): 1599-1629.

<sup>46</sup> Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*. Cambridge University Press, 2015: 5

world”<sup>47</sup>. Another famous agency helping democratization efforts is USAID, which was (and still is) active in Eastern Europe and claims to have had a positive effect on democratic freedoms and development of civil society<sup>48</sup>. In the EU, similar organization is called European Endowment for Democracy (EED). It was established by the EU and supports “civil society organizations, pro-democracy movements, civic and political activists, and independent media platforms and journalists working towards a pluralistic, democratic political system”<sup>49</sup>. EED operates according to an actor-first approach, where more trust is put on individual actors and civil society rather than on state actors, which is considered a step up from applying traditional conditionality<sup>50</sup>. I need to also underline the fact that not all of these organizations make regime change their goal, but rather efforts to improve local governance and support civil society, without disturbing status-quo<sup>51</sup>.

As I have shown earlier, the research is pretty univocal on the effectiveness of conditionality approach for democratization in Eastern Europe, however the same cannot be said about foreign aid as a tool, where there is much more ambiguity. Foreign aid programs have been criticized for promoting the Western norms and values to societies, where these views might not be applicable, and where there is a different idea of civil society and different needs. For example, Kateryna Pishchikova writes that such programs could be viewed as colonizing for Ukrainian<sup>52</sup> civil society, that “foreign words, clumsy phrases, unintelligible adaptations of English words”<sup>53</sup> are employed by local actors can lose their initial meaning and not be suitable for local realities. As a result, such programs can promote models of empowerment that do not work in the local context and end up being more harmful, than beneficial. Another aspect to take into account is when aid is channeled to poor and low-income countries. In these countries, it is often the case that organizations rely on foreign aid for their survival, and may seek grants just to create a façade

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<sup>47</sup> “About the National Endowment for Democracy – NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY.” About the National Endowment for Democracy – NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY, [www.ned.org/about](http://www.ned.org/about). Accessed 5 Dec. 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Freytag, Andreas, and Jac C. Heckelman. "Has assistance from USAID been successful for democratization? Evidence from the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Eurasia." *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics (JITE)/Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* (2012): 636.

<sup>49</sup> “European Endowment for Democracy - About EED.” European Endowment for Democracy - About EED, [democracyendowment.eu/en/about/about-us.html](http://democracyendowment.eu/en/about/about-us.html). Accessed 5 Dec. 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Giusti, Serena, and Enrico Fassi. "The European endowment for democracy and democracy promotion in the EU neighbourhood." *The International Spectator* 49.4 (2014): 129.

<sup>51</sup> Cit. Opt. Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*: 5.

<sup>52</sup> Considering the current circumstances, the point concerning Ukraine may not hold relevance as Ukraine is aligned with the West on the meaning of democratic values. The idea of the passage is that democracy is a western concept, which should be considered before applying to Eastern European states.

<sup>53</sup> Pishchikova, Kateryna. *Promoting democracy in postcommunist Ukraine: The contradictory outcomes of US aid to women's NGOs*. FirstForumPress, 2011: 4.

of civil society without contributing to change<sup>54</sup>.

In the cases mentioned above, the donors and recipients of aid face a classical principal-agent problem, where donors do not have perfect information on the situation on the ground and are constrained by their own assumptions of what aspects of civil society need support the most<sup>55</sup>. As a result, they delegate decision-making autonomy together with funding to NGOs, which are producing programs on the ground, reporting results to the principal, who does not have influence on this result. NGOs that receive foreign funding may also choose the mode of work that they think will ensure survival and functioning of the organization the best, and in case of non-democratic regimes it may mean staying careful and non-confrontational with incumbents<sup>56</sup>. Overall, we should not view foreign aid as a panacea for all problems in non-democratic regimes, since there are multiple factors influencing success of this tool. Nevertheless, there is evidence of effectiveness of such programs if not on democracy score in general, but on metrics of human and civil rights protection<sup>57</sup>.

There are big obstacles that democracy promotion efforts face in autocratic regimes. Despite the evidence that such aid does not have direct and strong impact on regimes, there is a whole block of literature discussing the practices of blocking the foreign aid to local NGOs or restricting the activities of NGOs that receive foreign funding. It is a popular tactic used in numerous countries to restrict possible foreign influence on internal politics. Some researchers have named this an alarming trend and call for reconsideration of the usual practices of aid allocation, because resistance creates a threat to its efficacy<sup>58</sup>. As a result, the democracy promotion programs in autocracies might be limited or act much more carefully.

As K. Dupuy et al. state, “39 of the world’s 153 low- and middle-income countries risked their international reputations [...] by restricting overseas financing to domestically operating non-governmental organizations (NGOs)<sup>59</sup>”. Therefore, I can consider it to be a global trend. On the forefront of this trend countries such as Russia, Egypt and Ethiopia, where repressions on civil society have been the most intense<sup>60</sup>. Since Russia is a main case study in this research, I will give

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<sup>54</sup> Narozhna, Tanya. "Foreign aid for a post-euphoric eastern Europe: the limitations of western assistance in developing civil society." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 7.3 (2004): 243.

<sup>55</sup> Cit. Opt. Giusti, Serena, and Enrico Fassi: 128.

<sup>56</sup> Cit. Opt. Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*: 14.

<sup>57</sup> Gershman, Carl, and Michael Allen. "New threats to freedom: The assault on democracy assistance." *Journal of democracy* 17.2 (2006): 37.

<sup>58</sup> Carothers, Thomas. "The backlash against democracy promotion." *Foreign Affairs* (2006): 55.

<sup>59</sup> Cit. opt Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash: 299.

<sup>60</sup> Christensen, Darin, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Defunding dissent: Restrictions on aid to NGOs." *Journal of Democracy* 24.2 (2013): 87.

a more thorough overview of it in the next section as well as in the second chapter. Other examples of countries that have adopted similar laws include United Arab Emirates, Ecuador, Zimbabwe and Belarus. As we can see, this trend is not unique to any part of the world, and not even unique to autocracies. Similar laws are mentioned to exist in Canada and Israel<sup>61</sup>.

So why does this trend exist and how is it being executed and justified? T. Carothers writes, that the main wave of backlash against foreign-funded NGOs has started as a reaction to color revolutions and Arab Spring uprisings<sup>62</sup>. And that reaction was noticed not only in Eastern Europe, but all over the world, including China and Zimbabwe. There was a strong perception of a big role of Western support for opposition in the successful results of these revolutions. Therefore, authoritarian leaders and leaders with authoritarian ambitions all over the world have perceived them as threatening their status-quo, and used them as a justification of repressive policies against the presence of foreign and foreign-funded NGOs in their states<sup>63</sup>. As a result, many donors have either left the countries where repressive laws were introduced, or have reduced their activities or started to carry them out in a much more careful way. For example, they could choose not to sponsor programs, confronting regime directly, but to focus on more “safe” issues, such as environment or women’s rights, or on helping those few civil society organizations survive and have an opportunity to do any work<sup>64</sup>. In these cases, the potential for regime change becomes lower, since these NGOs would not fight directly for the power change. K. Dupuy et al. have concluded, that “foreign aid flows are associated with an increased risk of restrictive law adoption”<sup>65</sup>, therefore we can see that democracy promotion efforts in the form of financial aid to local NGOs may face serious constraints.

Moreover, autocrats adopt restrictive legislation for foreign-funded NGOs in three conditions: if they feel vulnerable in their power in general, if they feel that threat is coming from these organizations, and if they are ready to bear the risks of such decision. The risks may include “naming and shaming” and sanctions from the international community. Comparing the cases of Belarus and Kazakhstan, Christensen et al. have concluded that Kazakhstan did not pass the bill regulating foreign funding of NGOs because of big dependency on trade with the EU, while Belarus could safely do it due to strong ties with Russia<sup>66</sup>. He proceeds to concluding that costs of such decision are too big to apply it without valid reasons.

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<sup>61</sup> Cit. opt Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash: 307.

<sup>62</sup> Carothers, Thomas. "The backlash against democracy promotion." *Foreign Affairs* (2006): 57.

<sup>63</sup> Cit. opt. Gershman, Carl, and Michael Allen.: 39.

<sup>64</sup> Cit. Opt. Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*: 7.

<sup>65</sup> Cit. opt Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash: 299.

<sup>66</sup> Cit. Opt. Christensen, Darin, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Defunding dissent: Restrictions on aid to NGOs." *Journal of Democracy* 24.2 (2013): 86.

When it comes to restrictions imposed on NGOs it is important to mention forms of co-optation civil society in autocracies. They are generally used together with restrictions on foreign funding for NGOs. One of them is creation of GONGOs, which stands for government-organized non-government organizations. Moises Naim calls those “thuggish arms of repressive governments”<sup>67</sup> and discusses how they have become a global trend. In these cases the governments can create organizations that perform functions of regular NGOs, such as human rights protection or civic education, but do that in a way beneficial to ruling elites. Such organizations exist all over the world, often described cases are in China, Turkey, and Russia, however sometimes they exist in democratic countries too. Other form of cultivated civil society includes co-optation of existing NGOs, when governments support only certain projects and organizations that support status-quo. In this case, NGOs that do not comply with these rules of the game are often repressed and lose their resources, which makes them turn to foreign funding.

This leads us to a conclusion, that regime in a receiving state is an important factor in success of democracy promotion. V. Gelman and T. Lankina introduce two sets of actors – “Western democracy promoters” and “domestic agents of authoritarian diffusion”, and conceptualize democratic institutional survival as a result of efforts both of these actors<sup>68</sup>. How these actors interplay and influence the survival of civil society remains understudied in International Relations literature, which creates a basis for contribution of this research. There are other actors present, such as internal democracy promoters (like civil society and opposition) and external autocracy promoters, however in this research I am focusing on the former. Overall, suppression of foreign-funded civil society NGOs is a global and alarming trend, that needs further exploration, which this research is going to provide.

#### **1.4. Disarmament and cross-border cooperation: Russian-Western relations and democratic diffusion**

In this section, my aim is to give more context to foreign aid to Russia in the framework of EU-Russia and Russia–US relations. The EU relations with Russia has always been drastically different from those with other post-Soviet states and this dynamic has influenced democratization efforts in Russia as well, therefore it is important to take it into consideration. Researchers agree

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<sup>67</sup> Naím, Moisés. "What is a GONGO?." *Foreign Policy* 160 (2007): 96.

<sup>68</sup> Gel'man, Vladimir, and Tomila Lankina. "Authoritarian versus democratic diffusions: explaining institutional choices in Russia's local government." *Post-soviet affairs* 24.1 (2008): 41.

that in general in the past 30 years the EU-Russia relations have gone through several stages, from cooperation to growing competition and to open confrontation<sup>69</sup>.

Starting from the collapse of Soviet Union, the West has established strong economic relations with Russia and there was productive cooperation in other spheres, at least on a level of statements and plans. A newly formed Russian Federation was a weak state, with the EU and US being clearly more powerful, and therefore Russia was in a position of receiving financial aid from them, which is where the story of the presence of foreign NGO in Russia starts<sup>70</sup>. However, as the state became stronger, the democratization rhetoric in Russia disappeared. With the events of Kosovo crisis, Chechen wars, and “color” revolutions, relations between Russia and the West were becoming more strained and competitive. In this period, the repressive machine in Russia has started working, which created obstacles for civil society development in general and for foreign-funded organizations in particular. I am taking a closer look at internal Russian policies and repressions in the next chapter.

At the same time, Russia remained an important partner for the EU in terms of energy resources and was the only state with nuclear power in the region. This was a reason for the EU to maintain a rather careful and reserved foreign policy towards Russia, avoiding criticizing it for clear imperialist ambitions and regime shifting towards authoritarianism. Researchers say that it is one of the reasons why democratization efforts in Russia were not as strong as in other Eastern European countries. Not only they were meeting a big backlash inside, they were limited on purpose from the outside. In the previous sections, I have discussed conditionality as one of the strongest tools for democracy promotion in CEE, and in case of Russia it was not applied. Russia was not offered to join NATO or EU, and its own initiative to do so was *allegedly* met by the US side suspiciously and negatively, at least this is the way Russian officials construct the narrative of confrontation with the West. At the same time, it is a known fact that Russia was offered to join European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and refused it. It has contributed to formation of competitive nature of relations with the EU and created tension in the EU’s East European policy<sup>71</sup>. K. Smith stated in a paper written already in 2001, that “fears of isolating Russia prevail over the implementation of conditionality”<sup>72</sup>. More than that, according to M. Mendras, “the westernization felt not realistic in Russian conditions in 1993-94 already”<sup>73</sup>, and European and American policy

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<sup>69</sup> Casier, Tom. "From logic of competition to conflict: understanding the dynamics of EU–Russia relations." *Contemporary Politics* 22.3 (2016): 376.

<sup>70</sup> Haukkala, Hiski. "From cooperative to contested Europe? The conflict in Ukraine as a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU–Russia relations." *Journal of contemporary European studies* 23.1 (2015): 28.

<sup>71</sup> Casier, Tom. "The unintended consequences of a European neighbourhood policy without Russia." *The International Spectator* 54.1 (2019): 86.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, Karen E. "Western actors and the promotion of democracy." (2001): 49.

<sup>73</sup> Cit. Opt. Mendras, Marie. "Russia and the West: To Belong or not to Belong?": 497.

towards Russia was focused much more on security and disarmament, than on democratization. Another explanation as to why Russia is not susceptible to influence on its regime from abroad and to any regime change in general is that it is a core of the former imperial power, which are in general not susceptible to external influences. Similar tendency can be spotted in Turkey<sup>74</sup>.

Nevertheless, despite seemingly low to non-existent level of influence, some researchers have found positive results from democracy promotion in Russia. In a 2005 research Lankina has found that EU's technical assistance to Russia has helped to support democratic institution-building in Russia's regions<sup>75</sup>. At the same time, EU was allocating aid to Russia disproportionately, prioritizing regions bordering the EU and western regions in general. In a 2016 study this was confirmed and Karelia became the example of a region, which for a long time was able to resist authoritarian pressure and maintain a degree of regional democracy. Lankina and Libman argue that this has to do with external flow of resources aimed at municipal development. Both articles also mention that NGOs were considered important actors and sometimes were preferred to work with over often unreliable and corrupt authorities. As for the financial aid to NGOs, research by Sarah Henderson has stated that "Western assistance, by providing tangible equipment and training for NGOs, has increased organizational capacity among recipient groups"<sup>76</sup>.

Research has revealed that EU actions play a fair role in democracy promotion, however at the same time autocratic regimes are acting effectively to resist this process<sup>77</sup>. In some countries, these democratization attempts have worked more than in the other. Research on Russia shows that there it has not been particularly effective due to Russia not being very susceptible to foreign influence as a former Empire, which is a case for Turkey as well<sup>78</sup>. Geographic location in close proximity to Europe is also believed to be an important factor in effectiveness of democracy diffusion (with some notable exceptions such as Georgia). Finally, after the collapse of Soviet Union Europe was prioritizing negotiations with Russia to prevent nuclear proliferation and was careful not to introduce any active democratization attempts, such as conditionality. As a result, Russia was not confronted and its neo-imperialist tendencies were not called out or prevented<sup>79</sup>.

Overall, I find that in comparison with other Eastern European countries, the financial aid and democratization efforts to Russia has been limited, and the norm diffusion effect has been hindered on a government level, however there have been some notable exceptions. Therefore, I

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<sup>74</sup> Kopstein, Jeffrey S., and David A. Reilly. "Geographic diffusion and the transformation of the postcommunist world." *World politics* 53.1 (2000): 14.

<sup>75</sup> Cit. opt. Lankina, Tomila. "Explaining European union aid to Russia.": 329

<sup>76</sup> Henderson, Sarah L. "Selling civil society: Western aid and the nongovernmental organization sector in Russia." *Comparative political studies* 35.2 (2002): 140.

<sup>77</sup> Cit. opt. Lankina, Tomila, Alexander Libman, and Anastassia Obydenkova.

<sup>78</sup> Cit. Opt. Zielonka, J., Pravda, A: 52.

<sup>79</sup> Mendras, Marie. "Russia and the West: To Belong or not to Belong?" (2001): 497.

expect the same pattern to be repeated on the lower level, with effect of foreign funding on societal change quite limited.

## **Chapter 2. Case study: Foreign Agent Law in Russia**

In this chapter I will take a closer look at the Russian case of restricting the work of foreign-funded NGOs to provide context for the empirical work. In what comes next, I will explain the choice of this case, look into the background, history, and enforcement of the law on foreign agents in Russia, and, what is more important, on how this law fits into the broader framework of Russian security and identity. This chapter helps to gain insight into why the law was adopted in the first place in order to formulate expectations for the empirical part of the research.

### **2.1. Why is Russian law on foreign agents relevant? Case selection justification**

There are a few reasons why the law on foreign agents in Russia is a good case to study how authoritarian regimes are resisting the process of democratic diffusion, it has both practical and scientific relevance. First of all, as I have shown in the previous chapter, this law is a part of a wider trend of local governments restricting the work of foreign-funded NGOs all over the world, which has been the topic of research on challenges to democracy promotion and democracy diffusion. Case studies like this one are helping to understand the experience of each country and it might be possible to extrapolate these results to other countries, experiencing the same. This can also become a basis for a comparative study of different tools autocrats use to crack down on civil society.

Secondly, there has been contradicting evidence from the research on democracy promotion in Russia. On the one hand, some researchers claim that there has been no effect from these limited efforts and that the West was more concerned with maintaining non-confrontational relations with Russia, rather than on institutional and regime change. On the other hand, T. Lankina has shown<sup>80</sup> that foreign aid was associated with democratic institutional survival in Russian regions, and that those regions which were involved in more international projects and received more aid were in total more democratic. Therefore, it makes sense to have a closer look on the Russian case and see the role of foreign funding in modern Russia.

Thirdly, in Russian case it is easy to isolate the influence of foreign funding for civil society from the other possible democracy promotion tools and from democratic diffusion effects. Contrary to other states in Eastern Europe, other tools such as conditionality were not used (until the introduction of economic sanctions in 2014), or used on a much smaller scale. It will help

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<sup>80</sup> Cit. Opt. Lankina, Tomila. "Explaining European union aid to Russia."

assess the role of solely foreign funding, without the risk of interfering effects being caused by something else.

All of the previous reasons related to Russia as a country case selection for this study. In the past 20 years there have been many repressive measures implemented by the Russian state, a lot of which were directed at civil society, so why was the law on foreign agents specifically chosen as a case study? Mainly, the creation of the law and the database of organizations recognized as foreign agents has allowed to see which organizations were receiving foreign funding and were engaged in political activity, according to the state, which makes it easier to find suitable data for research. While it is well-known that not all entities declared as foreign agents receive substantial foreign funding, I believe that all organizations that do receive it and that are perceived as a threat by the state have been affected by this law. The fact that in the past years the practice of the implementation of the law has become broader and includes not only actors of democracy promotion, directly sponsored from Western countries, does not cancel the effect that the law has on these organizations.

The reaction to the law rollout in Russia has also been controversial. News outlet “Meduza” has issued a collection of merchandise with the words “foreign agent” written on T-shirts, bags and pedants<sup>81</sup>. The human rights protection and historical memory NGO “Memorial” was first liquidated in Russia for violating the “foreign agents” legislation, and then received the Nobel Peace Prize for “the fight for the human rights and democracy”<sup>82</sup>. Some organizations have registered themselves in the “foreign agent” database voluntarily, while some have chosen to appeal this status in court or to liquidate the organization completely. Many organizations have kept on working without significant changes even after receiving the status of a foreign agent. Therefore, it is hard to precisely estimate the effects that the law has had on affected NGOs and on civil society in general.

On a practical level, this research will help to get a better understanding of the functioning of civil society in Russia. The experience of people, working on the ground and directly engaged in civic action will be helpful for donors, sponsoring them, with whom sometimes there is no direct communication or opportunity to provide feedback, as I will show in the interview analysis. Feedback from aid receivers may help allocate aid more effectively and take into account local circumstances and realities.

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<sup>81</sup> “At Last, Meduza Merch Is Here.” Meduza, 31 Aug. 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/slides/at-last-meduza-merch-is-here>.

<sup>82</sup> “The Nobel Peace Prize 2022.” NobelPrize.org, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2022/memorial/facts/>. Accessed 7 Dec. 2022.

Overall, this study contributes to the research field of democracy promotion and to study of interaction of concepts of democracy promotion and autocracy diffusion. It focuses on the interaction of domestic (NGOs) and international (aid providers) actors vis-à-vis an authoritarian regime and how autocrats can hinder the process of democracy diffusion.

## **2.2. Background and history of the law on foreign agents in the framework of Russian security concept**

So far, in this thesis I have mostly relied on rationalist explanations of policy decisions, ones that are driven by economic benefits, historical ties and rational choice of actors. Rationalists would explain that Russia is applying repressions because it is an autocracy where the main goal is to eliminate all opposition. However, in this particular case it is helpful to look at ideas of constructivist scholars, as it will bring another and sometimes a better perspective on the situation and will help better explain Russian foreign and internal policy. There are three main factors in the Law on Foreign Agents that I would like to highlight, that a rationalist approach would have a hard time explaining, but a constructivist one would make it clearer. The first one being that violators of this law were deliberately named “foreign agents”, which is a stigmatized term with a negative connotation from Soviet times. The second one is that the adoption of the law in Russian media and official state discourse was justified by the fact that there is a similar law in the US, and what Russia is doing is only relying with the same measures. Finally, there is evidence, that the law is used in a non-consistent manner, with “foreign agent” organizations being treated differently by the Ministry of Justice for seemingly no reason. In what comes next, I will look into what aspects of Russian identity have led it to frame the Law on Foreign Agents in these exact terms and how does it fit the broader repressive framework. This will help understand how the law fits in Russian domestic policy to give a more thorough insight in its effectiveness.

First of all, I believe that there are three ideas that shape the current repressive policy of the state. The first one has to do with how Russia views itself vis-à-vis the West and what role the West has in formulating its identity. In foreign policy Russia’s identity is complex and we can see how it sees itself as a part of European civilization and at the same time seeing Europe as the Other, that needs to be opposed. At the same time, the view of Russia as the Other helps the West formulate its own identity, that of liberal, free and democratic, opposite of an authoritarian Russia<sup>83</sup>. Similar situation is the case not only for Russia, but for Turkey as well. From here, quite

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<sup>83</sup> Morozov, Viatcheslav, and Bahar Rumelili. "The external constitution of European identity: Russia and Turkey as Europe-makers." *Cooperation and Conflict* 47.1 (2012): 39.

an ambiguous position of Russia comes up, something what Viatcheslav Morozov calls a subaltern empire and looks at it from a post-colonialist perspective<sup>84</sup>. On the one hand, by number of factors Russia's relations with the West look like relations between a former colony and a metropoly. These factors include the structure of trade and the fact, that Russia adopts the norms from the West, not the other way around<sup>85</sup>. Everything "western" is perceived to be better and more modern, from technology to education. At the same time, Russia does not let go of imperial ambitions and insists to be treated as an equal to the EU player. For example, one of Russia's ambitions was to create the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2010, the purpose of which was supposed to be "countering the EU's growing presence in the post-Soviet space"<sup>86</sup>. In 1992 Eurasian Economic Community was created, which was replaced by Eurasian Economic Union in 2014. These organizations were modeled after European Union and were supposed to provide an alternative to EU integration for the countries of "near abroad". Later, these imperial ambitions took a more destructive turn with invasion in Ukraine in 2014, annexation of Crimea and a new invasion in 2022.

From this vision of Russia's place vis-à-vis the West comes the next idea, which explains the self-perception of Russia as a "besieged fortress". M. Lipman writes, that Putin's Russia has constructed a worldview in which it operates and judges all actions by it<sup>87</sup>. This worldview or mentality is believed to be generally accepted by state officials and includes a certain set of beliefs that shape domestic and foreign policy. To this research, two beliefs, mentioned by M. Lipman are particularly interesting. The first one is "Russia is a great power, and the West is hostile to it"<sup>88</sup>, and the second one is "'might makes right' is a legitimate concept, and injustice is an inevitable part of life which is taken for granted"<sup>89</sup>. From the first one we get the idea, that Russia is constantly threatened by the West and it needs to protect itself, that it lives in a constant state of a "besieged fortress" surrounded by enemies; and from the second, that any means can be used for that protection. Therefore, it makes perfect sense for Russia to adopt laws, blocking infiltration of any "liberal values" from the West, as it perceived them as a big threat not only to the regime, but to state identity as well.

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<sup>84</sup> Morozov, Viatcheslav. "Subaltern empire? Toward a postcolonial approach to Russian foreign policy." *Problems of Post-Communism* 60.6 (2013): 19.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Haukkala, Hiski. "From cooperative to contested Europe? The conflict in Ukraine as a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU–Russia relations." *Journal of contemporary European studies* 23.1 (2015): 32.

<sup>87</sup> Lipman, Maria. "Putin's 'besieged fortress' and its ideological arms." *The state of Russia: What comes next?*. Palgrave Pivot, London, 2015. 112.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*: 112.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

However, as I have previously shown, despite constant competition with the West, Russia still looks up to it and considers its norms and values if not the “correct” ones, but at least universally accepted. Morozov finds that Russia constructs its identity as an integral part of Europe and in some cases even superior<sup>90</sup>. This worldview finds its way into official ideology and discourse. When analyzing the ideology, we see a phenomenon of the common tactic used by Russian authorities is to justify illiberal decisions by saying that they are doing the same as in the West. Vasile Rotaru calls it “mimicking the West”, where Russia was arguing that its foreign policy decisions are “in line of those of the West”, no matter if they are right or just<sup>91</sup>. The examples of such behavior were seen during the military interventions of 2008 and 2014, and most recently, in 2022. Russia would use commonly accepted norms such as responsibility to protect, or self-defense, to justify its oppressive actions. The case, studied in this research is also in line with the strategy of mimicking the West, because the law was presented to the public as something that “all Western countries use”. The law was described in the media merely a retaliatory measure to already existing “Foreign Agents Registration Act” enacted in the USA already in 1938<sup>92</sup>. Needless to say, the only similar thing among the two laws is the name. In the US legislation is much narrower and calls for significant proof of the fact that a domestic agent is acting on behalf of a foreign principle, and the Act is applied rarely<sup>93</sup>. I give more details on enforcement of the Russian foreign agent law in 2.3.

I argue that these ideas explain the overall hostility to everything “liberal” and “western”, and in this framework it looks very logical and consequential. Therefore, repressions towards civil society in Russia come from ideological reasons, rather than from genuine danger to the regime that they provide. Among these oppressive measures, we can name the law “On protection of feelings of religious people”, or the law “Against LGBT propaganda among children”, or inclusion of definition of marriage as a “union between a man and a woman” in the constitution, which all go along with Russia’s presentation of itself as a promoter of traditional values as well as suppress civil society and freedom of speech.

From there, one can make a conclusion that the law on foreign agents is the case of Russia using the “mimicking the West” strategy to justify the introduction of illiberal measures. For the

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<sup>90</sup> Morozov, Viatcheslav. *Russia's postcolonial identity: a subaltern empire in a Eurocentric world*. Springer, 2015: 101

<sup>91</sup> Rotaru, Vasile. “Mimicking the West? Russia's legitimization discourse from Georgia war to the annexation of Crimea.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52.4 (2019): 322.

<sup>92</sup> “Foreign Agents Registration Act.” The United States Department of Justice, 23 Dec. 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara>.

<sup>93</sup> Orlova, Alexandra V. “Foreign Agents, Sovereignty, and Political Pluralism: How the Russian Foreign Agents Law Is Shaping Civil Society.” *Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs*. 7 (2019): 410.

Russian government, it was as a rather ideological decision, rather than an action against an actual danger. And while it is fair to look at this law and rhetoric around it as an excuse for applying repression, I believe that it at the same time has an effect of attempting to counter foreign influence. Circling back to chapter 1, autocrats introduce such laws when they feel threatened by the possible influence from the West and Russia has previously expressed this fear of colored revolutions and possible foreign participation in 2012 protests, which has manifested in repressive legislation against NGOs receiving foreign grants<sup>94</sup>. The law has also been called a part of a project to “marginalize foreign influences and bring Russian NGOs under state control”<sup>95</sup>. This idea has been repeated multiple times by Russian officials and Vladimir Putin himself:

*“When I talk about these laws, about non-interference or attempts at interference, what do I mean as applied to Russia? Many entities of the so-called “civil society” – the reason I say “so-called civil society” is because many of those entities are funded from abroad. Specific relevant action programs are prepared. Their core members are trained abroad. And when our official authorities see that, in order to prevent this kind of interference in our domestic affairs, we make relevant decisions and adopt relevant laws. And they are more lenient than yours.”*<sup>96</sup> (Vladimir Putin, 14.06.2021, in an interview to NBC)

### **2.3. Enforcement of the law on foreign agents in Russia**

In this section I will present a short overview of the history of the foreign agent law and how it is enforced. As I have previously noted, this was not the first one intended for limiting foreign funding of NGO. The first law intended to restrict foreign-funded NGOs entered force in 2006 and banned foreign individuals from registering NGOs in Russia and everyone from implementing programs of foreign NGOs. Apart from that, it introduced the term “undesirable” which was given to people who were not complying with the law<sup>97</sup>.

The law in focus of this study was adopted in 2012 and included new requirements for NGOs receiving funding from abroad and introduced a term “foreign agent” for the first time. It resulted in some of the large sponsors such as USAID ceasing their activities in Russia without

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<sup>94</sup> Finkel, Evgeny, and Yitzhak M. Brudny. "Russia and the colour revolutions." *Coloured Revolutions and Authoritarian Reactions*. Routledge, 2014. 24.

<sup>95</sup> Crotty, Jo, Sarah Marie Hall, and Sergej Ljubownikow. "Post-soviet civil society development in the Russian Federation: The impact of the NGO law." *Europe-Asia Studies* 66.8 (2014): 1265.

<sup>96</sup> “Interview to NBC.” President of Russia, 14 June 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65861>.

<sup>97</sup> Machalek, Katherin “Factsheet: Russia’s NGO Laws” [shorturl.at/quwAR](https://shorturl.at/quwAR). Accessed 7 Dec. 2022.

the possibility to finish ongoing projects<sup>98</sup>. The first NGO to be declared foreign agent was an election monitoring organization GOLOS and after that from 2012 to 2022 more than 200 organizations were included in the list<sup>99</sup>. Some organizations have successfully appealed their status in court and were removed from the list.

The law was further amended several times and with each amendment the requirements became stricter and the scope of the law became broader. In 2017 the law was amended to include media outlets-foreign agents NGOs. All foreign media agencies working in Russia immediately became a subject of this new amendment. If previous versions of the law could influence only organizations, in 2018 the law was further amended to include individuals. The latest addition to the pool of different foreign agents was “individuals performing the function of a media foreign agent”, which can be given to people who “disseminate or create the materials of media foreign agents”.

As for foreign agent NGOs, they are included in the database if they receive funding from abroad and they are engaged in political activity. Once in the database, they have to fulfill the following requirements to comply with the law:

- Register themselves in the Ministry of Justice. The database of the foreign agents is open and available via website of the Ministry<sup>100</sup>.
- Regularly submit thorough reports on their financing and spending
- Submit audit reports
- Label their publications in the media and on the internet as those produced by a foreign agent.

More thorough guidelines on actions to be taken by foreign agents, such as the frequency and forms of reports to be submitted, change quite regularly which has also been mentioned by interviewees. When studying Russian laws it is important to mention how the law was used and how consistent it was. A briefing by European Parliament Research Service points out that NGOs with non-Western ties are very rarely designated as foreign agents, for example there is not a single NGO sponsored from China even though there are quite a few of them functioning that would fit the definition of a foreign agent under this law<sup>101</sup>. Researchers also point out the inconsistent and vague definitions of “political activity” in the law, which allows for a very broad application of

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<sup>98</sup> Goncharenko, Galina, and Iqbal Khadaroo. "Disciplining human rights organisations through an accounting regulation: A case of the 'foreign agents' law in Russia." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 72 (2020): 11

<sup>99</sup> Martin, Russel. "'Foreign agents and undesirables': Russian civil society in danger of extinction?." European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing, March 2022.

<sup>100</sup> The list is available via the link: <https://minjust.gov.ru/uploaded/files/reestr-inostrannyih-agentov-01-12-2022.pdf>. It might not be available from outside Russia without using a virtual private network (VPN).

<sup>101</sup> Cit. Opt. Martin, Russel. "'Foreign agents and undesirables'.

it<sup>102</sup>. Norms and requirements of the law are made unclear specifically to be confusing for people, to whom the law will be applied.

As we can see above, requirements of the law did not include blocks for foreign funding, but rather was intended to discredit the work of the organizations by making them label themselves as “foreign agents”, the term that has a negative connotation that could be understood as “spy” or “traitor”. However, as I have shown in the previous sections, it still became a big obstacle for organizations as a lot of them had to stop functioning or significantly alter their activities. In this research, I am interested specifically how this law affected foreign-funded organizations, while acknowledging that it has impacted civil society beyond this group, including media, individual activists and others.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

### **3.1. Research design and methods**

In the previous chapters I have identified that there is a gap in research on democracy promotion through financial aid to NGOs, with some researchers claiming it is effective, and some arguing for the opposite. Moreover, its already contested effectiveness is being hindered by autocracies, introducing repressions against foreign-funded NGOs. Even though this is a global trend, the existing literature has not addressed the influence of restricting foreign-funded NGOs on the effectiveness of democracy promotion. I believe this is important to study because support of civil society remains one of the important goals of Western countries and one of the main ways of democracy promotion, and researching its effectiveness in the environment of resistance will potentially help in these programs' evaluation. I look at the case of foreign agent law in Russia in order to identify how effective can an autocratic regime be in countering the effects of democracy promotion in the sphere of civil society. To do that I need to study the impact of this law on the state of civil society actors that are targets of democratic promotion. By those I understand the organizations, that were recognized as foreign agents and that were receiving foreign funding from the funds in the EU or US.

For this case study, I employ qualitative research methods, and particularly in-depth expert interviews with representatives of the organizations that were included in the database of foreign agents. Since the research question has to do with effectiveness of the legislation, the approach using interviews seems counter-intuitive, as opposed to, for example, policy analysis. However, to understand the effectiveness of the law specifically against democracy promotion, one needs to understand if it has managed to hinder the capacity of these organizations to produce societal change and therefore perform their functions, and whether it has managed to disrupt the partnerships of these organizations with their foreign partners, since this is one of the conditions of democracy promotion. In order to address these questions, the interviews are the most suitable research method, since insiders will have the best knowledge when it comes to the implications of the law for their organizations and on their cooperation with foreign donors.

In this thesis, I look at foreign-funded NGOs as actors, representing democracy promotion efforts in Russia, and on the law on foreign agents as a tool directed against these actors. Therefore, if this tool has managed to severely limit the work of these actors, I consider this tool effective. It is important to note, that informality plays a big role in Russian internal politics, therefore formal research of the practices of law enforcement might not give a full picture of the effects of the law. Moreover, many organizations have changed their names, web pages, or methods of working or

even continue to work completely anonymously. This fact will not be helpful in employing any sort of quantitative analysis, plus what organizations are reporting in public channels might be different from the real situation. Therefore, I believe, that interviews with representatives of foreign agent NGOs will help investigate the research question in the best possible way.

In-depth semi-structured interviews are a less common research method in political science and international relations. They are more widely used in sociology and anthropology, from where the methodology is borrowed for inquiries in international relations<sup>103</sup>. They are conducted, when there is a set topic and a prepared set of open-ended questions, that mainly dictates the course of the interview and they could be used for both positivist and interpretivist approaches in social science. In this case study, I am rather interested in factual data on the activity of foreign agent NGOs and their cooperation with Western donors, then in how they construct reality, however the latter might be beneficial. Therefore, I am looking at interviews as a positivist research method, were we assume the existence of objective reality, formulate and check the hypothesis.

Researchers distinguish elite and non-elite interviews in political science and give different advice for these. My research implies interviews with sometimes influential people in their circle and area of expertise, however they do not have access to decision-making power in the country, therefore I cannot classify them as elite interviews. While designing the research guide and conducting the interviews I have consulted several guides for researchers in political science. I need to be aware of biases that might come up from my side or from the respondent's side, and take those into account when conducting the interviews. Among them are "interviewer effects", when age, gender and general perception of the interviewer might affect the answers, that interviewees give<sup>104</sup>. Another possible bias might come up from interviewees if they would be potentially interested in presenting their organization in a certain way, i.e. downplaying the effects of repressions on them, or vice versa, exaggerating. Partially, this bias can be addressed by interviewing different people, working for the same organization, which was done in this thesis.

Apart from biases, there are a few limitations in this approach that I should address. First of all, I do not equate civil society in Russia to a subset of organizations representatives of which I am interviewing, nor just to the organizations receiving foreign funding. While I recognize that democracy promotion programs as well as the foreign agent law target civil society in general, broader definition and analysis of civil society is outside of the scope of this research. Focus on several NGOs allows for more detailed inspection of the effects of the law on them, and their experience can be considered representatives for other foreign agent NGOs in Russia. The other

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<sup>103</sup> Alles, Delphine, Auriane Guilbaud, and Delphine Lagrange. "Interviews in international relations." *Resources and applied methods in international relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018. 109.

<sup>104</sup> Mosley, Layna, ed. *Interview research in political science*. Cornell University Press, 2013: 13.

limitation is that the scope of the study is limited to the effects of one law and it is not the only tool that regime uses for disrupting the work of NGOs. However, this law directly affects foreign-funded NGOs and remains one of the most actively used against civil society. I address this limitation by including additional questions on other repressions in the research guide, and present findings on repressions beyond the law on foreign agents in section 4.3.

When conducting interviews, it is important to consider research ethics. Civil society in autocracies is generally hard field to work in due to security concerns of participants. In her book on taming of democracy assistance Bush admits that many interviews with activists were carried out under condition of full anonymity or “off-the-record”<sup>105</sup>. Since the main ethical consideration in social science is to respect participants’ personal integrity, safety, and well-being<sup>106</sup>, I have two main goals in this research: to protect identity of speakers and be mindful of their feelings and mental state. Identity protection is essential, since some of the interviewees agreed to take part in research only on condition of full secrecy. Being mindful of the emotional state of participants is important because interview might contain sensitive questions to them or might be asking to recall traumatic events. At least two of the participants of this research have been incarcerated for political activism and I made sure to be extra careful, discussing their personal relations with repressions in Russia.

Another ethical consideration is informational transparency and informed consent of participants. I need to take into account the fact that talking about their activities within foreign agent NGOs is a big security concern for many people. Therefore, as an exception, respondents in my research were not requested not sign informed consent forms, and instead gave their consent verbally. I have explained the research aims and their rights to withdraw from the interview at any time. Since information is sensitive, the interviewees were also anonymized. Even though some respondents (5 in total) were not against mentioning their names or organizations in the final text, I chose not to include any information that could potentially de-anonymize them in the text of this thesis, nor to provide interview transcripts.

### **3.2. Sampling, data collection, and interview guide**

According to the March 2022 briefing of European Parliamentary Research Service, the majority of foreign agent NGOs work in the field of civic and political rights<sup>107</sup>. This is also the

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<sup>105</sup> Cit. opt. Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*: 21.

<sup>106</sup> “Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities.” *Forskningsetikk*, <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/>. Published: 5/26/2022

<sup>107</sup> Martin, Russel. “‘Foreign agents and undesirables’: Russian civil society in danger of extinction?.” *European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing*, March 2022.

field, which the most active democracy promotion efforts are directed towards, since the declared goals are usually based on advancing human rights, free speech and media, and civic participation. Based on the research design and question, I focus on the following types of NGOs in this research: watchdog organizations, human-rights groups, and advocacy NGOs. While NGOs working in the field of environment, research or health are important for civil society protection and development, it is not their primary goal, therefore I leave them outside of the scope of this research.

Therefore, I have the following sampling criteria for the respondents:

- a person employed at a foreign agent NGO declared as a “foreign agent”
- the NGO must receive foreign funding from Western countries
- the NGO must fit one of the following types: watchdog organizations, human-rights groups, advocacy NGOs or similar
- a person must be familiar with internal working practices and decision making in the organization. Ideally, this should be people engaged in project management of the organization and its fundraising or operations, so that they could provide input on organization’s funding

I have also restricted the sample to people working for their organizations for at least one year, in order to raise credibility of their expertise. The aim for this type of research is generally 6-10 in-depth interviews. In order to find the respondents my personal informal and professional contacts network was used, through which 4 initial interviews were arranged. After that I used snowball sampling to recruit other participants. There is a possible limitation to this approach, where the respondents recruited through snowball sampling might belong to one societal “bubble” and share similar experiences. I addressed this bias by making sure that participants represent a range of NGOs functioning in different cities and performing various functions.

Empirical data in this research is represented by interview transcripts. The interviews were conducted in Russian and later translated into English. I provide translated quotes from interviews in Chapter 4. I recognize possible problems connected with translation and provide explanation of certain specific terminology where it is necessary.

Following the research question, I investigate the impact of this law of the law on foreign agents on democracy promotion in Russia. In order to do that I need to address two main topics in the interviews: the foreign funding of organizations (direct feature of democracy promotion) and effects of the law on organizations’ work. Full interview guide can be found in Annex 1. Interviews have been centered around 4 main blocs of questions:

1. Activities and projects of the organization, past, present, and planned. In addition to initial background research on this topic it is important to find out how employees identify the goal of the organization and its meaning for civil society. Moreover, for

many organizations public information on social media was different to what employees describe, since some projects might be carried out in secret. My goal was to find out whether the organization's goals align with what democracy promotion programs support.

2. Information about sources of funding and the share of foreign funding in organization's budget. I was interested how this funding was obtained, with which conditions and whether it has changed after receiving the status of a foreign agent. Additionally, I have asked about other forms of cooperation with foreign partners that do not include financial aid.
3. Information about the impact of the status of a foreign agent. The focus was on how the respondents have adapted to the status, how they changed the work inside organizations upon receiving the status and how they personally perceive it.
4. Impact of repressions beyond the status of a foreign agent. Here I was assessing whether the law on foreign agents was the factor that hindered their work the most and what were the other limitations.

## Chapter 4: Interview insights and findings

In this chapter I will present the results of the research, based on interviews carried out. Overall, I have collected 10 in-depth interviews over the course of October and November 2022. Interviews were carried out online via platforms Zoom and Google Meet, and lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. The participants represented 7 different NGOs, recognized as foreign agents, and their occupations ranged from a freelance lawyer and former volunteer made project coordinator, to a co-founder and a senior lawyer. Some respondents were engaged in working with different organizations at the same time, or had previously worked for 2 or more foreign agent NGOs. The 7 NGOs, representatives of which I had a chance to interview, are among the most active foreign agent NGOs in Russia currently, with active media presence and big scale projects. All of them are established organizations and have a history of existing in Russia and resisting repressions for at least 10 years. A lot of experiences, that interviewees mentioned, were shared among all of them, and naturally, some experiences were unique to their occupation or to the organization, that they were working for. However, with main questions of the study, regarding their relations with foreign donors and with the state, there has been unanimity, and by 10<sup>th</sup> interview I felt that I have reached the point, where the interviewees are discussing experiences, that I have already documented. Therefore, I consider the sample of 10 interviews representative for the scope of this research.

In the introduction of this study, I have formulated two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The work of foreign-funded NGOs in Russia has been significantly restricted by the law on foreign agents.

*Hypothesis 2:* Foreign-funded civil society organizations in Russia are able to continue their work with foreign partners even under the law on foreign agents, using informal and innovative solutions.

In what comes next, I will present results of the analysis, alongside excerpts from the interviews with participants. The section 4.1. addresses findings on the second hypothesis and discusses the relations of foreign agent NGOs with donors. The first hypothesis is addressed mainly in section 2.2, where I present findings on the topic of consequences of the foreign agent status for organizations' work and their survival strategies. However, we should understand and address the fact that repressions in Russia do not exist in a vacuum and studying only one law will not provide a full picture of work of NGOs under threat. Almost all the respondents have addressed the fact, that even though foreign agent law was the main obstacle to their work, it was not the

only one limiting their capabilities for producing change. The state applies many instruments, formal and informal, in order to intimidate civil society, and those are addressed separately in section 4.3. Finally, the invasion in Ukraine that started in February 2022 has signified a massive crackdown on civil society and has significantly altered the work of respondents and their respective organizations. I find that the impact of the law after the February invasion has massively shifted towards a more repressive side. An astonishingly big amount of organizations was added to the list of foreign agent NGOs since the beginning of the invasion, many organizations and activists were forced to flee and continue their activities abroad, and their experience was not similar to anything else that they had to deal with before, to the point where the impact of repressions after war was overshadowing everything that has to do with the law on foreign agents. Therefore, since the goal of the study is to research the impact of the law and this impact has significantly changed due to an external event, I believe it is important to dedicate the section 4.4 to impact and consequences of the war in Ukraine for respondents and their organizations.

It is important to note, that citations from interviews have been shortened and edited for clarity. In places, where I have anonymized the proper names that could be used for identification of the organization or the speaker, I placed those in [square brackets]. For example: “We opened an office in [a city in Russia] in 2017”. Brackets are also used for explanation of specific terms, used by speakers and where I have edited the citations for clarity.

## **4.1. Meaning of foreign funding for NGOs and relations with foreign donors**

### ***4.1.1. Financial sources and the meaning of foreign funding for FA-NGOs.***

The first and the one of the main research topics for this thesis is the role of foreign funding for Russian NGOs, recognized as foreign agents. My goal was to find out which part of the organizations’ budget was supplied by foreign donors, as well as how they build relations with foreign donors, i.e. what kind of requirements exist for them, as well as how does the state interfere with these relations. In order to have a complete picture, it was important to understand what other sources of funding exist across NGOs.

First of all, I should admit, that respondents in general were not comfortable with talking about their funding and budget, with some exceptions. Majority of them were ready to discuss this topic only in broad and general terms, without naming concrete donors and aid providers, and without naming any actual sums of money. They explained it with either security concerns, or with their own lack of knowledge on this topic:

Q1: *“Oh, I don’t really know anything about it. We have a fundraiser, who deals with money things. And I actually think, that this is classified information, so probably nobody is going to tell you this”* (Interview 3)

Q2: *“Concrete donors and ways that the grants were received are the details that I would prefer not to discuss.”* (Interview 5)

Being prepared for possible replies like this, I prepared less direct questions, usually asking them about which partners do they work with, from which countries, and whether they are able to collect many donations in Russia for their activities. An important point to mention is the general way of funding NGOs in general and particularly in Russia. Non-profits do not make money from selling goods or services by definition, therefore their only source of income is money, raised from public or private funds. There are three main ways of funding that respondents have named for their NGOs: crowdfunding, private donations (from Russia and abroad) and sponsor organizations. All of these sources were in one way or another affected by their foreign agent status.

What I found interesting, is that the sources of funding from within Russia were the most affected with the introduction of the law on foreign agents. Overall, respondents were unanimous on the fact, that crowdfunding-style donations, where people are offered to subscribe to a small monthly donation in an organization’s newsletter or social media (usually an equivalent of 10-20\$ a month) were accounting for a minimal share of organizations’ funding, ranging anywhere from 2 to 5 per cent. Respondents mentioned, how after the organizations were recognized as foreign agents, people were afraid to send even small donations on crowdfunding platforms, because *“it was dangerous to send donations from Russia to a foreign agent”* (Interview 1). They have also recognized, how it has become significantly harder to collect even those small donations, because of people’s security concerns.

The same goes for bigger private donations. The difference between private donations and financial aid from official “democracy-promoting” funds is that funds would usually allocate money for specific projects and do it rather openly and systematically, their funding is provided for a limited amount of time and is allowed to be used only for this project, with some rare exceptions. Private donors are usually represented by philanthropists, that can sponsor organizations without connecting it to specific projects, and they are much more likely to wish to remain anonymous. Respondents have expressed the highest level of secrecy, when discussing private donations and refused to name any donors in this category. However, they mentioned, that those donors were coming from Russia, from abroad as well as from “Russian people who reside and work abroad”. From what I could understand, funding from private donors is unstable and

depends on personal connections of organization's representatives, and its share in organizations' budgets is very varied. However, some of the respondents have admitted, that some donors have left upon declaration of the organization as a foreign agent, mainly because they wished to remain anonymous, which was not compliant with the law requirements to provide full detailed reports about organizations' funding. Moreover, many respondents have admitted a big role of volunteer work, done for their organizations:

Q3: *“Some companies, businesses supported us, some of them publicly. For example, [a big Russian company name] has supported our [event] recently. [We received] grants as well. Most importantly – a lot of volunteers that were doing a lot of very important work, such as lawyers and psychologists working for free.”* (Interview 5)

Nevertheless, upon being asked less direct questions, usually later in the interview, almost all of the respondents have admitted, that *the majority of funding for their organizations is received from donor funds from abroad*, and that *this has not changed upon receiving the status of the foreign agent*. Some interviewees from organizations that publicly display their financial sources were quite happy to talk about their funding and its sources, naming specific funds and countries, that support them. The common topic, that was raised across several interviews is that the law on foreign agents has in some sense a freeing feeling for organizations, which previously tried to hide or refuse their foreign funding:

Q4: *“Information on our funding is open and is on our website, all of our donors are listed there. The majority, around 95% of funding, we receive from our main partner, which is [a foreign organization based in Berlin]. What is the point of refusing it, if we are already a foreign agent? And our [fundraising] strategy has not changed upon receiving the status”* (Interview 10)

Many respondents, after admitting that crowdfunding in Russia has become hard to carry out, were saying that they do receive grants, but they were not open to discuss the details. If the respondents were not open to talk about their own funding, they were sometimes making general comments about funding in the NGO community in Russia and about other foreign agents, which helps to understand the perception of foreign funding for NGOs across civil society community:

Q5: *“I don't know any human rights protection organization in Russia that would not receive funding from the Netherlands. Just because the Netherlands is a country that has*

*declared the spread of human rights as its value and dedicates a part of budget to that”*

(Interview 6)

For some respondents it was important to underline, that all of their funding was received legally, and that they went an extra step to ensure, that their efforts are complying with Russian legislation:

*Q6: “Grants were mainly European. It was important for us to keep everything legal, and since [the laws were changing constantly] it was very hard to do. When the lists of unwanted organizations appeared, we had to stop working with a number of partners, we had to constantly monitor the situation. We also got help from local consulates and embassies of certain countries.”* (Interview 5)

Another topic that came up a few times was non-financial support from donors or international community in general, that was also very helpful for respondents:

*Q7: “When you feel that big organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch are standing behind you, you feel that you are powerful and not alone. So, if the support is not even material, but if it is just [written] materials, like books or brochures, or conferences, this is already very nice.”* (Interview 3)

When talking about their foreign donors, all of the respondents underlined, that they see them more like a means to an end, rather than a reason, why they are working. Some respondents said that they do not like to rely on foreign partners for the functioning of their organization, but it was not connected with the status of a foreign agent:

*Q8: “As for money, I have often heard an opinion, that these donor organizations can request something back for their funding. Any foreign institutions that give these grants have aims of sharing and diffusing their values, they don’t care much about influencing certain decisions”.*

(Interview 3)

*Q9: We don’t see anything bad in receiving foreign funding for our activities, there is nothing bad in this, our activities do not go against the Constitution, and quite the opposite, they are aimed at its fulfillment.* (Interview 6)

Therefore, we can see, that paradoxically, the law on foreign agents has disrupted the aid flow only from crowdfunding in Russia and from some private donors. At the same time, most of the funding was still received from foreign donor organizations, that support human rights protection and democracy building, before the influence of the law on foreign agents, as well as after it. Despite the fact that foreign donors largely remained with organizations and were not influenced by the law, some respondents mentioned that they needed to look for new donors after the law entered force. Largely it had to do with big foreign donors leaving, sometimes upon being directly asked so by the Russian government, which happened with USAID for example<sup>108</sup>. This partially confirms previous findings across multiple autocratic and semi-autocratic countries that overall assistance to NGOs drops when restrictive laws against foreign-funded NGOs are in place<sup>109</sup>. Nevertheless, all interviewed organizations were able to substitute these donors with new ones. Among the sources of funding were named the following: the European Commission, the UN Human Rights Fund, the state of Netherlands, Germany, as well as special donor funds such as European Endowment for Democracy and others, which I will not be naming to protect respondents' privacy.

#### *4.1.2. Status of a foreign agent and its influence on relations with donors and ways of obtaining funding*

As I have shown in the previous section, the status of a foreign agent was mostly not an obstacle to receive foreign funding and to collaborate with partners abroad. However, there still have been some notable changes in the ways how organizations interact with donor organizations. Christensen and Weinstein find that more independent donors (ones that are not directly linked to the governments) are more likely to come up with creative strategies to continue the work with civil society groups even in challenging environments<sup>110</sup>. In this subsection, I focus on means of communication and collaboration between donors and NGOs and the most important insight I can present is that donor organizations have shown themselves to be flexible and ready to come up with compromises and unorthodox decisions.

While some organizations have accepted their new status, and have opted to fulfill all of the law's requirements as thoroughly as they could, others tried to avoid being put in the database of foreign agents. One of the strategies, that organizations used in order to circumvent the legislation is liquidating their organization and continuing working as an unregistered social

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<sup>108</sup> Cit. opt. Goncharenko, G., & Khadaroo, I. (2020): 11.

<sup>109</sup> Cit. opt. Christensen, Darin, and Jeremy M. Weinstein: 87.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

movement. The drawback of this approach is that such unregistered organization is legally not allowed to have a bank account or a budget, therefore it is not possible to accept donations and aid from abroad. In these cases, interviewees have mentioned, that donor organizations were open to solutions, that usually involved channeling funding through a third organization in Russia, that did not have a status of a non-profit, and therefore was not required to report its budget to authorities. One of the interviewees has described the scheme, used in his organization:

Q10: *“As a natural person, I am employed at a friendly Ltd (a limited liability company, a for-profit organization, in Russian: “OOO”), who are paying for my work, with whom I have a work agreement, in which it is stated, that I offer judicial help for people. These contracts are payed for by donors, foreign and Russian ones.”* (Interview 6)

The second hypothesis of this thesis is based on research, that shows that even when there are constraints on foreign funding for NGOs, foreign donors and said NGOs are likely to find a way to continue cooperation, rather than it shutting down. The evidence from interviews shows that this is often the case. Even though the law does not restrict the funding for foreign agent organizations in any way, some respondents have admitted, that receiving foreign aid has become sometimes more problematic because they had to look for new donors. Mostly it had to do with donors and funds, wishing to remain anonymous, and that could not do that now that the organization is required to submit detailed budget reports to the Ministry of Justice, or funds that decided to cease activities in Russia.

Another aspect that is relevant to this research is the fact that the status of the foreign agent has been recognized as a sign of reliability for foreign donors, which some of the speakers have mentioned. For example, a fundraiser of one of the NGOs, aimed at human rights protection, claimed that “donors from abroad think that our status (of a foreign agent) gives us more credit” (Interview 7). Another respondent has expanded on that:

Q10: *“As far as I know, the foreign agent status was scary at first, because donors did not want to put the organization in danger. However, within the last 5-7 years, I feel like for external donors [the status of foreign agent] does act as a sign of quality, especially for organizations, who still keep working in Russia.”* (Interview 6)

In general, interviewees admit, that with the introduction of the law on foreign agents it did not become harder to receive foreign funding technically, nor it has become harder to find donors

for projects. Overall, we can make four main observations from the interviews on the topic of the section. First of all, we can see that the law on foreign agents *did not become a significant obstacle* for most civil society organizations to receive foreign funding. Even though organizations in some cases had to look for other donors, none of the respondents mentioned it as a serious struggle. However we should not disregard the fact that some big donor organizations have left Russia completely and ceased their activities there as a result of the law. Secondly, organizations did not significantly change their modes of fundraising upon receiving the status of a foreign agent. The biggest influence is that it became harder to collect donations in Russia, due to security concerns, that Russians face, while donating to foreign agent NGOs. All of the organizations continued their works with slight modifications, in order to adhere to the existing laws (or not to adhere to them by choosing to liquidate the organization and work outside of the legal field). Thirdly, the vast majority of organizations have admitted a very high role of foreign funding in the budgets of their respective organizations, plus they perceive the whole human rights protection field in Russia as heavily dependent on foreign funding. Finally, the respondents have admitted, that donors are ready to come up with innovative solutions to circumvent the bureaucratic difficulties, that organizations face. This largely corresponds to findings on this topic, which stated that impact of foreign democracy promoting donors on the one hand reduces with implementing legislation against foreign-funded NGOs, and on the other hand it is extremely difficult to cancel it completely due to innovative and informal decisions that civil society actors and donors come up with. Therefore, we can accept the second hypothesis of the study.

#### **4.2. Foreign agent status: relations with the state and societal change of NGOs**

This section addresses the first hypothesis of the study, which has to do with restrictions of the work of foreign-funded NGOs by the law on foreign agents. I consider the law effective in restriction of the work of NGOs, if it has managed to prevent organizations from making societal change, or to significantly reduce the audience, that it could reach. And overall, if the law effectively restricts the projects of foreign-funded NGOs, I consider it effective against democracy promotion. Therefore, in this section I will present findings on how the law has affected their activities, whether they were able to adapt to the new environment, and what it all can say about democracy promotion. In conclusion to the section I reference some of the studies of democracy promotion via aid to NGOs in other autocratic countries and see how the results of this research relate to them. The difference with approach to H2 is that in the previous section I was looking specifically at foreign funding of organizations and how it was affected by the law, while here I look at the societal impact of these organizations.

#### ***4.2.1. Societal change and survival strategies of NGOs after receiving the status of a foreign agent***

In general, the respondents agreed that the law indeed was able to significantly restrict their activities, however opinions on that matter divided. Some respondents claimed that the law has not significantly affected their activities, while others concluded, that it was not possible to conduct their previous projects and activities with the new status, and they had to employ different survival strategies. Even though the law does not contain any requirements on stopping organizations' projects, respondents felt threatened by the state and misunderstood by their audience:

Q11: *“Was it scary or bad? [The recognition as a foreign agent] was not scary at all. We discussed [with the colleagues] and decided that we are going to keep working with this status. It led to the negative attitude from people, who could potentially take part in our events. [...] So people were worried, that there would be some consequences, if they come to an event of a foreign agent. However, we still conducted them successfully”* (Interview 10)

Other organizations decided that is not possible for them to exist with the label of a foreign agent because of concerns for their security and reputation. The main survival strategy of such organizations was briefly mentioned in the previous section: liquidation and continuation of work as an unregistered social movement. However, this was also not a guarantee for success:

Q11: *“We refused to exist under the label [of foreign agent], so the organization divided into two, one of which was immediately recognized as a foreign agent, too. So after that, we did not register the organization in the Ministry of Justice. In theory, we are ready to liquidate the organization and reorganize it again as much as we have to. We choose not to live with a label [of a foreign agent], because the experience of [another NGO] has shown that no matter how carefully you fulfill the requirements, you will still be accused of not adhering to the legislation, because the requirements are so vague, so violations can be found everywhere.”* (Interview 6)

Q12: *“We were recognized [as foreign agents] twice. First time, we decided to liquidate the NGO and keep working as an initiative group. Next time, the government said “haha” and recognized us as a foreign agent anyway.”* (Interview 5)

Overall, from the interviews I could observe that the requirements of the law on foreign agent have made some organizations severely restrict their work and use different mechanisms in order to survive under the new legislation, circumventing the requirements of the law. Those organizations, who chose to live with a new status, have admitted that even though not much in their daily work has changed, they had to endure the stigmatization of their activities in general public and in general be much more careful with their statements online. Many respondents have mentioned that the audience that they were able to reach reduced once they received a status of a foreign agent.

#### ***4.2.2. Relations with state representatives as a foreign agent NGO***

Another aspect of the work of NGOs is working together with the state representatives to provide feedback to ensure its more effective work. It is especially important for organizations, that work in the sphere of human rights protection and those that have watchdog functions, and have to collaborate with courts, police, prosecutors, and audit structures of the state. Respondents have admitted that often their status of the foreign agent did not prevent them from doing meaningful human rights protection work, however these cases were very localized, and it was more of an exception to the general rule:

Q13: *“Periodically we were able to work with police. We had a team of specialists that was doing investigations [in the sphere of crimes against LGBT people], that was coming to the police stations to present evidence. After some time, police started calling us when they encountered an assault of a gay person, or similar things.”* (Interview 5)

Q14: *“Before the status of a foreign agent in 2015, the cooperation with the government was on a surprisingly high level. We were even carrying out conferences with our organization and a local court. In [the city] our lawyers were giving lectures to employees of FSIN [federal penitentiary service, in Russian: ФСИН – федеральная служба исполнения наказаний]”*  
(Interview 6)

All of the respondents have mentioned, that the law was becoming stricter almost every year, which coincided with amendments to the law, and if in the beginning it was relatively easy to exist with a status of the foreign agent and still carry out all events and activities, then with time it was becoming much harder:

Q15: *“We were still invited as experts to some of state-organized events. I would say that it continued until 2019, when there was some sort of divide. Recommendations for media appeared not to take commentary from people, affiliated with foreign agents. So before 2019 there were no real obstacles for our work. Of course, there were additional requirements from the law, but we fulfilled them and did not have any fights. And working with the audience was becoming harder and harder with every adjustment in the law.”* (Interview 10)

Overall, in this section, we can conclude, that foreign agent NGOs were initially still able to work in their field upon receiving the status, however the opportunities were becoming more limited every year with every new amendment of the law. Some organizations used to have productive cooperation with the state in their respective spheres, for example they had established relations with human rights ambassador or with a local criminal investigator, however the status of a foreign agent became an obstacle for such cooperation due to stigmatization of organizations with such status among state representatives and public. There have been a few waves of repressions and amendments to the law on foreign agents, and with every “wave” the work was becoming more limited and employees felt less secure. Receiving the status of a foreign agent did not become a surprise or a shock for most of the employees, some of the organizations were preparing for it in advance since the introduction of the law. At the same time, contrary to suggestions of some media, none of the respondents considers the recognition as a foreign agent to be “a sign of quality” and every one would like to get it lifted from their organization, since they admit that it is very restricting and stigmatizing. Survival strategies of the organizations against restrictions and stigmatization have mostly included either liquidation and reorganization into a new entity, or trying to comply with all of the requirements.

In the broader context of democracy promotion, similar tendencies were discussed in the case of Egypt. The “NGO foreign funding” law in Egypt required organizations to approve foreign funding in a special government agency before accepting it. This led to a situation where funding was often not approved and it became impossible for NGOs to engage in projects that would challenge the existing status-quo<sup>111</sup>.

Another aspect that these findings bring out is authoritarian adaptation. As we can see from above, some respondents mentioned that their survival strategy was to liquidate the legal entity of their organization and continue existing as an unregistered social movement. They used the

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<sup>111</sup> Herrold, Catherine E. "NGO policy in pre-and post-Mubarak Egypt: Effects on NGOs' roles in democracy promotion." *Nonprofit Policy Forum*. Vol. 7. No. 2. De Gruyter, 2016: 208

loophole in the law, when an organization needs to be an officially registered NGO to be recognized as a foreign agent. And since 2021 the Ministry of Justice publishes a new list, one of “unregistered social movements performing the function of a foreign agent”, which closes this loophole and adds organizations to the list even when they were able to avoid it before. Catherine Herrold mentions the importance of understanding the capacity of autocratic regimes to adapt to challenges and of taking into consideration the local political context<sup>112</sup>. If it is not favorable for producing change, external influence is not likely to promote it.

Therefore, I can accept the first Hypothesis and agree that the work of foreign-funded NGOs in Russia has been significantly restricted by the law on foreign agents.

### **4.3. Repressions and obstacles beyond the foreign agent status**

Even though this research is centered around the law on foreign agents, during the interviews many respondents mentioned that the law on foreign agents was not the only one obstacle, and in many cases other repressions were even more severe. I believe that this fact does not make the decision to focus on one law less relevant. The entire repressive legislation in Russia is too diverse and nuanced, plus includes formal and informal practices, which would have made the scope of research too broad. Nevertheless, it showed up as an important factor in the interviews, therefore I include this section in my research. Moreover, many respondents looked at these obstacles as another outcome of the law and were closely connecting them with their status of a foreign agent. The findings from this section could become the first step in continuing this research in the direction of how the whole Russian repressive machine acts against actors of democracy promotion.

Complex nature of repressions was also admitted in the literature studying repressions in autocracies and in Russia in particular. G. Golosov referred to the strategy, that Russian elites adopted after 2012, as “the politics of fear”, or “the demonstrative intimidation of those who advocate against the regime, the systematic public discrediting of the Kremlin’s opponents, and the selective prosecution of opposition activists and their allies”<sup>113</sup>, where different repressions were used in combination. I divide this section into two, based on the mechanism of repressions. I am assessing the repressions based on how they managed (or not) to prevent organizations from continuing their work.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Cit. opt. Gel'man, Vladimir. "The politics of fear: how the Russian regime confronts its opponents": 7.

#### **4.3.1. Informal repressive practices and “uncivil society”**

By informal repressive practices I mean those, that cannot be attributed to any formal state institutions. L. Kirchke refers to those as “covert violations sponsored by government authorities but carried out by third parties, as a mechanism to thwart democratic transitions”<sup>114</sup>. The main practice that I believe could be attributed to informal repressions were described in detail by three of the respondents, working for different educational and human rights protection NGOs. It included the disruption of their physical events by people, claiming to be conducting “civil control”. These people represented several pro-Kremlin political groups, which were mentioned across all respondents, who talked about this practice:

Q16: *“[Once I was organizing] a charity book fair, and men from SERB came there. I don’t even know who they are exactly, but it’s obvious that they are supporters of Kremlin and other things like that. They were very hostile, just came in and started pressuring us that something wasn’t labelled [as produced by foreign agent]. [...] Then they bought a book and started shoving cameras in my face and loudly demanding a check from us. We explained that it is a donation and we are not obliged to give checks for that. And they kept on screaming and scaring people away. The whole experience was just was very unpleasant.”* (Interview 7)

The SERB that was mentioned refers to South East Radical Block, which is a nationalist pro-Kremlin social movement, allegedly having curators in the Russian President’s Administration<sup>115</sup>. Another respondent said that at some point they decided to stop conducting events at all or make them as closed as possible, because they “understood that those SERB and NOD will come and disrupt everything” (Interview 1). NOD (in Russian: НОД – Национальное Освободительное Движение) or NLM stands for Nationalist Liberation Movement, which is another nationalist far-right Russian movement, supporting the government. One of the respondents used the term “titushki” to describe these people, who were regularly disrupting their events. “Titushki” is a term, that was invented and first used in Ukraine during the Maidan protests, and it referred to “organized bands of militant hooligans” acting in favor of Yanukovich regime<sup>116</sup>, and later this term has migrated to Russia as well. I believe that these groups and their actions are

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<sup>114</sup> Kirschke, Linda. "Informal repression, zero-sum politics and late third wave transitions." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38.3 (2000): 384.

<sup>115</sup> “Titushki of ‘E’ Center: How SERB Group Is Connected to State Duma, MVD and President Administration .” TVRain, 9 Nov. 2017, <https://tvrain.tv/teleshov/reportazh/serb-449758/>. (news article, available in Russian only)

<sup>116</sup> Wilson, Andrew. *Ukraine crisis: What it means for the West*. Yale University Press, 2014: 78

an example of “uncivil society”, appropriated by the government. The concept of uncivil society does not have a strict definition in the literature, however usually it is a collective term, applied to networks of organization with non-democratic ideas, using violence as means to their goals<sup>117</sup>.

Nevertheless, while these groups were described as “unpleasant” and “hostile”, respondents recognized, that in general these groups were harmless and in most cases did not prevent them from conducting on-site events completely. The main effect from this type of action was that respondents took more security actions to prepare their events.

In some extreme cases, respondents mentioned pressure on their organizations in the form of threats, kidnappings and even murders, that were not properly investigated by the police, and that respondents still attribute to pressure from the state. This was mentioned by two interviewees, both of whom represented organizations, active in the Caucasus region, where, as they claimed, the pressure was the biggest:

Q17: *“We had a story of pressure on our branch in [city in the Caucasus region]. It was burned down. Than we moved it to [another city], and there was an attack on the bus and our employees were beaten up. After that, we moved again. [...] This is an exceptional story, particularly [typical] for North Caucasus region. Well, there were incidents in [Russian region], where the license plate of the car was removed, and later a person was kidnapped in a car with this license plate. We also [received threats], but [serious damage] happened only in the North Caucasus branch.”* (Interview 6)

These cases, according to interviewees, made the organizations that they were working at, change their modes of work, or stop certain projects completely, as they have interpreted them as threats coming from the state. Individual activists left the country or stopped their activities in the respective organizations. One of the respondents has summarized the consequences of the status for their organization:

Q18: *“Status of a foreign agent was not even in the top-10 of our problems. We had murders, imprisonments and drugs planting on our members and coordinators. The only obstacles [from the status] were when for example some IT company refused to do a website for us, explaining that it does not want to cooperate with a foreign agent. And then we found another one really fast”* (Interview 2)

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<sup>117</sup> Kopecký, Petr, and Cas Mudde. "Uncivil Society?." (2003): 10.

Nevertheless, all of the above-mentioned manipulations did not stop organizations from working completely, but rather made them come up with creative solutions in order to continue the work.

#### ***4.3.2. Administrative repressions beyond the law on foreign agents: criminal cases, checks and searches***

If informal repressions have only alleged connection to the regime, then the effect of other administrative repressions is impossible to downplay. By administrative repressions I understand the application of repressive laws by state authorities, or justification of restrictive measures with legal practice. In case of organizations, representatives of which I have interviewed, the main obstacles, that could be attributed to administrative repressions, were excessive checks and frequent searches from police and prosecutors, a lot of which were conducted with violations of formal procedures:

Q19: *“Once we had a police search in our office, it was very-very long and they did not provide a reason for this. There were people inside that they were not letting out for hours, and they were not letting anyone in. When they left, they left “Z” signs on our things.”* (Interview 7)

The searches were also conducted in houses of individual activists. In interview 3, the respondent has admitted, that searches in their organization’s employees’ houses started after the recognition of their organization as a foreign agent in 2021, and that these searches have convinced her colleagues to leave the country immediately, as they have interpreted it as a warning about an upcoming arrest.

Some organizations have faced other repressive laws, due to the specificity of their activities. For example, one of the interviewees was working for an organization, promoting LGBT rights. For their organization, the 2013 law, banning “LGBT propaganda” among children imposed more restrictions, than the law on foreign agents. Particularly, the law has prevented them from providing help to LGBT youth:

Q20: *“Our main principle has always been to work within the law norms, so even after the [LGBT propaganda] law went into force, we were of course against labeling everything we create as “18+”, but we made a choice to do so, [to keep providing help to thousands of people].”* (Interview 5)

However, the respondent has underlined, that the reach of their organization has not suffered despite the repressive laws, and that they were still able to organize *“big and meaningful projects that reached tens of thousands of people”*. Surprisingly, he admitted, that the law on LGBT propaganda was used as a good opportunity to raise awareness of the issues of LGBT community in Russia and that *“there was a big interest from media and from the international community, thanks to which [the organization] got a lot more new activists and new initiatives.”*

Finally, many respondents admitted a feeling of very selective application of the law. This feature does not necessarily represent repressions beyond the foreign agent status, however it is crucial for understanding the functioning of the law, beyond its formal legal application. As I have shown in section 2.3, the selectiveness is one of the main features, admitted by researchers studying this law. The definitions of what constitutes as “political activity” are left broad on purpose, and foreign funding of the organization might be as insignificant, as a small one-time private donation from any country other than Russia, in order to recognize the organization as a foreign agent. Interviewees have told, that this creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, where they didn’t know if their organization was going to be next on the list, and how to prepare for possible restrictions. One of the respondents was hired to work as a lawyer specifically to prepare and file the “foreign agent” documentation to the Ministry of Justice:

Q21: *“The law was changing all the time, so you needed to be very careful with that, in order to provide a correct report, since the requirements were changing constantly. [...] But if the organization is not under pressure, it is possible to work. The employees of the Ministry of Justice will call you and you can talk to them and they will explain to you how to fix your report. But if an organization is under pressure, it is very easy to destroy it on the basis of this law.”*

(Interview 8)

Similar sentiment was expressed by all the respondents. They feel that the law was used as an instrument against specific organizations that were in some way inconvenient to the authorities, and that if the Ministry of Justice had such a goal, it would have found the grounds to add to the list of “foreign agents” any organization. The previous interviewee has added:

Q22: *“[Another organization] was liquidated after two “foreign agent” fines, and on our website, we had a “No War” banner for three months and no one said anything.”* (Interview 8)

At the same time, despite being separate repressive measures, respondents claimed that all of the above-mentioned cases were connected with their status of a foreign agent. Searches and event disruptions started after the organization was declared a foreign agent and added to the database. This goes in line with findings by Kendra Dupuy et al., which claimed that governments restrict NGOs in multiple ways and only one of them is formal law<sup>118</sup>.

Therefore, we can conclude, that there have been other repressive measures used towards the NGOs, beyond the status of a foreign agent. They were both formal and informal, with informal practices included the usage of so-called “uncivil society”, where the organized groups of aggressive people from nationalist movements would show up at events to disrupt them. Other, more extreme practices included personal threats, kidnappings and murders, which have been very influential on organizations’ activities and were perceived as warnings from the state. Formal repression practices included frequent police searches in the offices of the NGOs and homes of their employees. For some respondents, the requirements of the law became the main obstacle for their work, while for others, repressions beyond the law became even more oppressive, than the law. In many cases, the legal basis of the law was used for further intimidation.

That being said, these findings further reinforce the findings of previous section and prove that the law became an obstacle for organizations to continue their work. Apart from direct influences of the law such as social stigmatization and bureaucratic burden, I believe that it made them targets for other repressive measures.

#### **4.4. Impact and consequences of the war in Ukraine**

Finally, it is crucial to take into consideration the impact that the Russian invasion in Ukraine on 24.02.2022 has made on Russian civil society and the human rights movement. In 2022, there have been more detentions of political activists, than in the previous 10 years<sup>119</sup>. Out of 10 people I interviewed, 4 have fled Russia after the start of the war, due to threats because of their activism. Moreover, more organizations than ever have been included in the list of foreign agents, and the new amendments to the law on foreign agents entered into force as of 1.12.2022, according to which it is no longer necessary to receive foreign funding to be considered a foreign agent, and it is sufficient to be “under foreign influence”. The war has made a great impact on the interviewed organizations and on their relations with donors, which is why I am including this

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<sup>118</sup> Cit. Opt. Dupuy, Kendra, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash: 310.

<sup>119</sup> “Repressions in Russia in 2022.” OVD-Info, <https://data.ovdinfo.org/repressii-v-rossii-v-2022-godu#2>. (available in Russian only)

section in the research. Apart from a massive impact and changes in the implementation of the law on foreign agents, interviewees mentioned signs of disconnected expectations of donors and reality of activism in Russia, which was not the case before, and which is an important factor for the study of democracy promotion.

#### ***4.4.1. Cooperation with foreign partners after the start of the war***

Respondents admit, that there have been disruptions in the work with foreign donors since the start of the war. Most of them, however, were connected with objective reasons such as economic sanctions and inability to transfer money legally to Russia, alongside with constantly changing exchange rate. One interviewee has mentioned, that their organization started having delays with salary payments as early as one month following the invasion, and were able to restore the supply chain only 7 months in, and still are having issues. As to the willingness of donors to maintain contacts and cooperation with organizations, the respondents' opinions have divided. Some of the interviewees have told me how donors have left their organizations and froze some of the ongoing projects, "due to security concerns" or without any explanation:

Q23: "*[...] And one big American donor fund said that they are ready to fully fund this new initiative. The call with them happened just a few days before the war started. After the beginning of war, they said that they cannot support initiatives in Russia. [...] My colleague should have gone to Berlin to present LGBT movement in Russia, but after the start of the war they said they are not ready to accept participants from Russia.*" (Interview 5)

Similar situation was described by other respondents. One of them said that they found it more difficult to find and apply for European grants since the start of the war, and another one that "*right now she doesn't even think of reaching out to foreign donors, because of all the atrocities that go on [in Ukraine].*" (Interview 7). Other respondents said, that they did not feel changes in communication with donors, which some of them framed as a good thing, and other not that much. Those who considered it a good thing were glad that donors stayed with them, and those who thought it was a bad thing were hoping for bigger support due to worsened conditions for activism.

Two of the respondents mentioned, that they feel a big gap between donors' perception of political landscape in Russia at the moment, and the real picture. This misunderstanding resulted in unmet expectations from donors directed at organizations' performance:

Q24: "*I think that donors think that it is still possible to do something, [conduct events] in Russia. It is a bit hypocritical. We still have to provide reports with numbers on our events and*

*we are supposed to keep them as high as before. And my supervisors, unfortunately, also think that we can do more. I think they have changed their mind a little only when I was arrested. Maybe it sobered them a little.” (Interview 1)*

Similar outcome, when expectations of donors and reality of activists was described in the case of Turkey and attempts of democracy promotion from Europe. Researchers found that in Turkey foreign funding led to fragmentation of civil society, which was a result of a disconnect between aspirations of donors and realities of civil society<sup>120</sup>. From the point of view of democracy promotion it is an alarming emerging pattern, because this kind of disconnect makes aid less effective and can sometimes even be harmful for civil society.

Contrary to other answers, one of the respondents said, that she feels a growing interest from international community to their organization:

*Q25: “Right now, one part of our team is engaged in creating appeals, reports and other documents for international courts and for monitoring purposes, and the other is doing advocacy. They are travelling with these reports to round tables, discussion sessions and other meetings with human rights activists in Russia. We see the growing need from the Europeans to engage in talks with us, and from our side there is a need for that too.” (Interview 2)*

According to the interviewee, representatives of their organization are being actively invited to provide input on the state of Russian civil society on a high level, from foreign ministries of certain countries, to the European Union institutions. However, I consider this point of view an exception rather than the rule, since the interviewee was coming from a human rights NGO, that had big international interest and coverage right around the time when the war started.

Another important aspect of the cooperation with foreign partners since the start of the war, is the effects of Russia’s suspended membership in the Council of Europe. At least 4 of the respondents mentioned this fact as an obstacle for their current and future work, that they were extremely alarmed about. One reason has to do with the fact, that exclusion from the Council of Europe means, that Russian citizens can no longer apply complaints on Russia to the European Court of Human Rights<sup>121</sup>. Moreover, Russia no longer has a binding legal obligation to implement judgments and decisions from the Court. For many human rights protection NGOs, appealing to

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<sup>120</sup> Ketola, Markus. "EU democracy promotion in Turkey: funding NGOs, funding conflict?." *The international journal of human rights* 15.6 (2011): 798

<sup>121</sup> Russia Ceases to Be Party to the European Convention on Human Rights.” [www.coe.int, www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/russia-ceases-to-be-party-to-the-european-convention-on-human-rights](http://www.coe.int, www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/russia-ceases-to-be-party-to-the-european-convention-on-human-rights). Assessed 8 December 2022

ECHR was one of the main ways to seek compensations for illegal detention and imprisonment of political activists in Russia. One of the interviewees, who was a lawyer, specializing in human rights protection, said that the next option that they are considering is appealing to the HN Human Rights committee, which has similar aims as ECHR, however it does not implement decisions on compensation for activists. More than that, some respondents have expressed disappointment with previous decisions of ECHR:

Q26: “*We see some loyalty to the Russian state from the European Court of Human Rights, where they were often giving it the benefit of the doubt in order to keep cooperating with Russia.*” (Interview 2)

Apart from the compensations from the ECHR, one respondent mentioned, that since Russia was suspended from the Council of Europe, the funding from the European Commission would not be available for projects in Russia. In the latest call for funding for civil society development and democratization, Russia is not included in the list of countries, eligible for becoming an applicant<sup>122</sup>.

Therefore, we can see, that the war in Ukraine has mostly negatively impacted the partnerships of Russian foreign agent NGOs with their donors, and the obstacles mostly stem from the attitude of donors and exclusion of Russia from the Council of Europe, with economic sanctions creating technical difficulties for functioning. At the same time, many organizations with established partnerships with certain donors have kept these partnerships intact.

#### ***4.4.2. Changes in the work of NGOs after the start of the war***

Apart from cooperation with donors, there have been massive changes in the work of foreign agents NGOs after the start of the war, which all of the respondents have admitted. The first change is the fact that most activists have left the country and continue to work from abroad. One of the respondents mentioned, that “there are around 10% of foreign agents left in Russia, but this is a speculation.” (Interview 3). While some respondents said that they can successfully perform their functions from abroad, others felt like absence of in-person observation and communication with activists was negatively impacting their capacity to support social change.

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<sup>122</sup> “Civil Society: European Commission Announces New Funding Opportunities.” International-Partnerships.ec.europa.eu, [international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/civil-society-european-commission-announces-new-funding-opportunities-2022-12-22\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/civil-society-european-commission-announces-new-funding-opportunities-2022-12-22_en). Assessed 8 December 2022.

Many organizations have taken on new functions, such as helping activists under threat flee the country (Speakers 5 and 2), or helping Ukrainian citizens, who fled from the war to Russia (many because they had no other option) or were involuntarily displaced on the territory of Russia (Speakers 8 and 9). Representatives of organizations, specializing on protecting rights of detainees and convicts reported that their volume of work has increased 4 to 6 times, compared to year 2021. Other organizations are currently focusing solely on survival of their network and internal structures:

*Q27: “With the introduction of war censorship our field of activity has been limited very much. The number of our partners has been significantly limited due to the law on foreign agents and war censorship, so our tasks are directed at ourselves in the center, at volunteers. This of course shouldn’t be like that, normally we have a lot of partners that give us tasks and work, but right now everyone is focused on just surviving in the conditions of Russian Federation, which is problematic by itself.” (Interview 1)*

At the same time, I feel that the main change with the war is the general attitude of the activists to their work and the future, with looks pessimistic across all interviews:

*Q28: “All of that [repressive action] is breaking down, destroying the civil society. It is becoming increasingly harder to work in the sphere of human rights protection. I don’t know how I would work if I was still in Russia.” (Interview 3)*

Out of 10 respondents, only one remained positive about the close future, in which she believed that “everything will be over soon”. All other respondents admitted the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness of their organizations against the regime. Therefore, we can conclude, that the invasion in Ukraine has made an enormous impact on the state of civil society and NGO sector in Russia. Majority of the interviewed people had to leave Russia after the start of the full-scale invasion. However, they continue their activities from abroad, with only 2 respondents still staying in Russia as of the end of December 2022. The connection with foreign partners was disrupted to a big extent in the beginning of the war due to economic sanctions, Russia’s suspension from the Council of Europe and security concerns of some donors and the fact that they decided to suspend their projects in Russia. However, after a few months some of donors have returned and currently continue cooperation with their respective NGOs.

## Conclusion

Despite openly confrontational relations of Russia with the West and almost non-existent cooperation in all spheres and despite brutal invasion of Russia in Ukraine, the EU and the US are still helping Russian civil society. At the same time, the Russian state is increasingly applying repressions towards civil society. The law on foreign agents that went into force in 2012 requires all NGOs, receiving foreign funding, register in the special database of the Ministry of Justice, as well as label all of their materials, and introduces many other limitations. More importantly, it gives every one of such organizations the label of a “foreign agent”, implying that they act on behalf of another state. However, not many organizations stopped working after the law went into force, and many of them even expanded their activities after being put in the database.

In this thesis, I have tried to look at this phenomenon through the prism of concept of democratic promotion and an authoritarian state, resisting this process. There is multiple evidence of the effectiveness of democracy promotion efforts, notably in Eastern Europe, where conditionality and offers to join international alliances were helpful in building democratic institutions. However, the impact of other forms of democracy promotion, such as foreign aid to civil society NGOs, was found to have controversial results. Some researchers have found out positive effects of democracy promotion on the level of Russian regions, while others claim that there is no effect at all. As I have established from the literature review, in Russia there have been a few obstacles for using the instruments of democratic diffusion, one of which was the non-confrontational manner, that the West wanted to treat Russia, and the other was the growing power of authoritarianism. I also show that authoritarian powers are highly aware of any attempts to disrupt the regime and tend to feel threatened by liberal social movements.

The only form of democratic promotion that was left for Russia was the funding of civil society, and through that, the spread of liberal norms. At the same time, we can see a global trend for authoritarian states to restrict foreign-funded organizations in one way or another, or to block external funding for NGOs completely, which has become a tool for resisting democratic diffusion. But how effective is this tool? Using the case of the law on foreign agents in Russia, and interviewing people against whom it is intended, I have researched the effectiveness of this tool for countering effects of democracy diffusion. In order to find this out, I first investigated how big of a role foreign funding plays in the development of Russian civil society, and how much this law has disrupted the activities of interviewed NGOs.

Overall, one of the conclusions for the paper is that human rights NGOs in Russia rely on foreign funding for their survival and functioning. Studies of civil society done before do not mention the scale of foreign funding in the budget of these organizations. In general, the law on

foreign agents was not an obstacle for receiving foreign funding and for continuation of their work, even though some donors refused to work in Russia after the law entered force. All interviewed organizations were able to find substitution funding. The foreign aid has been a significant assistant to the development of civil society in Russia and diffusion of democratic norms and all respondents admitted that foreign funding is crucial for survival of their organizations. At the same time, the main outcome of the law on foreign agents was stigmatization of the respondents' activities in Russia and disruption of projects and partnerships *within* Russia. If the organization continued its activities with a new status, these activities were carried out on a smaller scale and were able to reach less people. It has also made organizations and their employees vulnerable to other repressions and made many employees leave the country.

What does it say about democracy promotion and how does it contribute to this field of study? I can make a conclusion that democracy promotion efforts by supporting local human rights NGOs in Russia were seriously disrupted by the effects of the law on foreign agents. Even though the organizations interviewed kept on functioning, their activities became less visible and harder to implement, with some rare exceptions. Moreover, the survival strategies that they applied together with foreign donors were not available after a while, because the state would amend the law or broaden definitions to close existing loopholes. At the same time, foreign funding remains important. The effectiveness of democracy promotion in Russia manifests itself in support of the functioning structure of NGOs working in the spheres of civic education, minority and women rights advocacy and other human rights protection efforts. These democracy promotion efforts remain inefficient for initiation of the regime change or more global institutional democratization. Like the previous studies of effects of democracy promotion via aid to NGOs I remain pessimistic about the prospects of democracy promotion in autocracies and in Russia in particular, due to low level of impact of NGOs and authoritarian adaptation.

Moreover, following the Russian invasion in Ukraine on 24th February 2022, the scope of repressions inside the country has grown exponentially, which ceased the activity of the civil society almost in entirety. The only outcome left for foreign donors right now is the support of the existing institutional environment of NGOs, which led to miscommunication between donors and NGOs, as reported by some speakers. If conclusions to be drawn for aid allocators and donors, the results of this research and communication with aid receivers show the need for a more open dialogue with civil society and unorthodox solutions, otherwise the initial aims for aid allocation will not be fulfilled.

Even though the aim of this research was to study the effects of one specific law and other repressions were out of the scope, it turned out that it is not possible to single out one law in the bigger repressive context of Russia. The respondents were affected by the whole spectrum of

repressions, in which however the law on foreign agents often stood out as a “first repression” after which more severe ones were applied. More than that, some repressive measures were directly connected with the status of a foreign agent of the organization, such as police searches or event disruptions.

As for the future perspectives, I see this research going in two directions. First of all, it could look at the perspective of foreign donors allocating aid to projects in civil society in Russia and in autocracies in general. We would benefit from their understanding of goals and aims for civil society in Russia, and from insights into their decision-making process of grants allocation. Another direction for further research is to compare findings with laws against foreign-funded NGOs in other autocratic countries. Even though chapter 4 partially does that, the legislation is evolving and there are new tools that autocracies use against democracy promotion.

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## **Annexes**

### **Annex 1**

#### **Interview guide for a semi-structured interview**

1. General information about the speaker and the organization
  - a. What is the organization's main purpose? What is its brief history?
  - b. What is your position in the organization? What does it entail? How long have you been with the organization?
  - c. What are the current goals and tasks that the organization and you personally are focusing on right now?
2. Information about the Foreign Agent status
  - a. Can you recall the moment when the organization received the Foreign Agent status? Was it a surprise? Did you prepare for it in advance?
  - b. What was your personal reaction to the new status? How about your colleagues?
  - c. What does this status entail for your work and for organization in general?
3. Information about foreign and other funding
  - a. How is the organization funded? What are the main sources of funding? Is it an open information?
  - b. What is the (approximate) share of foreign funding in the organization? What are the foreign donor organizations? How was this funding received?
4. Changes after receiving the Foreign Agent status
  - a. How has the organization altered its work after receiving the status?
  - b. What was the most significant impact on your work in relation to the new status?
  - c. What was the most surprising consequence of the new status?
  - d. Have there been changes in the way the projects are funded?
  - e. How do you personally assess societal impact of your organization before and after receiving the status of the foreign agent?
5. Comparison with other repressions
  - a. Can you compare the foreign agent status with other restrictions and repressions by state? What was more severe and hindered your work more?
6. The war in Ukraine
  - a. What was the aftermath of 24<sup>th</sup> of January for the work of your organization?

## Annex 2

### List of interviews

No	Organization type	Title
Speaker 1	Foreign agent NGO, dealing with history and human rights.	Project coordinator
Speaker 2	Foreign agent NGO, protecting human rights.	Lawyer
Speaker 3	Foreign agent NGO, dealing with history and human rights.	Community manager
Speaker 4	Foreign agent NGO, dealing with history and human rights.	Lawyer
Speaker 5	Foreign agent NGO advocating for LGBT+ rights	Former director
Speaker 6	Foreign agent NGO, protecting human rights and rights of prisoners	Lawyer
Speaker 7	Foreign agent NGO, protecting human rights.	Fundraiser
Speaker 8	Foreign agent NGO, protecting human rights and rights of prisoners	Lawyer
Speaker 9	Foreign agent NGO, protecting human rights and rights of prisoners	Lawyer
Speaker 10	Foreign agent NGO, watchdog organization	Project coordinator

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