

NGOs and think tanks in Russia and China

Dear users, this newsletter provides information on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and think tanks in Russia and China.

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1.1 Russia

At the beginning of this year, President Vladimir Putin of Russia signed amendments to the law 'On Public Associations'. The bill sets out stricter registration procedures for foreign and domestic NGOs and gives the state the power to close them down.

Critics have argued that Putin is trying to get rid of organizations that do not pledge their loyalty to the Kremlin. During his campaign to promote this legislation Putin addressed a convention of Russian NGOs, which included the Moscow Helsinki Group and its leading human rights campaigner, Lyudmila Alexeyeva. On this occasion, Putin propagated the new law with the argument that Russia would better solve its internal political issues by itself.

Putin's argument has been repeatedly challenged by his critics. Writing in early 2004, Lyudmila Alexeyeva expressed concern that Putin's efforts were not only directed at those civil society organizations funded by foreign sources. To illustrate her claim she referred to the fact that the new restrictions also affected NGOs funded by wealthy Russian citizens known to be opponents of the Kremlin such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Alexeyeva argued that Putin's intention to bring NGOs under the Kremlin's control or else outlaw them altogether had been part of a long-term plan.

The viability of Russian NGOs has been put under serious threat by the new legislation. The question now is how and to what extent Russian civil society will be able to carry on influencing and shaping public opinion and politics. What Russia needs today are activists of the integrity and caliber of Lyudmila Alexeyeva who set up the human rights organization Moscow Helsinki Group despite the restrictions posed by the Soviet regime.

Non-Governmental Organizations, by Russia Profile.org, Moscow, Russia

Russia Profile is an English-language information service offering expert analysis of Russian politics, economics, society and culture. It consists of a website and a magazine. The website collects and assembles information on Russian NGOs and their development and legal framework, and provides a directory of Russian NGOs grouped by thematical orientation.

Groups condemn Russian NGOs laws, by BBC News

This news article of 8 January 2006 reports on the criticism by Russian and international rights groups of Russia 's new NGO laws.

Russia's NGOs: It's not so simple, by the International Herald Tribune

This news article of 8 December 2005 criticizes the general Western condemnation of Russia 's new legislation on NGOs as being too simple-minded.

1.2 China

The question of how NGOs, as well as think tanks, might operate in a restrictive legal framework, and to what extent they may influence and shape public discourse and society, is equally important to the People's Republic of China. Even though Chinese think tanks and NGOs are sponsored by government agencies (they need to be registered if they do not want to work under semi-legal conditions), they still retain a certain amount of non-official status, allowing them to propose and debate ideas more freely.

The role of China's civil society is not restricted to internal issues. On the contrary, in the case of the diplomacy between China and the US for instance, most of the exchanges have taken the form of academic discourse between members of think tanks.

1.3 Non-governmental organizations / think tanks

China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO), Beijing, China

China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO) is a non-profit, voluntary, membership organization operating nationwide. CANGO was founded in 1992 and registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 1993. CANGO develops and maintains relations with foreign NGOs, bilateral, and multilateral organizations. This website provides information on the association's activities and its annual reports.

Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC), Hong Kong, China

The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) is an NGO having general consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. The ALRC was founded in 1986 by a group of jurists and human rights activists in Asia. It is a body committed to the development of legal self-reliance and empowerment of people. Its work places particular emphasis on the areas of cultural, social, and economic rights and the right of development. This website provides information on the center's activities and publications.

China Reform Foundation (CRF), Beijing, China

China Research Foundation for Economic Reform (CRF), established in 1995, is a non-profit, non-governmental institution based in Beijing. The main goal of the foundation is to promote scientific and policy-oriented research activities on a broad range of issues concerning China's current economic reform and development, to encourage high-quality economic analyses of subjects of

interest to business, government, and the general public, so as to contribute to the process of China's modernization. This website provides information on the foundation's activities.

China Center for Economic Research (CCER) at Peking University

The center aims to institutionalize a new teaching and research model which is able to attract domestic and international resources as well as bring together a group of Chinese economists who have received rigorous academic training abroad. By doing so, the center hopes to contribute to economic education and research at Peking University, foster economic reform and development in China, and add to the development of modern economic theory. This website provides information on the center's activities, as well as working papers and a newsletter.

Ford Foundation-China, Beijing

The Ford Foundation's grant-making in China is directed by its field office in Beijing. The Foundation seeks out Chinese initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic values, reducing poverty and injustice, and promoting international cooperation. The office develops projects together with prospective grantees and recommends grants to New York for funding. This website provides information on the projects and programs funded by the Ford Foundation in China.

China Program, by The Asia Foundation, Beijing

The Asia Foundation in China supports civil society organizations and government institutions to enhance popular empowerment while increasing government accountability. Through financial support, professional training, and technical assistance, The Asia Foundation supports legal reform, improved governance, development of the non-profit sector, and women's rights and opportunities. Given China's importance on the world stage, the Foundation also works to facilitate a more mature and stable relationship between China and the US. This website provides information on the Foundation's activities in China, as well as freely downloadable publications.

Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP), Beijing

The Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP) was established in 1981 under the auspices of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). IWEP is a research center in China in the fields of world economics and international politics, and a think tank for the government. The institute's seven research departments are dedicated to the following subjects: international finance, international trade, transnational corporations and international economic organizations, economics of industrial structure, international politics, international strategy, and world economic statistics. The website provides information on the institute's activities and publications.

Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies (IAPS), Beijing

The Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies (IAPS), established in 1988, is one of the research institutes in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Being an institute specializing in Asia-Pacific studies, it focuses mainly on the issues of contemporary politics, economic development, foreign relations, social and cultural issues, as well as regional integration and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. As a research institute funded by the central government, its research programs are both academic and policy oriented. This website provides information on the center's activities, research reports and an archive with the issues of the institute's journals 'Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies' and 'South Asian Studies'.

Shanghai Institute for International Studies, Shanghai, China

Founded in 1960, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) is a comprehensive research organization for studies of international politics, economics, security strategy and China's external relations. The SIIS is dedicated to serving China's modernization, and Shanghai's opening-up and economic development. It mainly studies the US, Japan, Europe, Russia and the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on relations among major powers and China's periphery environment. This website provides information on the institute's activities and on its publications.

China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, China

The CIIS conducts research on international issues to serve China's diplomacy. The institute consists of seven research divisions dedicated to the following subjects: international politics; world economy; American studies; Asian-Pacific studies; Western European studies; South Asian, Middle Eastern and African Studies; and East European, Central Asian and Russian Studies. This website provides information on the institute's research activities, expert papers, and a newsletter.

1.4 Governments and governmental organizations

Capacity-Building for NGOs in China

This report was published by the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs in 2002. It provides conclusions drawn at the meeting between Chinese government officials and NGOs with the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs in 2002, as well as a short overview of the 14 NGOs in China which have a consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The meeting's participants defined the strengthening of the role of the NGOs in the Chinese national economic development and their participation in global forums as the main objective.

Environmental NGOs in China: Encouraging Action and Addressing Public Grievances

This report was published by the Congressional Executive Commission on China in 2005. It provides research on environmental NGOs in China, their activities, and the legal framework they are operating in. This information was presented at the roundtable before the US Congressional Executive Commission on China.

China's Nongovernmental Organizations: Status, Government Policies, and Prospects for Further Development

This article was published by the International Journal of Not-For-Profit Law in Washington, DC, in 2000. Its author is the Deputy Bureau Director of the Nongovernmental Organizations Administrative Bureau at the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing. The author points out that China is in a critical period of transition from a planned economy to a market economy. A socialist market economy, so the author argues, is a market system that is uniformly open, allowing for orderly competition, wherefore the building of a market system is an important condition, requiring in turn a positive development and standardizing of NGOs. He concludes that the Chinese government is fully focused on nurturing and developing NGOs.

The World Bank and Chinese NGOs

This site provides information and reports on the World Bank's activities in fostering NGOs in China.

1.5 Research and academia

The Growth of Civil Society in China Key Challenges for NGOs

This report, published by Chatham House in February 2005, identifies key challenges to the growth of organized civil society in China.

The Chinese Human Rights Web

This website provides a range of links on the academic study of human rights in China, with a particular focus on materials that are available on the internet. There are links to UN and government documents, to topical issues, as well as to activist organizations and a bibliography. Some of the referred material is in Chinese.

Muddling Toward Democracy: Political Change in Grassroots China

This report, published by the United Institute of Peace in 1998, argues that the most effective way for the US government to cooperate with China is via NGOs (based both in China and in the US), rather than via its government agencies. This is due to the NGOs' long time expertise at the grassroots level and also because they are better cushioned against Washington's changing, and often powerful, political winds. That said, the author does not believe that NGOs will play a considerable part in reforming China, as she believes this will be directed in a top-down fashion.

NGOs in China: Die Entwicklung des Dritten Sektors

This report in German was published by the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung in Germany in 2004. It provides an account of the prevailing political circumstances and legal provisions under which both Chinese and international NGOs act on the basis of the international NGO- and Third-Sector-Theory. The characteristics of the Chinese Third Sector are illustrated with the help of examples. This article also offers a sound basis for further and more specific studies on the subject.

1.6 Media

Rapide Entwicklung von NGOs in China

This article was published by the Beijing Review in 2005. It comments on the changing role of NGOs in Chinese society and their legal framework.

Beijing Review, Beijing, China

Beijing Review is a Chinese English Weekly News Magazine on Politics and Economics. It is available in German, French, English, Japanese, Spanish, and Chinese.