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Title: NGOs and illicit drug policy change in the Russian Federation

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Abstract: In the decade to 2010, international initiatives directed at changing Russian illicit drug policy gained considerable momentum. However from 2010 official Russian government ambivalence evolved into open hostility directed against foreign ideas and against donor funded NGOs. By 2013, large scale donor-funded programs directed at reducing the social and individual harms associated with illicit drug use became effectively unimplementable in Russia. The main objective of this thesis is to establish if any non-government initiatives directed at illicit drug policy change were politically feasible in Russia between 2010 and 2013. In order to address this overarching objective, I sought to answer the following research questions: 1. What framed the possibilities and limits of political feasibility of drug policy initiatives that relied on international funding sources? 2. What political and other structures framed the feasibility of domestically funded non-government drug policy initiatives? 3. Contemporary Russia has presented unique barriers to the application of conventional methods of researching illicit drug policy. What novel data sources and methods might frame these limits? This thesis examines Russian drug policy from a pragmatic perspective. It examines both internationally and domestically funded civil society actors to identify what worked to influence Russian drug policy in the recent past. This thesis consists of a series of mixed methods exploratory case studies that offer a rich "bottom up" description of the contemporary Russian context. It also describes novel "big data" quantitative Internet search methods as a valid research method to study of complex environments. Against the backdrop of increasing security tensions between Russia and NATO, it proposes mechanisms that may allow future collaboration between donors, researchers, and Russian civil society organisations in a new, largely unknown policy space.

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This thesis frames contemporary Russian illicit drug policy as an intractable policy problem. This thesis covers the period 2010-2013. The period 2010-2013 was marked by rapid political change in Russia. These case studies examine the general pathways by which changes to contemporary Russian illicit drug policy may be facilitated from outside of Russia. In these case studies, I do not seek to make causal claims. Rather, the findings from this thesis may be considered as a starting point for generating and testing new hypotheses about the implementation of politically feasible donor funded policy change initiatives in Russia today.³ In this thesis, I sought to identify patterns of politically feasible interventions in an environment where conventional analyses had failed.