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“We are the electorate!”

Russian Veterans’ Organizations Resisting Welfare Liberalism

Introduction

“In our country, the political and socioeconomic situation has changed drastically and unforeseeably – that is, far from the better direction. Default, delays in pensions, monetization, reforms in housing and health care, new administrative-territorial division ... The Veterans’ Council has become a defender of the legal rights of the older generation. And the passing of time has given evidence: Veterans’ organizations are needed like air. During recent years, they have become a powerful and coherent force that defends the interests of all the veterans, retirees and the disabled.”¹

The quotation above from a chair of one Russian veteran’s organization captures well the main question set for the investigation in this paper: we seek to understand the role of the veterans’ organizations in contemporary Russian society. As a rule, the previous research on post-Soviet civil society research has somewhat ignored such old Soviet-era organizations seeing them as compromised, inauthentic, and illegitimate to count as “real civil society” due to their Soviet legacy (Hemment, 2012, 242; also Phillips 2009, 277 -- Richter). However, in this paper, we take seriously the claim, presented in the quotation above, concerning the veterans’ organizations as “a defender of the legal rights of the older generation”. Consequently, we treat the veterans’ organizations as genuine interest groups that are organized around a classic representative structure with a clear constituency whose interests the organizations claim to represent, advocate and defend.

¹ The quoted excerpt was published in a local newspaper *Ladoga* (20/2007, 3) in the event of the 20th anniversary of one Karelian district-level veterans’ organization, see more in Kulmala 2013, 197-206).

In this article, we aim to better understand how and how systematically – if at all systematically – the Russian elderly people engage collectively through the veterans’ organizations in interest representation and rights defense, which, as the quotation above also shows, seems to take place in the context of the welfare transformation and related policies – and in the name of the Russian elderly. The elderly people in fact are one of the very rare societal groups in Russia that have openly protested against the social policies of the Putin era in the 2000s. The failures of the pension and monetization reforms and rises in pensions even during the economic setback in 2008 would indicate that these people have played a role in Russian social policy making. Consequently, we specifically ask what societal role these organizations display within the reorganization of the socialist welfare state in the country. In our research, we have decided to use Russian veterans’ organizations as an experimental field in which we try to understand the efforts and possible agency of the supporters of the old welfare norms within the massive welfare reforms. As a veteran in the Russian context refers not only to participants in different wars but also to pensioner who have served for the state or other public service², the veterans’ organizations are overwhelmingly populated by the Russian elderly. On the other side of the coin, we pay special attention to the question how the organizations of the elderly adapt to the recent neo-liberal efforts of the Russian state to out-source its previous social obligations on the Russian NGOs

To investigate the role of the veterans’ organizations for the reorganization of the welfare state, we bring together two scholarly frameworks. In order to understand the post-socialist welfare transformation, different principles of social provision rooted in different types of welfare models (regimes) are of our interest. Moreover, the role of different stakeholders – states, NGOs, businesses – in welfare service provision connects with the different models. As said, we are interested in what kind of role these Russian citizens’ associations, populated by the elderly, take within the new out-sourcing mechanism. Yet, to understand the role of these organizations as advocates of citizens’ interests, we rely on civil society and collective action theories.

We build on the comparative study of veteran’s and pensioners organizations’ in two Russian regions: the Republic of Karelia and federal city of St. Petersburg. In fact, the regional level of activity is utmost relevant since in contemporary Russia most of the welfare responsibilities lie in the hands of the regional governments. Though, as we soon explain, the federal level social policy

² See the federal Law #5 “On Veterans”.

making is essential as well when it comes to the in-kind benefits that are highly on the agenda of the studied organizations.

We first shortly contextualize our case study of Russian veterans' organization and their role in welfare transformation in the country by introducing the major post-socialist welfare trajectories with focus on the policy concerning the veterans and pensioners. Then we move to the presentation and categorization of the studied organizations. Finally we discuss their agenda and activities to analyze their role and draw our conclusions. We will show that the Russian veterans' organizations are first and foremost active in social advocacy to secure their social benefits, provided by the state.

Post-Soviet Incoherent Welfare Trajectories and Policy on the Elderly

In September 2013, the television Channel 1 accomplished an unprecedented telethon "With United Efforts"³ aiming at involving Russian citizens and their organizations into charity activity to support people who were injured in the massive floods in the Far East of Russia. Celebrities participated to attract attention, won public trust and raised money to assist those vulnerable citizens who have suffered from natural disaster – that is, for the activities that have traditionally belonged to the state's social responsibilities in the Russian context.

Another example that becomes even closer to our topic and indicates a similar shift in social responsibilities are several quite recent legislative acts which enable the Russian state to out-source its previous social obligations onto the shoulders of Russian (socially oriented) NGOs.⁴ Also Russian enterprises are encouraged – or better to say somewhat expected – to actively participate in various social programs.⁵ When it comes to big (especially, international) companies, social programs in the field of social assistance and education are common: for instance, Intel, IBM, City

³ In Russian, "Vsem mirom", see: http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects_in_detail/si=5934. The project proved to be successful. As a result of this one-day project nearly 20 million euros (almost 830 million rubles) were collected to protect citizens damaged in natural disaster.

⁴ In 2010, for instance, a new law (N 40-FZ) on socially oriented non-commercial organizations was introduced and in 2011 followed by a presidential decree (N 713), which created state funding for certain of socially oriented NGOs to implement governmental programs. When doing so, the government guarantees tax reductions and the sustaining of particular conditions to act for those organizations. (See more in Kulmala & Tarasenko 2013a; Kulmala 2013, 128, 288; OPRF 2012, 54–55).

⁵ Ministry of Economic Development introduced laws to reduce taxes on charity activities of the business and encourages the regional authorities to do the same.

Bank, Coca-Cola and others are quite active organizations in this sphere. Yet, new laws aim at increasing the role of small businesses in the field as well.⁶

The listed, very neo-liberal in their essence, measures can be treated as a logical continuum of the Russian state to withdraw from its previous obligations in the field of social welfare and thus to diminish its previous role as the main provider of social support and welfare services. Starting from the Yeltsin years, the trend has been to liberalize, privatize and decentralize the social obligations and thus to restrict the role of the state in welfare provision (Cerami 2009; Cook 2007; Kulmala et al 2014). As Smith and Rochovska (2007, 1164) wrote, “Indeed, it might be said that the transition from communism to capitalism – as some saw it – continues to represent one of the boldest social, economic and political experiments with neo-liberal ideas in the world today.”

On the other hand, the liberalization process in Russia has not perhaps been always as wide as one would have expected. In the 2000s, under the Putin/Medvedev tandem, in parallel to continuing of downsizing the old social policy, there has been a reverse trend toward more interventionist role of the state in certain fields of social policy. This shift has largely, however, been highly selective: due to the alarming demographic situation in the country, the state has prioritized the measures to increase the birth rate (Kulmala et al. 2014; also Cook 2011; Rotkirch et al. 2007; Rivkin-Fish 2010).

In addition to this certain priority for which the Russian state has taken more responsibility, Putin’s second term government also failed to implement some of its liberal reforms, namely the pension and monetization reforms. The Federal Law #122, commonly known as the law on monetization of in-kind benefits (*l’goty*), triggered a political crisis for the Russian government.

L’goty were characteristic elements of the Soviet welfare system. They were special benefits or privileges that entitled eligible recipients to the free or discounted use of various public services, including transport, housing, utilities, medicines and sanatoria – and they were generally awarded on the basis of merit or service to the Soviet state, irrespective of material need. Categories of recipients included military and labor veterans, people with disabilities, Heroes of the Soviet Union, inhabitants of the Far North, among others.⁷ (Wengle & Rasell 2008, 739-741.) In 2004, the Putin administration moved to dismantle this massive system of privileges by replacing the in-

⁶ At least fifteen per cent of the regional money redistributed for the social contracts (i.e. outsourcing the state social obligations to other agents) is to be allotted for small businesses and NGOs.

⁷ By 2003, 236 different categories of the population were eligible for more than 156 social payments at the federal level alone. Overall, legislation delineated more than 1,000 varieties of benefit in Russia.

kind benefits with cash payments. The government justified the need for the reform by characterizing the old system as over-sized, inefficient, and expensive. The system was also claimed to be unfair, to favor the non-poor and to be prone to corrupt practices. (Kulmala et al. 2014, 543; also Maltseva 2012, 286-290; Cook 2007, 179.) As Wengle and Rasell (2008, 748) argued, the monetization was a clear step in the direction of a liberal welfare state, of a system in which people must economize with fixed sums (also Hemment 2009, 40) – even though significant continuities persist.

The reform generated the massive, nation-wide protest: 420 protest actions between January and July 2005. These protests were spontaneous, grassroots and uncoordinated events; political parties, trade unions and NGOs became later involved to help to coordinate (Cook 2007, 181; Wengle & resell 2008, 745). As a result, although standing by the reform in principle, the government made multiple concessions and allowed many exceptions and exemptions to the Law #122 (Cook 2007, 182). In the final evaluation, the monetization reform was too much top-down, which is why it failed in many respects. The monetization was only implemented thoroughly in a few rich regions of Russia (such as Tiumen and Tatarstan), while more than half of the regions only saw minor changes and less than one-third of the regions saw moderate changes (Kulmala et al. 2014, 543; Maltseva 2012, 290). Thus, as a result there was a wide divergence across the country (Hemment 2009, 40), which in fact became very clear during our comparative research as well. This, in fact, supports our later argument that federalism matters when looking at Russian social policies (also Jäppinen et al. 2014; Kulmala et. al. 2014) – even in the case of in-kind benefits, which had been traditionally overwhelming a federal social responsibility.

The reform, however, passed much of the responsibility to the regions. The federal government remained responsible for the military veterans and disabled, while the regional governments took the responsibility for the majority, i.e. pensioners, veterans of labor, including those who had labored on the wartime home front and victims of repression (Hemment, 2009: 40). The size of the payments varies by the category and the level: the federal payments are bigger than the regional ones. Thus, seemingly the government prioritized the politically and socially most important categories of the military veterans and the disabled, which created a hierarchy among the categories (Wengle & Rasell 2008, 744) – and consequently resulted in inequalities and competition. As we soon show, the struggle over the status of one's category and consequent right for the federal level benefit was central in the political activity of the studied veterans' organizations.

In addition to the Law #122, the federal Law #5 “On Veterans”, plays a major role in this struggle. The law defines the different types of veterans in the country as well as regulates the scope of benefits for various types of veterans. According to the law, a “veteran” refers to (1) a participant of different wars (WWII, Afghan and Chechen wars, etc.) who were personally involved into military operations. In addition to war veterans, it also includes (2) labor veterans (i.e. to pensioners that have earlier served for the state, deserved a state reward or started working under age of eighteen during the WWII), (3) veterans of public services, (4) veterans of military services. The categories of (1) a worker in the home front, (2) a citizen of besieged Leningrad and (3) a former prisoner of concentration camps are also equated to a veteran in terms of social benefits.

All in all, in the middle of the often controversial state policies, the liberal idea of an individually based social responsibility has never been widely accepted among Russians but the majority of citizens still expect the state act as a main provider of social welfare (Henry 2009; Kulmala 2013). As Cook (2014) argued, the current Russian welfare state is shaped by strong welfare legacies: the liberalization efforts cannot be truly successful due to the societal welfare constituencies – mainly pensioners and public-sector workers – who have strong expectations for the state welfare provision.

The tendency to rundown the welfare state in the Russian context has not been that much in the agenda of the political parties (cf. Cook 2007). Instead, it seems that political leaders have left the bureaucrats to be blamed for the related reforms – that is, the final responsibility has been on the shoulders of those who cannot be “punished” in the elections. However, if anyone it has been the Russian pensioners who have been loudly criticizing the (neoliberal) restructuring of the welfare state. The failure of the monetization reform shows that pensioners’ agency played a role and that the Russian system is, unlike often thought to some extent, receptive to popular demands and protests, as Kulmala et al. (2014) argued.⁸

Furthermore, in addition to increases in the family benefits (i.e. the elite-led top priority), the government has substantially raised the pensions. As we see in Figure 1, unlike the annual average wage or payment of the subsistence minimum, the size of pensions has grown even in 2008-2010, that is during and after the world-wide economic crisis (cf. Cerami 2009; Sutela 2012).

⁸ The authors conceptualized the resistance of monetization as “event-driven agency, which indeed can have some influence if it happens in the right place at the right time.

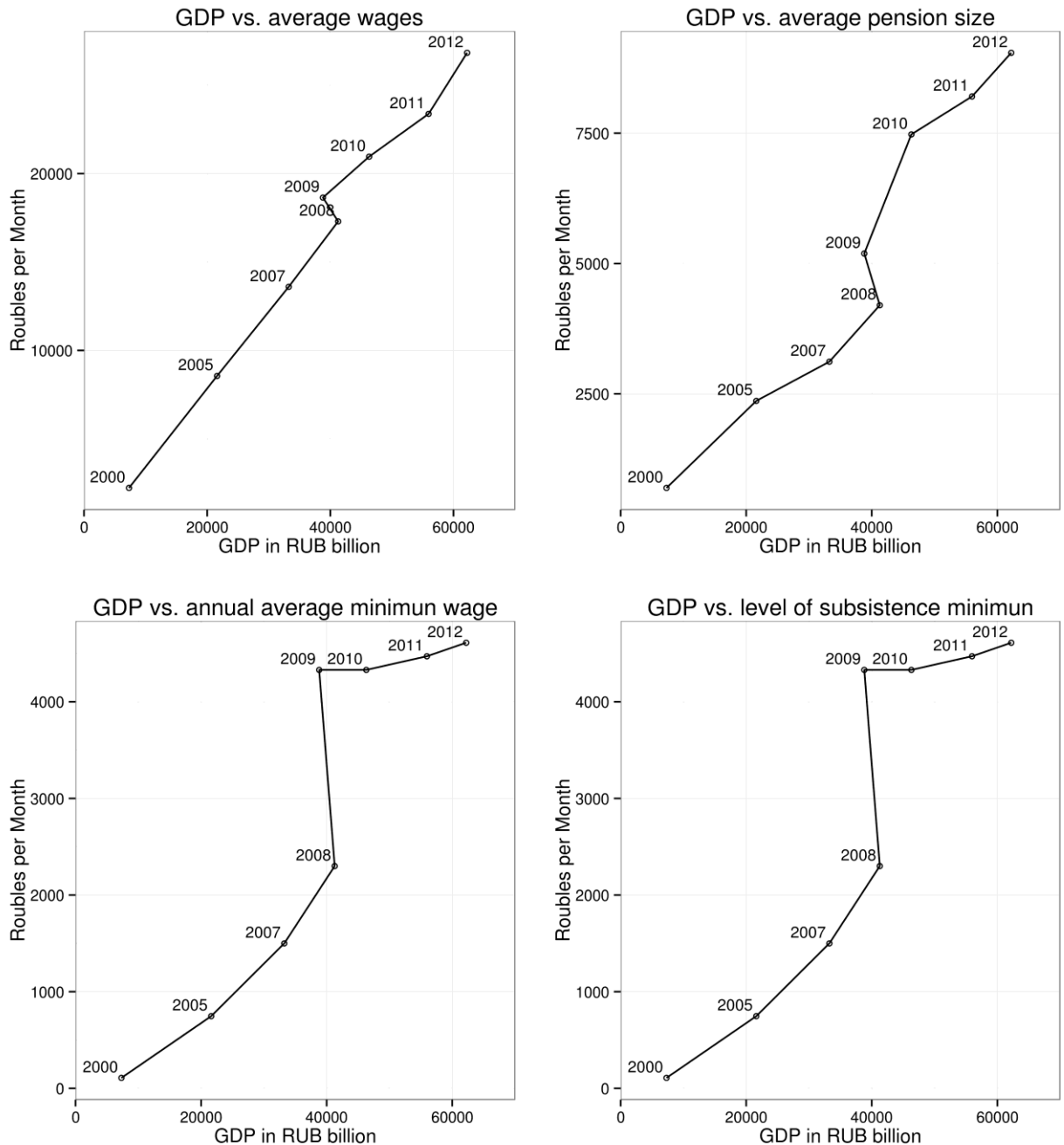


Figure 1 Change in dependency between GDP and wages, pensions and subsistence minimum.

In sum, alongside prioritizing the social policy that well responds to the national concerns, Russian pensioners have been one of those rare groups that to whom the government has directed more funds. Thus, it seems that the Russian elderly has had at least some influence on the welfare trajectories in contemporary Russia. Why is that? What makes the elderly somewhat special? In this article, we aim to better understand how systematically – if at all systematically – the Russian elderly engage in interest representation and rights defense activities. Furthermore, we aim evaluate how successful their efforts are. As said, the veterans’ organizations, populated by the

Russian pensioners, serve as our case study. We investigate how welfare concerns of the elderly become promoted and advocated through the organized form of collective action and what societal role the veterans' organizations display within the reorganization of the welfare state. On the other side of the coin, we pay special attention to the question how the organizations of the elderly adapt to the recent neo-liberal efforts of the Russian state to out-source its previous social obligations on the Russian NGOs.

Thus, we search for analyze possible agency of the studied organizations within somewhat restricted circumstances of contemporary Russia, where political opportunity structure seems to be rather closed for initiatives and input from below. Thus, instead of top-down treatment of the federal policies, we remain open to possible avenues for bottom-up solutions to modify and negotiate these policies, at the local and regional levels in particular. (Cf. Kulmala 2013). As noted, the previous research has somewhat ignored such old Soviet-era organizations seeing them as compromised, inauthentic, and illegitimate to count as "real civil society" (Hemment 2012). On the contrary, we treat the veterans' organizations as genuine interest groups that pursue shared interests based on the collective identity of the participating people. Our underlying assumption thus is that these organizations are first and foremost active in social advocacy – that is, in representing and defending the interests of their members vis-à-vis the state to secure their old benefits, inherited from the socialist, i.e. state paternalist system.

The Russian Veterans' Organizations as Interest Groups

As in many other post-communist countries in early 1990s the Russian model of welfare state combined broad security coverage and access to basic social services (dominant universalism) and stratified provision (a feature of a conservative model of the welfare state) (Cook 2007). Numerous organisations such as veterans and pensioners organizations and professional unions were an integral part of this system that was built on the categories of citizens that enjoyed social benefits guaranteed by the government. The transformation of the welfare system of social provision in the early 1990s triggered the development of such membership organisations as their main goal to secure those categorical, in-kind benefits. Russian veterans' and disabled organisations can be treated as a key example of such development (Belokurova 1999; Jakobson, Mersianova & Kononyhina 2011).

It became clear also in our conversations that the mobilization of the veterans in the country began in late 1980s and early 1990s exactly because of the harsh times and consequent need to social

protection. According to a member of the executive body of the Saint Petersburg Veterans' Council, "veteran organisations started to unite their efforts in order to protect their members' interests". In the same way, one of the executives of Saint Petersburg "Citizens of Besieged Leningrad" explained to us: "we started to fight for social benefits because it was difficult to survive in the early 1990s" (see also Kulmala 2013, 203, 206).

Thus, as in the quotations above and in the beginning of this article, the very existence of the veterans' organizations becomes clearly marked with such activities as "rights defence" and "interest protection" as their primary function.⁹ As already explained, the category of a veteran extends beyond military and covers a large group of the Russian pensioners – thus, they represent a large group of people in Russian society. These are reasons why, we consider these organizations as an important tool for this societal group in question to fight for their social rights and make political claims on the preferred welfare system model – even though these Soviet-type organizations typically neglected in the scholarly literature on post-Soviet civil society.

As noted, first and foremost, we categorize the Russian veterans' organizations as interest groups, which are usually non-profit and voluntary organizations whose members have a common cause for which they seek to influence public policy. Such organizations thus pursue shared interests based on the collective identity of their members. As Alapuro (2010, 109) argued, a crucial aspect to an organization to be an interest group is politicization of the collective identity that is shared by the group members. In other words, interest groups publish, i.e. make visible and call attention to injustices that their members face and to problems that are not being met by existing institutions. Consequently, they put pressure on public agencies to find resources and new solution according to these injustices and problems. (Cf. Taylor 1996, 20).

In addition to categorizing the studied veterans' organizations as interest groups, a crucial conceptualization of the studied veterans' organizations as membership organization is made to understand the logic of their action (cf. Kulmala 2013, 46). By membership organization we refer to an organization that is organized around a classic representative structure with a clear constituency. Such an organization is run by its members with a delegation of power and serves the interests of these members. The collective organization of people is based on principles of mutual aid and self-help. (Cf. Cook and Vinogradova 2006, 30-32; Ebrahim 2007, 202-204.)

⁹ Although there are also apolitical veterans' organizations, the main function of which is rather to serve as hobby clubs, as explained by the chair of the Karelian Veterans' Council: "Да, они постепенно расширяются. И самое главное, что появились ветеранские организации, которые, ну, как бы, для души ветеранов, понимаете? Не для политики и не для защиты интересов, а появились такие как... [giving an example]."

The aspect of “membership” is crucial for the logic of action of such organizations in comparison to mission-driven organization whose active participants (paid staff and/or volunteers) do not belong to a group on behalf of whom the organization works and to whom its activities are addressed. Thus, these organizations are not representative in their nature but they rather exhibit solidaristic character. (Cf. Ebrahim 2007, 202–204; Kaldor 2003, 17–18). Such organizations can be labelled as social welfare organizations (cf. Kulmala 2014). We tend to think that the majority of the Russian veterans’ organizations belong to the group of the membership organizations, though among them, one can find also the latter type of organizing – organizations that work and speak for pensioners and veterans by active people who do not necessarily belong to this social group (see Kulmala & Tarasenko 2013). In this article, we exclusively analyze the membership organizations, while the second type indeed deserves attention as well.

According Marier (2008), welfare related questions are instrumental in generating interest groups that seek to protect their benefits”. Accordingly, the interest group theory implies that those stakeholders who benefit from the existing social guaranties and policies tend to resist the related reforms (Olson 1982; Marier 2008). In contemporary Russia, the veterans obviously belong to a set of certain welfare stakeholders (or constituencies)¹⁰, which clearly benefit from the old redistribution of financial and administrative resources. The above-discussed massive system of in-kind social benefits and privileges, inherited from the Soviet period, serves without a doubt as an example of the exiting redistribution that has been beneficial to the majority of the members of Russian pensioners’ and veterans’ organizations. As noted, the system provided certain benefits to certain categories of people – that is, automatically without measuring the actual need of the beneficiaries (in contrast to means-tested assistance). With the monetization reform happened exactly what one could assume from the viewpoint of the interest group theory: the welfare stakeholders that mostly benefitted from the old system resisted the reform, as a result of which the reform failed in many ways, as described.

In our research, we aim to understand how systematic is the resistance of the Russian veterans’ organizations to the post-Soviet reorganization of the welfare state, to the process from which this group of people has largely suffered. By building on welfare model and interest group theories, our underlying assumption is that the studied veterans’ organizations are active in trying to secure

¹⁰ By welfare stakeholders Cook (2007) and Cox (2012) refer to a set of groups of people, such as social sector administration, professional associations, trade union leadership, etc.

and/or advance the existing social benefits to their member categories and thus to oppose the liberal model. In other words, by protecting their rights based on the old, state paternalist system, they challenge the Russian state in its efforts to withdraw from its previous social obligations.

In other words, social advocacy is assumed to be their primary function especially when it comes to their activities at the regional and federal levels. However, we expect these organizations also to provide practical social assistance and other kinds of support and help which is crucial to their members. (Cf. Kulmala 2014.¹¹). The latter function becomes closer to service provision and self-help functions of citizens' organizations. Such a dual role is essential to understand the logic of action of these organizations as well as their relationship to their constituencies (cf. Alapuro 2010, 111). As noted, alongside being interested in the resistance of the studied organizations to certain welfare reforms, we assume them to be somehow forced to position themselves to the new policies of the Russian state towards the socially oriented organizations, including the increased support to provide social services.

The Case Study of the Veterans' Organizations in Saint Petersburg and Karelia

In our analysis, we focus on the regional level organizations, since most of the responsibilities of social policies lie in the hands of the regional governments. As noted, federalism matters also concerning the in-kind benefits: the monetization reform resulted in regionally diversified systems, which in turn creates inequalities between the same categories of people in different regions. Furthermore, the monetization reform reorganized a division of labor concerning the different categories of people among the federal and regional levels, which in turn created inequalities among the different categories. Such divergence across the country justifies our decision to focus on the regional level. Such hierarchy between the categories, in turn, makes it necessary to pay attention to the federal-regional dynamics.

Our empirical analysis is based on the comparative study of veterans' in two Russian regions: the Republic of Karelia and federal city of St. Petersburg.¹² Karelia and St. Petersburg have been

¹¹ Kulmala (2014) has argued that paradoxically the Soviet-type membership organizations are engaged in advocacy as their primary function, whereas the so-called post-Soviet social welfare organizations exhibit social assistance of their target groups as their primary task. She shows that both organizational categories are involved in service provision and advocacy but to varying extent and with different logic of action.

¹² Saint Petersburg and Moscow are considered as federal subjects. For instance, within the boundaries of Saint Petersburg, there operate more than 100 municipal governments.

selected in order to cover rather different socio-economic contexts which might impact the strategies that the studied organizations choose to display. Saint Petersburg is a region, which contributes to the federal budget, while the Republic of Karelia is dependent on the monetary transfers from the federal budget sources. Both regions, though, have vivid and rather developed civil societies – not least due to having been largely influenced by the international agencies.

In Saint Petersburg, there are altogether 215 (???) registered veterans' organizations (including the local branches), while in Karelia one can find over 600 veterans organizations (including the local ones), which – according to the Karelian (regional) Council of the Veterans' – claim to unite around 246,000 veterans and pensioners in the Republic.¹³ We have selected four different types of the veterans' organizations into our more in-depth investigation. First of all, in both regions, our analysis covers the regional umbrella organizations – i.e. the Saint Petersburg and Karelian Councils of the Veterans (Saint Petersburg Social Organization of Veterans [namely, Pensioners and Disabled People] of War, Labor, Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Entities; Council of Veterans of War, Labor Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Entities of Republic of Karelia) that bring together numerous regional and local veterans organizations. In addition, we have made the division of the responsibility on the in-kind benefits between the regional and federal levels as an independent variable, which might affect the logic of action of an organization. Therefore, we have chosen in both regions into organizations that are under the federal responsibility as well as under the regional responsibility: The regional organizations of the veterans of the local wars (e.g. Afganistan and Chechenia) “Brothers in Arms” (*Boevoe Bratstvo*) in Saint Petersburg and Karelia belong to the category of a participant in military operations that is protected by the federal government. The Saint Petersburg and Karelian regional organizations of the former young prisoners of fascist concentration camps (*uzniki*) and regional organizations of the “Citizens of Besieged Leningrad” (*blokadniki*) as veterans of wartime are under the regional social protection. The umbrella organizations naturally bring together all veteran types.

For our research, we have conducted interviews with the representatives of the mentioned organizations as well as with the authorities. Additionally, we have analyzed the official websites and other published materials of the veterans' organizations as well as relevant policy documents, including regional and federal legislature. In our investigation, we have paid attention to the following questions:

¹³ See: <http://gov.karelia.ru/gov/Different/Veteran/index.html>

1. Who are the members and active people of the organization? By who and for whom the organization was established? What is the collective identity of the members? Are the activities and agenda addressed only to the selected group of members or do they take a more generalized form? To what extent the organization relies on volunteers and/or paid staff?
2. What are the major concerns of the group of people that the organization claims to represent? How the organization aims to respond to those concerns and problems that they members face? What is the primary task of the organization? What about other, secondary tasks? How the organization engages in these tasks?
3. What is the relationship of the organization with the state structures at the different governmental levels and branches? What is their position on the state policies in the field (state withdrawal; outsourcing)?
4. What are the differences and similarities between Saint Petersburg and Karelia?

The empirical analyzes below is structured according to the questions above: we first discuss about the establishment and memberships of the studied organizations (*who?*); second, we analyze their agenda and activities (*what, why and how?*) and third their relationship with the state structures (*what kind of state-society design?*). As noted, through our analysis, we aim to understand the societal role of the Russian veterans' organizations within the massive, post-socialist reorganization of the welfare state.

(By/for Whom?) Creation of the Studied Veterans' Organizations – Parallel Top-down and Bottom-up Processes

In the literature, Russian veterans organizations have often been given as a prototype of the so-called pocket organizations that refers to (Russian) civil society organizations that are seen being co-opted by the Russian authorities (references...). The extract from our conversation with the chair of the Karelian Veterans' council indeed confirms the obvious top-down establishment of the Russian veterans' organizations. Yet, it also captures quite nicely their further development at grassroots as citizens' associations, as interests groups that function to secure certain social benefits for their members:

“Вот, это было по решению политбюро ЦК КПСС. Значит, это было в 1986 году. Создавалась очень такая, они хотели объединить все ветеранские движения. Там их было достаточно много разных, которые не имели устава. Каждый работал по-своему, и они решили объединиться с тем, чтобы выяснить проблемы ветеранов, узнать, значит, так и будем говорить, весомость этих вот ветеранских запросов, вот, посмотреть, как выполняются законы СССР и законы регионов по выполнению тех льгот, которые государство предоставляет ветеранам. Это касалось жилья, пенсий, лекарственного обеспечения, санаторно-курортного лечения, вот, ну, и развития личности. Это досуг, это развитие спорта, здорового образа жизни, то есть партийные чиновники правильно сделали, им, видимо, вовремя подсказали. Они правильно сделали, что создали такое ветеранское движение. Ну, и оно начало набирать силу. Сначала оно было, будем так говорить, под управлением партийных там советских функционеров, профсоюзных функционеров это было, потому что это было всё бесплатно. Это была партийная дисциплина. А постепенно, значит, как менялся состав актива ветеранских организации, значит, появились совершенно будем так говорить, выходящие за рамки вот этого постановления политбюро ЦК КПСС ветеранские движения. То есть появились ветеранские движения вот такие как Комитет ветеранов войны, Комитет, допустим, Союз блокадников Ленинграда, Союз малолетних узников концентрационных лагерей, Труженики тыла, а у нас в Карелии и минёры, и бойцы истребительных батальонов...”

As seen, the establishment of most Russian veterans' organization dates back to *perestroika* in the mid-1980s, when Gorbachev's policies made the public sphere more open and gave rise to citizens' organizations more generally, including the veterans' organizations. The umbrella organizations, however, became established by the Communist Party authorities – that is to say, from above. The Soviet All-Russian Union of the Veterans of War, Labor Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Entities was created by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in December 1986 to bring together all the then-existing smaller veterans' groups, after which the regional branches of the all-Russian union started to be created with their local organizations (see also Kulmala 2013, 197). Both umbrella organizations, i.e. Saint Petersburg and Karelian Veterans' Councils, included in this study, were created by the party officials in 1987 (?), as a result of the general tendency in the country. Soon later, as explained by the chair of the Karelian Council above, more specific veteran categories started to form their organizations – as *blokadniki* and *uzniki*, the regional organizations of which are included in our case study.

Even if the creation of these organizations officially came as the top-down manner, it is important to also to underline the role of veteran leaders who pushed the initiative and convinced the government to encourage the creation of such organizations. For instance, in Karelia, the council was officially established though the through the Petrozavodsk City Committee (*Gorkom*) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (*Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuz*), but actually the initial idea came from the group of veterans themselves (see also Kulmala 2013, 197). Or, as a representative of the Saint Petersburg *blokadnik* organization explained,

“Lidia Hodchenkova (a veteran and a citizen of Besieged Leningrad herself) was working as an assistant of the head of executive body of the Communist Party (*ispolkom*) in Leningrad, V. Hodyrev, did a great job in convincing his boss about the importance of our organization. After her efforts the organization was officially registered”.

Therefore, the creation of these veterans’ organizations cannot be considered only as the orchestration of civil society from above. Rather, the movement started from the veterans themselves but became then officially supported and organized by the political leaders – which might also symbolize the recognition of this social group in the country.

The similar pattern seems to be true also in the case of “Brothers in Arms”. The creation of the Saint Petersburg branch was initiated in 2008 “from above” by the head of the all-Russian Brothers in Arms, Boris Gromov, who at that time served as the governor of the Moscow region (2000-2012), representing United Russia party (see also Chebankova 2013, 116). A member of the Saint Petersburg regional parliament, also elected through United Russia, Igor’ Vysotskii was invited by Gromov to run the regional organization in Saint Petersburg. Yet, a closer look at this regional branch in Saint Petersburg shows that Vysotskii, as a participant of Afghan war himself, shares the identity category for which he actively advocates for. In fact, as a member of the organization, he is one of the key actors in furthering the interests of this specific group of veterans. As we will soon show, such overlaps and simultaneous participation from below and above is very central to the logic of action of the studied veterans’ organizations and contributes to their success with their claims.

Furthermore, despite the obvious top-down manner, it seems that concerns and interests of the veterans’ themselves started to grow soon. As seen in the quotation above, according to the chair of the Karelian Council, “the idea was to unite veterans’ movement, veterans’ organizations in order to make visible veterans’ concerns, to publish their importance and to force the government

to implement its obligations stipulated in Soviet legislature”. At the latest, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and consequently the socialist welfare system affected drastically on the living standard of many ordinary Russians – let alone the elderly generation who still feel rather nostalgic about the old system. The huge social changes brought hardships and consequently created a need to respond to the new situation, as was already shown earlier in this article (*cf.* “we started to fight for social benefits because it was difficult to survive in the early 1990s”; “veteran organisations started to unite their efforts in order to protect their members’ interests”; *the quotation in the beginning*). This new need to fight and protect their social benefits – as the main task of the studied organizations, as we soon argue – becomes broadly articulated through interest-representation and rights-defence rhetoric.

In comparison to many other Russian civil society organizations – especially to those established after in the post-socialist era – another typical feature of the Russian veterans’ organizations is that they are mass-membership organizations (also Kulmala 2013/2014) that are spread though out the country. All the four types of regional veterans’ organizations have their all-Russian unions. In addition to the federal and regional organizations, they usually have also district-level (i.e. municipal level) organizations which are once again divided into community groups (*pervychnye organizatsii*, see also Kulmala 2013, 197). According Chebankova (2013, 197), for instance, Brothers in Arms unites altogether 90,000 local organizations. Each of the different-level organizations exhibit slightly different functions as the scope of their work is obviously different.

As seen in Table 1 below, except Karelian *blokadniki* and *uzniki*, the studied regional organizations have large membership: ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. Even the mentioned smaller Karelian organizations are big in comparison to many Russian NGOs that are often claimed to being more like institutionalized friendship circles and carrying an elitist character (Henderson 2002; Richter 2002; Salmenniemi 2008; Sampson 2002; Sperling 2006; Stephenson 2000).

Table 1. Memberships...

Name of the organization	Number of veterans	Number of district organizations
Saint Petersburg Council of Veterans (resource – official publication)	380,000	20
Karelian Council of Veterans (resource – interview)	246,000	18
Saint Petersburg <i>blokadniki</i>	68,000	19

Karelian <i>blokadniki</i>	340 (the total number of the veterans in this category in the region: 778) ¹⁴	???
Saint Petersburg <i>uzniki</i>	14,1000	20
Karelian <i>uzniki</i>	380 (the total number of the veterans in this category in the region: 4037) ¹⁵	???

Add: Memberships of BB – Karelia/SPB ???

Thus, the Russian veterans' organizations possess a clear constituency, as membership organizations usually do, but they also possess wide constituency representing a large social group of Russian society. The representation classically function through the delegation of power: leadership of the organizations is usually elected by the members among the members. Moreover, as seen in the quotation in the beginning of the article, interest representation extends beyond the interests of concrete members, to "the interests of all the veterans, retirees and the disabled". As Kulmala (2013, 198) has shown, the large number of constituencies might also be used to justify the claims. An executive member of the Saint Petersburg organization of Former Young Prisoners of Concentration Camps (*uzniki*), said: "Since we have a lot of members in our organizations authority has to listen to us".

Yet, as we will soon show, there are common questions concerning all the veterans and retirees, while some of the questions are specific to a certain veteran category. Through the community groups, the veterans' organizations seem to be well anchored at the level of the ordinary Russians. This is an important notion also for scholarship on post-Soviet civil societies at large, since the conventional argument has been that the post-socialist civil society organizations as "elitist" are detached from the ordinary Russian and tend to carry an elitist character (e.g. Henderson 2002, 142, 157-159; Richter 2002, 36-37; Sampson 2002, 310; Sperling 2006, 163; Stephenson 2000, 285). As said, the previous scholarship has largely ignored these "Soviet-type" organizations but due to their representative nature, we argue that these organizations are to be considered as a significant part of citizens' mobilization and organization in contemporary Russia. Furthermore, the veterans' organizations are much about political mobilization of Russian citizens – vis-à-vis the state. As emphasized already, the main task of the studied organizations seem to lie in fighting and protecting social benefits (provided by the Russian state) of their members. In the next session, we turn to a more detailed analysis, what these organizations do, with which kind of agenda, and how they proceed with their aims and claims.

¹⁴ The official website of the Council of Veterans of Republic of Karelia

¹⁵ The official website of the Council of Veterans of Republic of Karelia

Interestingly enough, in addition to the veterans' organizations drawing together large number of people, Russians place trust to veterans' and disabled people's organizations more than to other kinds of civil society organizations (OPRF 2009, 26, 30; cited in Kulmala 2013, 125), while generally Russian society is characterized by low trust on civil society.

(What, why and how?) Agenda and Functions of the Veterans' Organizations: Securing Old Social Rights

The main task of all the studied veterans' organizations concerns advocating and protection of social rights of their members: in the interviews interest and rights defense was always mentioned as first – which can be confirmed by looking at the webpages of the studied organizations, on which rights and interest defense is usually stated the main tasks (see Saint Petersburg and Karelian Veterans' Councils¹⁶; Saint Petersburg Brothers in Arms¹⁷). The listed tasks are actually amazingly similar for almost all the studied organizations and can be summarized as:

- defending and assisting with access to social rights and benefits promised by the state;
- patriotic education with youth; stimulating and sustaining historical memory of the events in the past that are relevant to the identity category in question;
- moral support for the members.

When talking to the representatives of the studied organizations, it became crystal clear that the main function of rights defense was practiced in the field of social protection: “It’s about rights, social rights, absolutely”, as one of them put it. The inability of the post-soviet state to provide social benefits produced the need for these social groups protect their rights (cf. Jakobson, Mersianova, and Kononyhina 2011). As noted, the need to articulate and protect these rights became generally connected with the reorganization of the welfare system in the early 1990s and in particularly to the monetization reform in 2005. The most often mentioned burning issue that the organizations worked for was in-kind benefits (*l’goty po material’no-bytovomu obespecheniiu*). Housing and medicine related issues and problems were common as well. There appeared much talk about the “second pension” (*vtoraia pensiiia*) as well.

¹⁶ The official website of the Council of veterans in Saint Petersburg: <http://veteranleningradspb.ru/galereya-pocheta.html>; the official website of veterans in Republic of Karelia: <http://gov.karelia.ru/gov/Different/Veteran/131025.html>

¹⁷ The official website of Boevoe Bratstvo in Saint Petersburg: <http://www.bbratstvo.spb.ru/>

The major question concerning the in-kind benefits and second pension was the division of labor between the federal and regional level benefits and the related question of inclusion/exclusion of the identity category for which an organization advocated for in the Law #5 “On veterans”. If one was protected by the federal government – which requires an acknowledgement of the category in the Law #5 and a status of a participant in military actions – the coverage is bigger and thus better. So, what was going on in the work of the studied organizations was a struggle over (re)defining of their category. All wanted to be acknowledged as “real war veterans” and mentioned in the Law #5 in order to be entitled to the federal benefits. The articles #14 and #15 of the law are crucial: the latter gives to a participant in a war and the former one with disabilities the right for the second pension. *Blokadniki*, for instance, have been successful “through hard lobbying”, as they put it by themselves, to include their category into the law. Since they mentioned in the law on veterans, they are equaled to veterans of WWII, which means that they have the much wanted second pension. In order to achieve this recognition as “participants of war”, they elaborated a special concept of “Leningrad as a city-battle front”, the acceptance of which made them as “real participants”.

Uzник, for their part, still struggled with the issue. There was, though, a decree (*ukaz*) by Yeltsin that allowed *uzniki* to be treated as participants of the WWII but since this group is not mentioned in the law on veterans, they remain under the regional budget concerning their benefits which in turn means smaller protection in terms of money. Thus, the existing definitions of the categories and the struggle over them really mattered, as it becomes clear in our conversation with an *uznik* organization:

R: Ну, если говорить за все ветеранские организации, что проблемы сегодня, конечно. Начнём вот с узников. (...) Потому что проблема стоит не только в Петербурге, но и во всей Российской Федерации. Поедете Вы в Петрозаводск, там встретитесь с Людмилой, она тоже Вам... Что мы до сих пор... Что наша категория до сих пор не внесена в федеральный закон о ветеранах.

I: А, вот как?

R: Значит, льготы, если по указу президента 1235. (...) 1235 мы по материально-бытовым льготам отнесены к ветеранам участникам Великой Отечественной Войны. И на основании постановления 20 Мин.труда 7 июля 1999 года, где 5 пунктом приписано, что материально-бытовые льготы предоставляются несовершеннолетним узникам в соответствии с законом о ветеранах статьи 14 и 15. То есть статья 14, как инвалидам-участникам войны, и статья 15 это просто как

участникам войны. Но все выходящие от президента, от министерств постановления, указы, везде идёт ссылка на закон о ветеранах. И, естественно, нашим людям приходится доказывать, что им положены вот такие вот льготы, документы от чиновников стараются в последнюю очередь. Но я должна сказать, что у нас настолько внимательный Комитет по социальной политике, что они знают уже нашу проблему и стараются уже во всех бумагах, во всех своих постановлениях по Санкт-Петербургу включать нашу категорию и, честно говоря, даже по некоторым льготам мы превосходим даже жителей блокадного Ленинграда. По материально-бытовым льготам. (...) Но, несмотря на это, по бюджету, поскольку нас в законе о ветеранах нет, мы отнесены на региональный бюджет.

As one can see in the above-given examples, the categories really matter and the monetization reform, which created the division of benefits of the veterans between the federal and regional levels, did indeed create a hierarchy of the categories, as often argued in the literature on the reform (e.g. Hemment 2009; Weingle & Rasell 2009). If participants of war are prioritized through the legislation, many categories, such as workers of home front (*truzenniki tyla*), feel themselves second class citizens after the reform. The struggle over inclusion/exclusion creates tension between the organizations of the different veteran categories, as a member of Saint Petersburg *uznik* complains: “*blokadniki* got the second pension because they are considered with a status of a disabled person (*invalid*); our members feel insulted”. Her colleague in the Karelian *uznik* organization also felt the tension after the reform:

“Ну, по началу у нас даже более были дружеские, тесные отношения. Мы проводили вместе новогодний вечер, здесь друг к другу в гости ходили, а теперь всё началось ещё с того, когда узникам по закону август 2004 год о монетизации больше сумма за льготы возмещалась, нас приравнивали к участникам войны и инвалидам войны, мы получили где-то 2,5 тысяч, а блокадникам меньше дали. Они даже по радио выступали, почему вот узникам дали. Теперь наоборот, блокадникам дали пенсию по инвалидности, узникам никак не дают.”

However, people considered that in addition to the particular issues depending on the veteran category, there are common issues as well – which is why one needs both, veterans’ umbrella organizations, as the regional veterans’ councils, as well as organizations for particular categories:

“Р: У нас Санкт-Петербургская общественная организация ветеранов, пенсионеров, инвалидов труда, вооруженных сил и правоохранительных органов. И в её состав входят 33 ассоциированные общественные организации. В том числе и Узники.

Понимаете, есть вопросы, которые общие и необходимо решать всем вместе. А есть опросы, которые чисто... Вот вооруженные силы, они свои вопросы решают, узниковские проблемы их очень мало волнуют, это мы сами решаем. А есть общие вопросы, конечно. Сегодня я потом буду говорить про остальных. Поэтому мы решили объединиться.”

Interesting case is also a very recently established organization “Children of War” (*Deti voiny*), which well illustrates the need of organized, collective form of interest representation and demand for social rights. The organization is to create a wholly new category of people who are “victims of war”. As member of the “Citizens of the Besieged Leningrad” explained: “There are many people, who lived in the besieged Leningrad but don’t have this status; therefore we will fight for this new category”. It was also told that the organization was established “in order to get additional benefits”. The Commission on the veteran issues in Saint Petersburg (see later) has sent an initiative to the federal Duma that would support the adoption of the federal law on “Deti voiny” (FZ 493165-b¹⁸). On the other hand, competition is seen also here: some people saw Children or War redundant, since most of its participants are members of other veteran organizations and thus their concern are already taken into account.

In addition to the hierarchy of different categories, the monetization reform also created regional differences and inequalities, since the regions implement the related legislation in different ways:

”Ну, у нас в городе многое зависит ещё от региональных властей, от муниципальных и от законодательных собраний. По Карелии всего лишь 1 закон дополнительный я нашла, транспортный налог, освобождение. Это 2007 год, и то я сейчас не знаю, действует он или нет. В то время как в Москве, в Санкт-Петербурге, в Московской области действует до 12 дополнительных законов о выплате материальной помощи, бесплатном проезде в городском транспорте, по курортам тоже. В общем, там гораздо больше внимания и на региональном уровне тоже, уделяется узникам. У нас в Карелии, к сожалению, нет. Ни губернатор, ни законодательное собрание. Единственное, что наше законодательное собрание поддержало инициативу законодательного собрания Санкт-Петербурга в 2007 и в 13 году они отправили свою поддержку. Это было. А когда я обратилась к губернатору, чтобы нас ещё исполнительная власть поддержала, как нам

¹⁸ The official decision (15.05.2014) of the Commission on veterans of Saint Petersburg parliament on the federal law on “Deti voiny”: <http://www.assembly.spb.ru/welcome/show/633200089/41395>

рекомендовали, в том числе Галина Леонидовна, то даже ответа не было. Пришел ответ – отписка, что должен поступить запрос из Госдумы к ним, такого запроса нет, поэтому они не будут.”

Generally, in this respect Karelia was seen doing much worse than Saint Petersburg. More likely, Karelia as a budget-deficit region tries to implement the social protection minimally – even if the regional level would carry the responsibility in question:

“Мне опять же отписку их местного, что, и я сослалась на то, что федеральным законом 122 мы приравнены, и льготы, и социальная поддержка распространяться та же самая в полном объёме должна. И выплаты, которые вот за льготы, потому что по льготам мы приравнены, и все те меры социальной поддержки, которая звучит в определении, на нас распространяется. И мне говорят: это вы должны изменить федеральный закон. А я говорю: если федеральный закон декларирует наше право, уже есть, надо чтобы его выполняли. А они значит: нет, вам нужно обратиться в законодательное собрание республики Карелия. Я говорю: ничего не надо. Ну, я передала ещё какие-то письма Эмилии, она депутат от Яблока.”

Or another example:

”У нас же есть удостоверение узника, выданное органами социальной защиты, на котором написано, что пользуемся льготами специально по указу президента 1235 от 92 года это удостоверение для нас установлен образец его. Но там не указаны статьи закона о ветеранах, которые на нас распространяются. Вот 14 и 15 статья. 14 касается инвалидов войны. 15 касается участников войны. И во всех последующих постановлениях и решениях, и закон 122 говорит, что на нас распространяется эти 2 статьи. К сожалению, в нашем удостоверении органы соц.защиты территориальные, они отказываются поставить в удостоверении, что мы пользуемся этими статьями льгот. Поэтому один водитель признаёт наше удостоверение, а другой – нет.”

In sum, the studied organizations are active in advocating for their member categories. On the one hand, there are common issues and common understanding that the Russian veterans should be protected by the state – i.e. they strive for universal principle of provision. On the other hand, some of the claims and concerns are articulated in the name of this specific identity group, which would better fit the idea of the stratified welfare provision (cf. Cook 2007, 9).

Why and how then the organizations are active in advocating and protecting their social rights? The answer for the why question seems to be simple: “Если бы была пенсия нормальная, то, наверное, и не нужно было эти требования выставлять”, as an executive member of the organization “Former young prisoners of concentration camps in Saint Petersburg” put it. How question, as well, seems to have a simple answer: through legal changes, through changing the existing laws, which in fact is an important finding that contributes to the wide-ranging literature on Russian civil society which often argues about the apolitical nature of the Russian citizens’ organizations (references....). Such aim to make legal changes, in turn, takes multiple forms but interestingly enough mostly happen at the level of representative and institutional politics. Again, this is an important finding in the light of the previous literature which often claims about the prevalent preference of Russian civil society organizations to communicate with the executive branch – instead of the legislative, through which obviously the more permanent changes might happen.

We identified three different strategies to try to influence to the existing laws: lobbying through (direct and informal) political connections; through formal petitions; and through the political institutions.

First of all, the organizations – seem to be very well connected with the regional-level policy-makers through which they lobby their interests. -> see also “simultaneous participation from above and below” (personal connections)

Second, they write petitions with legislative initiatives:

“In recent year, only our organization in Saint Petersburg wrote 32 letters and petitions to the president of the Russian Federation, to our government, State Duma and Federation Council. These letters, there are not to wish Happy New Year. They are pleadings (*obosnovaniia*), demands (*trebovaniia*), proposals (*predlozheniia*) to change the federal law on veterans and on pensions.”¹⁹

Last but no means least, in Saint Petersburg, the organizations actively – and at the regional level successfully – operate through the channels of institutional politics, through the Commission on the Veterans Issues of the Saint Petersburg regional parliament, which in fact is head by a veteran

¹⁹ Blagotvoritel’naia gazeta “Russkij invalid”, 2/2014, 22.

activist, Vysotskii, the chair of the Saint Petersburg branch of “Brothers in Arms”. In addition to “Brothers in Arms”, the other veterans’ organizations considered him as their “friend”.

There were twenty initiatives presented to the regional authorities by the Commission from 2005 to 2014. Among the, thirteen regional laws and amendments were adopted (65 %); four are still being considered (20 %); while only three of them were rejected (15 %) – which seems to be quite nice record. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the initiatives concern the introduction of various forms of financial support from the state for specific veteran categories (including second/additional pension payments) and subsidies for veterans’ organizations. The most recent initiative that we had our hands concerned reducing fares in public transport for the veterans.

Also initiatives to the federal authorities (State Duma, national government, president) are made through the Commission. In 1998-2014, there have been thirty six such initiatives. Though making chances to the federal level laws seems to be rather difficult: only six of them were adopted (17%), while eleven rejected (31%) (rest of them under consideration?). Anyhow, to be able to take the initiative through the federal level requires its acceptance at the level of the regional parliament, which seemingly supports the veterans’ initiatives to be taken further. Though, in some cases, the motivation clearly is the fact that transferring certain benefits back to the federal level would ease the regional budget.

Concerning the regional difference, one can conclude that such formalized interest representation though the regional parliament (i.e. institutionalized connections) happened in Saint Petersburg, while lobbying and trying to changes things on a case-by-case principle though personal connections prevailed in the case of Republic of Karelia. Interestingly we witnessed a few examples where Karelian veterans’ organizations backed up to their Saint Petersburg fellows to get something through to the federal level through the saint Petersburg parliament because no-one listened to them in Karelia. Generally, the institutionalized connections to the legislative obviously have more sustainable effect (cf. Salmeniemä 2007; Marier 2008). According to our findings, those organizations which are connected officially and openly to the political parties, their leaders, and other institutions of the representative politics are more successful in advocating preserving their interests.

Much of the work of all the studied organizations is about helping people whose social rights are considered to be violated on a case-by-case principle. Usually the organizations hold regularly the

so-called reception hours for their members who come (and phone) with their concerns that usually concern benefits and housing. The role of an organization here is to consider if there is a real case and if yes to appeal to the authorities: in some case through more official channels and in other cases “right away” through “direct connection”, as a representative of the Karelian branch of “Brothers of Arms” described, “usually when a person is here, we just start to call people, would they ministers and mayors...” Such direct phoning seems to be amazingly effective – probably thanks to the high authority and good connections that the leadership of these organizations usually have (here an example of an emergency situation added).

Many of the leaders are very sharp in their knowledge about the relevant legislation and indeed much of juridical information is needed in the activities of the Russian veterans organizations and, as expressed by one of the leaders:

”Неважно, узник ты не узник, ветеран, ну вот дано мне знать законодательные акты. Мне надо было не механиком быть, а юристом.”

Karelian “Brothers in Arms”, for instance, collaborated with the juridical faculty of the Petrozavodsk state university to which actually one of their active members had enrolled in to become a lawyer. In the case of *uzniki*, who have ended up to the concentration camps before their adult years and not gained any education after having returned traumatized, the organizations’ role in assisting the members was highlighted. According to their Saint Petersburg leader, only one percent of the members has (higher??) education.

One of the main activities of the veterans’ organizations is to monitor the implementation of the legislation in regards to those social benefits that their members are entitled to get. The organizations have a significant role in raising awareness of their members for these rights, as one “Borther in Arms” described:

“It is important to assist a person with judicial information about his/her rights which are prescribed in the law. When a person is aware of his/her rights (s)he is able to protect those rights”

In order to assist their members, in addition to the reception hours, the veteran organizations arrange judicial consultations and meetings with the authorities – free of charge. Such assistance recalls to an essential feature of self-help-oriented membership organizations of providing

technical knowledge for their members, as Taylor (1996, 16) conceptualized such effort and ability to provide useful medical or juridical information.

The organizational back-up, i.e. the collective organization, is seen as an important resource also when trying to protect the rights of individual members vis-a-vis the state, as the quote below well illustrates:

“When an individual appeals the authorities to exercise their responsibilities, they tend to escape from or neglect such claims. But when there is an organization with a significant backing up behind you, the attitude is totally different. This factor works because appealing on the name of the organization enables solving problems.”

The organization is seen as a significant back up (*za spinoi*) and the authorities are approached in the name of the power that derives from the representative nature of the organizations, which is based on the shared identities and collective action. Furthermore, such connects also with the fact that the veterans’ organizations are not only membership organizations but they are mass membership organizations (cf. Kulmala 2013, 198). In addition to the tensions, discussed above, the organizations tend to cooperate in order to be more influential in their claims. For example, as a head of the Karelian Veterans’ Council remembers: “all-Russian society of the deaf asked for help and we assisted them with defending their specific social benefit, guaranteed by law, of getting a half price when purchasing accommodation”.

In addition to such rights defense – either practiced through trying to change the laws or through solving the problems on a case-by-case principle, the veterans’ organizations have other functions as well. All the studied organizations took up the importance of patriotic education and collaboration with schools and other educational institutions, e.g.:

”Основная функция считается объединение узников, защита их прав и льгот, затем патриотическое воспитание и нравственное воспитание молодёжи. Члены нашей организации, особенно 11 апреля в Международный день узника и 9 мая ко Дню победы посещают школы, проводят уроки мужества.”

Often though, instead of any larger “patriotic” mission (cf. Kulmala 2013, 207), this function seems to be about remembering, not forgetting what has happened to them in the past– i.e. stimulating and sustaining historical memory of the past events that are relevant to the identity

category in question, as this function was conceptualized earlier. In the official leaflet of the Karelian *uzniki*, for instance, “immortalizing (*uvekovechivanie*) of memory of the victims of the concentration camps” is mentioned as their fundamental task. In Petrozavodsk, at the office of “Brothers in Arms”, we saw a PowerPoint presentation that is usually shown at the “lessons of manhood and patriotism” (*urok muzhestva i patriotizma*, see also Lassila 2012, 19, 21, 36), held by the organization. What we saw was basically a photo gallery of the soldiers from Karelia that died in the Afghan war – yet, the photos were accompanied with obvious patriotic symbols, such as the flag of the Russian Federation, white-blue-red turn of colors, pictures of the churches that obviously the Orthodox ones.

As Kulmala (2013, 228-230) argued, one very essential function, which is typical to membership organizations generally, of the Russian veterans’ organizations, was to provide various forms of emotional support to their members. One form of such support was peer support that grows from the shared problems and thus from the shared identity, which in turn create solidarity among the members. Taylor (1996, 16) considered such issues essential for self-help organizations’ ability to mobilize around the issues that their members experience. Within the activities of all the studied veterans’ organizations, the various kinds of events, such as excursions, cultural program, hobby clubs, which they arranged played a major role. These events were organized to provide the possibility for the members to get out of their homes to meet people in similar life situations, to socialize (*obschat’sia*) and drink tea (*chaepitie*). This function, though, is more fundamental for the logic of action of the organizations at the level of communities than to the regional organizations.

Logic of Action of the Veterans’ Organizations in Relation to Russian Authorities

The studied organizations have multifaceted relationship patterns with the Russian authorities. At the federal level, these organizations basically in oppositional position when it comes to many (neo)-liberal social policies – to those aiming at narrowing down social benefits as well as diminishing the state role in social service provision. This seems to be true also in other fields: for instance, Chebankova (2013, 116-117) illustrated the processes through which the “Brothers in Arms” movement challenged the Putin administration in the military reform. Such oppositional and critical position is especially interesting when we know that on the other hand many key members in the Russian veterans’ organizations are affiliate to the United Russia party. This probably tells us about the texture of the party itself: instead of being an ideological political institution, it rather serves as a channel to powerful administrative positions (cf. Kulmala 2013,

117) – thus, bringing together a mixed bunch of people. Interestingly, several people that we spoke to saw the relationship with the state as “a never-ending conflict; the state has always tried and will try to cut citizens’ social rights”, against which the organization is positioned to oppose in order to protect its members rights and interests.

Anyhow, at the local and regional level, the relationship to the authorities seems to be close. At these levels, we have identified two logics how the studied organizations engage with the authorities to get their claims listened – and thus to achieve more benefits for the members categories and veterans’ organizations more generally. One strategy is to have their members in needed decision-making positions and the other one is to vote and get rewarded in turn.

Simultaneous Participation from Above and Below

An essential logic of the studied organizations of interest representation and consequent lobbying pretty much lies in the idea of simultaneous participation from below and from above (cf. Kulmala 2013, 42, 272): in other words, to have members who are active in the movement and who simultaneously hold top positions that gives them possibility to act and participate in the decision making – to lobby for those issue that are considered important for the members. Some of the organizations have played their cards well, as a member of the executive body of the Saint Petersburg “Brothers in Arms” put it:

“Fourteen deputies of the regional parliament are members of our organization. So, we have our own lobby.”

In fact, this number makes almost one third of the entire composition of the regional parliament, which cannot be considered any minor factor from the viewpoint of lobbying and presenting interests of their members. As noted, their chair, Vysotskii, heads also the Commission of the Veteran Issues at the regional parliament, through which many initiatives have been made.

Thus, the role of the member-politicians is big for the organizations: first of all, they bring lots of resources with their central placement in the decision-making power, which brings along essential knowledge on issues and ways to navigate within the system and necessary connections to achieve its goals. The two-faceted position of the above-mentioned Vysotskii is constantly referred to: for instance, the webpage of the organization repeatedly notions that the chair can be approached as a regional deputy and as a chair of the organization. The head of the Social Policy Committee of the Saint Petersburg government, as well is a member of the Saint Petersburg “Brothers in Arms”.

In Karelia, the head of the Veterans' Council, a labor veteran, in turn, used to work as a Minister of Construction of the Republic of Karelia. He refers to this experience as an important resource to attract additional funds,

“То есть это всё организации, которые нам помогают. Вот, я к ним обращаюсь, и они нам помогают достаточно много. Вот, ну, потому что я работал трижды министром, и меня в строительстве хорошо знают. Ну, я в республике, и вот всё ребята, всё мы. А вот мы обращаемся, и они все нам хорошо помогают. Мы перед ними отчитываемся, у нас есть свой отчет, Светлана Борисовна ведёт.”

His assistant, for her part, is currently a member of the Karelian regional parliament, which is seen as positive factor: “we have good relations with the parliament”, the head of the Veterans' council said us. We were told that the members of the Council are very welcome to participate in parliamentary committees, for instance.

Thus, the importance to inclusion of the politicians and officials becomes emphasized and their role seems to be big in furthering the issues the organizations advocate for. First of all, their involvement in the citizens' associations and simultaneous central placement in the institutional politics brings lots of resources: a direct channel to try to have an influence on burning issues from the viewpoint of their members, essential and up-dated knowledge on those issues and related legislation, needed skills to navigate within the system and necessary further connections. It is important to remember that these officials are “true” members of the veterans' organizations in a sense that they do share the membership category, i.e. identity of those people that they advocate and work for. It seems that such overlaps in their role “from below” and “from above” are systemically built.

In addition to providing “own lobby” in the decision-making power, the inclusion of the politicians bring many material resources. First of all, many of the studied organizations exploit the possibility to use premises and services that the parliamentarians are entitled to, as described by a member of the Saint Petersburg Brothers in Arms:

“Twice in a week, we arrange judicial consultations free of charge for our members. We take advantage of the deputy's benefits; the head of our organization is a regional deputy.”

It also seems that the organizations that have such interlink to the regional parliament, profit from it financially. They might, for instance, enjoy a monetary subsidy from the regional: that is to say, a certain amount of state money that is not distributed on a call-for-proposal basis (to which the veterans' organizations remain very critical, as we show later in this article), as currently the majority of the state funding for Russian NGOs is. Brothers in Arms, for instance, were granted in such a way with 24,750,000 rubles in 2010 and 53,800,000 rubles in 2011.²⁰ The Social Policy Committee of the regional government is in charge of the implementation of this support (as well as generally collaboration with veterans' organizations in the region); the head of the Committee, as noted, is an active member of the Saint Petersburg Brothers in Arms. BB is the head of this committee, which presumably has had an impact on such positive outcome of the distribution of the regional subsidies. Seemingly, the veteran organizations have a privileged position in gaining such support and benefits.

In addition to the regional level leading officials and politicians, many municipal-level leaders and councilors are members of the studied veterans' organizations. High-ranked members bring also authority to the organization that they represent in the eyes of other actors in the field.

All in all, the veterans' organizations seem to effectively take an advantage of the memberships of the politicians: they are used to lobby for social benefits for their members and for fundraising for the organizations. Furthermore, building on such overlaps between civil society and representative politics seems to serve as a major strategy for the veterans' organizations to achieve their goals. Such a notion in fact challenges the conventional idea of Russian civil society as a apolitical space. big role of politicians in the activity of veteran's organizations

“We are the electorate”: the Strategy of the Veterans Organizations to Vote and Get Something in Return

“We are the electorate” or “because we vote” were often heard notions during our conversations with the representatives of the studied organizations. So, in addition to their above-discussed strategy of overlapping roles of veteran-activists and decision-maker, the veteran organizations tended to communicate a lot with the authorities – also with those who were not members of their organization. Especially in Saint Petersburg, people felt that they receive positive attention from the regional parliament as well as government:

²⁰ The information on the direct state support for the NGOs in Saint Petersburg is available on-line: http://www.crno.ru/assets/files/2011-12-06_St-Petersburg_NKO_collection_A4.pdf

”Проблема, я хочу сказать, что у нас в Санкт-Петербурге правительство, конечно, очень много уделяет внимания всем категориям и особенно, конечно, Узникам. Несовершеннолетним узникам.”

In Saint Petersburg, a Veterans’ House (*Dom veteranov*), where many of the veterans’ organizations have their offices and many events are held, was granted by the then-governor Valentina Matvienko, “as a present that we voted for her”, as one leader of Saint Petersburg veterans’ organization put it. Matvienko also initiated a program called “Dept” (*Dolg*), through which businesses can participate in investing to social support for Saint Petersburg veterans.²¹ At least, the Saint Petersburg branches of the “Citizens of the Besieged Leningrad” and “Former Young Prisoners of the Concentration Camps enjoy support under this program.

We were given to understand that this program also had something to do with the governor being indebted to veterans for their votes.

Such voting and rewarding pattern seemed to be true especially at the lower levels. The regional parliamentarians become elected through the municipal districts, at the level of which they make effort to satisfy the needs of the veterans’ organizations and other NGOs as well by granting those organizations with funds that they, as regional deputies, have a right to redistribute to NGOs. A leading member of Saint Petersburg *uzniki* emphasized the ability of local organizations to mobilize their members to vote for specific person who grants financial support:

”Я хочу сказать, что каждый депутат сотрудничает по районам, это же электорат, и они ходатайствуют о выделении в виде субсидий общественным организациям.”

“Blokadniki” voted for this specific politician because they get some benefits from this collaboration”, she continued. Similarly, a *blokadnik* admitted this fact saying that Makarov (i.e. head of the Saint Petersburg regional parliament) as a deputy of the Petrogradskii district is very supportive. Such assistance by local level deputies to the veterans’ organizations in order to get their support was mentioned many times. The involvement of certain organization in this kind of political play becomes supported also through the formal documents during the elections.²²

²¹The official website of Saint Petersburg government contain information on the main achievement of this program: <http://old.gov.spb.ru/gov/admin/kostkina/dolg>

²² <http://www.nvspb.ru/stories/veterany-golosuyut-za-dosrochku-55523/?version=print>

All in all, such an emphasis on the veterans' as the electorate at the local and regional levels at minimum prompt us to think this might be a significant factor also in the bigger, federal-level picture. Pensioners are large group in Russian society that vote. It might be that the failure of the monetization reform and constant increases in pensions have much to do with the fact that the elderly people do vote.

As discussed already earlier, there was regional variation: the situation in Karelia seemed to be worse when it came to the getting their voice heard for the veterans' (examples....)

(Also, sympathy...

(Cf. Kulmala 2013); "Although current Saint Petersburg governor was born in Baku his mother is a citizen of besieged Leningrad and he spent his childhood on Nevskii prospekt, therefore he is a "leningradets" (citizen of Leningrad) according to his blood".)

Resistance to the State Outsourcing Policies

(I completely run out of time to write this section)

According to the current federal and regional legislation on socially oriented NGOs defines that activities of organizations that are involved in patriotic education are to be considered as socially beneficial and thus eligible to financial support from the governmental programs for socially oriented organizations. These recent laws thus have made possible to the veterans' organizations to participate in the calls for proposals for these state funds – alongside the direct financing from the regional budget.

However, it becomes clear that the studied veterans' organizations, in addition to their resistance of the withdrawal of their state from its social support, oppose the new out-sourcing mechanisms of the state that aim at increasing the role of Russian socially oriented NGOs in social service provision. These organizations would prefer the old-type direct subsidies over the new "call-for-proposals" type grants.

Interestingly, the Saint Petersburg Brothers in Arms have however received the new grants, as well, even though they did not seem to appreciate this funding too much: a representative of the organization saw their grant more as a technical issue and headache of the bookkeeper of the organization instead considering that there was an actual project behind this money. Basically he

was saying that the organization is not interested in taking such function of implementing social projects. Due to their lobby in the regional parliament, they get them anyway (“we don’t need it but we get it anyway”, while other expressed difficulties in applying and getting the grants:

“К сожалению, все гранты по проектам. Проект нужно оформить в электронном виде, напечатать это всё. У нас нет ни оргтехники. Есть внуки, которые нам помогают. Мне, допустим, Лейла, внучка помогает. Только благодаря ней я могу электронную почту отправить в Москву в центр и получить там, прочитать. И печатать все проекты, которые мы делали...”

“либо на наш юбилей, помню, был случай, нам 7 тысяч выделили к 15-летию. Теперь, когда стала министром **Улич Валентина Васильевна**, ни копейки. Один ответ: используйте конкурсы, проекты, но правда в 12 году мы с федеральных средств получили субсидию.”

For instance “Citizens of Besieged Leningrad” has no connections with local or regional deputies and therefore has to turn to personal ties: “It was possible to ask politicians or officials personally to financially support the organizations and they helped. But in recent years organizations have to apply for the state’s money... it is difficult for us because we do not have an accountant and are not able to run the project”.

In other words, the direct support that does not require any development of project management skills, which would lead to further professionalization of the staff which has been considered as one of the main features of social (welfare) organizations to survive in the current “project society”. There is a huge difference between the membership type of the veterans’ organizations and the social welfare type of organizations that have paid staff with whom to serve for the veterans, as very AVIP – which has been very successful in implementing large, nation-wide “Babushka i dedushka onlain” project (cf. Kulmala & Tarasenko 2013).

Anyhow, the old-type membership organizations do participate in competitions – and get small amounts of money, for excursions and such -> no “serious” service provision function:

“И: Вы в конкурсе участвовали?”

Р: Да. Поездку на Валаам, в Заонежье по местам концлагерей, и Память сердца осуществили тоже проект, то есть деньги тоже такие.

И: А это была общественная палата? Или президентский грант?

Р: Это была субсидия федерального центра через министерство здравоохранения и социального развития. Но программа была федеральных средств. Вот в этом году, когда я обращалась туда, говорят, что в мае будет объявлен какой-то конкурс по инвалидам, в июле, возможно, ещё что-то. Я говорю, у нас мероприятие в июне, как я могу рассчитывать на эти конкурсы. Вот и чистые отписки идут из министерства социального развития и здравоохранения.

Conclusions

- true membership organizations / interest groups

Refusing to treat the Russian veterans' organizations illegitimate to count as agents of civil society, we challenge the widely accepted view on these organizations as co-opted by and loyal to the Russian current political regime. Our findings, however, illustrate that the picture is more complicated and the veterans' organizations have a significant role in defending the social rights of the members – as well as a societal role also in more political terms.

In sum, despite the strong links with the government, veterans' organizations can be considered as membership organizations, the main task of which is to protect its members' interests and assist them vis-a-vis authorities. This interest defense is mainly practiced in the field of social rights of its members. The representative and executive branches support the organization financially but also in otherwise material and moral terms. Overlapping roles of the active members and elected politicians and other officials in fact facilitate many of these resources. In other words, the veterans' organizations are true membership organizations that bring together people that share similar identity. Their main activity concerns the advocacy and helping to access services in the field of social issues. Veteran organizations fight for struggle for specific benefits resisting the government's liberal-oriented policy aimed at reduction of some social obligations.

- interest representation though “politics”
- ideology: resistance to the liberal reforms and persistence to maintain the previous paternalist system.

Veteran organizations fight to secure old privileged position and related benefits and to enjoy direct budget money instead of willing to participate in the new neo-liberally designed projects. It sees the state being responsible for the support for its members.

- The analysis illustrates the relevance of closer investigation of the old Soviet-type organizations
- The importance of the regional level: where the implementation of policy takes place and the role of interests groups is of crucial importance. As the analysis shows the bottom-up political connections matter at the regional level under the top-down model of decision making.
- the obvious regional variation

BIG Question concerning their as the electorate – electorate at the municipal and regional level – how much does it matter at the federal level?

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