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## **Making the European Human Rights Policy Attractive and Effective for Russia:**

### **The Role and Strategy of NGOs**

The "Wider Europe" grand project is still a work-in-progress, and being a member of Wider Europe is more question of will than of some historical given. Being European today means a willingness to develop *common European* ideas and practices, *common* policy responses to many challenges posed by new economics, new security, and new society.

The objective of the proposed research is to examine how ideas, norms, and practices in area of human rights are transferred across Wider Europe and become common European norms and practices. The project focuses on one aspect of this transfer: on the process of transferring European human rights norms and values to Russia.

The project aims to analyze the impact of European norms and practices upon Russia; to explore *if and how* knowledge about human rights norms and policies, developed in European institutions, are used by Russian policy-makers in developing human rights norms, institutions, and policies within the Russian Federation.

Russia is already engaged in a process of convergence on modern European values and norms through the number of channels, including its partnership with the EU and membership in the Council of Europe. The issues of human rights figure more and more prominently in Russia's dialogue with EU member-states and have an institutionalized place in the Russian-EU partnership. Russia's membership in the Council of Europe entails as conditions that Russia should subscribe not only to general principles of democracy, but also to the precise and legally binding European Convention of Fundamental Freedoms and Human Rights, and thence the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Yet, one can easily notice the continuing ambivalence over the degree to which Russia shares or even could and should share European and EU-sponsored values. There is growing internal debate in Russia on what should be the Russian line towards European institutions on matters of political values, human rights and democratic freedoms. Some people are concerned by the present Russian trend to speak and behave with a neo-authoritarian accent, while others fear the possible use of the human rights argument for imposing alien interests and development models on the country. At the same time, the EU also reveals ambiguity of priorities in its policies toward Russia and seems to be discouraged and confused about whether it should try to attach Russia to the Europeanization train.

In this context, the questions of strategic choice are as follows: for Russia, if and to what extent it is willing and able to accept *common European* ideas and practices; for the EU, whether and to what extent it is able to make European policies on human rights attractive and effective for Russia. Here it becomes important what strategies, mechanisms and agents are involved in the process of transferring democratic norms and practices (in area of human rights) within Wider Europe.

The transfer occurs through a number of processes and can involve a wide variety of actors. Yet, any interpretations of such transfer must now take into account the significance of non-state actors involved in the export of ideas and policies across Europe. The impact of non-state transfer agents is difficult to gauge but it is likely to have a deep impact on the future of Wider Europe project.

In Russia, many non-state actors are actively involved in efforts to strengthen the rule of law and the observance of human rights in accordance to European standards. Almost nobody denies that non-state actors have impact on the transfer of European ideas, norms and practices to Russia, but we do not know enough about the non-governmental domain of cross-border policy transfer within Wider Europe.

The proposed project aims to provide insights into constraints and opportunities for Russian NGOs involvement in the expansion of European democratic norms and practices. In particular, the empirical part of the project involves research into the structure of obligations and incentives, demanded and offered by Russia's membership of the Council of Europe, and to strategies developed by Russian NGOs to transfer norms and rules of the Council of Europe to Russia.

The objectives of the project are to analyze the role of non-state actors in promoting European democratic norms and practices in EU neighbor countries, develop strategies for successful NGO's involvement in transfer of democratic norms and practices (in area of human rights) to Russia; and write a 20-page policy study and research paper on the issues.