
Associations and the Development of Civil Society in Tsarist Russia

Joseph Bradley

This article examines the growth of civil society in imperial Russia by focusing on voluntary associations, especially learned societies, closely watched by tsarist officialdom but neglected by historians. Although scholars often emphasize the peculiarities of Russian development, Russia's societies were part of a broader European phenomenon. A study of associations highlights the relationship between state and society in authoritarian regimes where civil society is most vigorously contested. Because authoritarian regimes close the channels of representative politics and make it difficult for their subjects to act freely in concert, associations demonstrate the potential for the self-organization of society. They cultivate the microspaces of initiative and autonomy not completely under state control where the capacity of citizenship can appear. This study conceptualizes the development of Russian civil society and the way in which the disenfranchised could enter public life by using the examples of six Russian learned societies. Owing to the mission of the learned societies, Russian civil society became inextricably linked to patriotism and the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Associations raised consciousness, accorded an opportunity for special-interest constituencies of men to enter the public arena, framed policy issues, and mobilized a public in the language of representation. Although civil society and the autocratic state are often described as bitter rivals, cooperation, not confrontation, in the project of national prestige and prosperity was more often the rule. However, an increasing public assertiveness challenged autocratic authority, as Russian officialdom was unwilling to relinquish its tutelary supervision of civil society. Thus, associations became a focal point of a contradictory political culture.

Introduction

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia, not known as a nation of joiners, had by rough estimate more than 10,000 voluntary associations. Private associations, sanctioned by the government, entered the public realm with a breathtaking number and variety of missions and projects. Societies were everywhere—St. Petersburg and Moscow, the capitals of the non-Russian regions of the empire, the major provincial centers, and even small towns. Their range included learned societies; professional associations; small-town charitable and agricultural societies; literary and artistic societies; and clubs for leisure, recreation, and sport. After the Great Reforms of the 1860s, a lively nonrevolutionary civic life emerged in the largest cities as new professional, entrepreneurial, artistic, and scientific elites aspired to create new public identities. The rapid growth of associations in the second half of the nineteenth century

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both caused and reflected fast-paced social, economic, and cultural changes. Although it severely circumscribed public action, an understaffed government could not keep up with the expansion of associations, many of which it had encouraged in the first place. Associations enabled Russians to take initiative, organize themselves, and work together to achieve common goals. They were a focal point of a contradictory political culture: They fostered a state-society partnership and were a critical element in the effort to emancipate society from a personalized autocracy and arbitrary officialdom. As I have argued elsewhere, through a study of associations on the periphery of Europe, we can examine the development of civil society as well as problematize civil society as a category of analysis (Bradley 2009).

Beginning in the eighteenth century the Russian state created or sanctioned many of the constituent elements of civil society, and civil society evolved from a state-enabled, state-protected, and often state-guided entity to one dominated by private initiative. Although this pattern also existed in continental Europe, the power of autocracy meant that the development of Russian civil society was more beholden to a tutelary autocratic agenda. It was also beholden to autocratic inconsistency, and civil society grew unevenly over time. Three eras were most conducive to its growth—the reigns of Catherine II (1762–96) and Alexander I (1801–25), the Era of the Great Reforms under Alexander II (1855–81), and the final decades of tsarism from 1890 to 1917. Studies of Russian Freemasonry, the Great Reforms, local and municipal government, charity, liberal academics, professionals, the press, popular reading habits, and even civil rights show that educated Russians could increasingly engage in practical, purposive, civic activity directed by, and at, structures “between tsar and people.” (Brooks 1985; Clowes et al. 1991; Crisp and Edmondson 1989; Frame 2006; Hagen 1982; Lindenmeyr 1996; Marker 1985; McReynolds 1991; Ruane 1994; Smith 1999; Wartenweiler 1999). Before turning to an examination of voluntary associations, a brief mention of other components of a budding nineteenth-century Russian civil society may provide the context in which associations operated.

Russian universities (the first being Moscow University, founded in 1755) bridged the boundary between state and civil society. Even though the universities were subject to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and the professors were civil servants, they were communities that cultivated independent thought. Like the Academy of Sciences, founded in 1724, the universities enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy to manage their own affairs and to pursue the spirit of scientific inquiry. They also enjoyed an important privilege: They acted as their own censor. In addition to their rapid growth in the late imperial period (from an enrollment of 5,000 in 1855 to almost 70,000 in 1914), Russian universities became arenas of autonomous social initiative and hotbeds of antigovernment agitation.

The judicial statutes of 1864 embodied the legal (if not the constitutional) principles of civil society—the notion of the individual legal person, equality before the law, trial by jury, judicial immunity, publicity, and legal representation in court. Despite setbacks to the principle of government of laws in the wake of the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 and the continuing arbitrariness of the Russian bureaucracy, the judicial reforms fostered the development of legal consciousness (Engelstein 1992;

Wortman 1976). Despite their restricted autonomy, by the end of the nineteenth century, Russia's organs of local self-government (*zemstvos* and city councils), created in 1864 and 1870, were responsible for considerable progress in public health, veterinary medicine, education, fire prevention, famine relief, and information gathering. Moreover, they planted the seed of political representation that *zemstvo* men cultivated as the leaders of the liberal movement at the beginning of the twentieth century (Pirumova 1977, 1986). Publishing and the press also spearheaded the growth of the public sphere of Russia's civil society. In 1865, the government eased prepublication censorship restrictions. While this did not create freedom of the press, it enabled a rapid growth in the expression and circulation of information and ideas that the government was unable to suppress. By 1900, publishers produced 24,532 titles in more than 100 million copies in the empire. The number of daily newspapers increased from 125 in 1900 to 856 in 1913, and the daily circulation tripled from one to three million (Ferenczi 1989; McReynolds 1991). More than any other component of civil society, publishing and the press were institutions in which public opinion could be expressed; in providing information and publicity, they were essential for the undertakings of voluntary associations.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, St. Petersburg and Moscow displayed the beginnings of an unofficial art public, or art market—a network of private persons outside the academy and the imperial theaters who cooperated to patronize, produce, distribute, consume, and evaluate works and/or performances of art. Russia's public sphere included many public libraries, museums, and exhibitions, important civic institutions in their own right and a complement to the schools in the dissemination of useful knowledge. By 1913, Russia had more than 12,000 public libraries, including major institutions in Moscow and St. Petersburg, in addition to the scholarly libraries of the Academy of Sciences, the universities, and the learned societies. Russians attended more meetings, conferences, and congresses; from 1871 to 1917 there were 700 medical congresses alone. Thus, economic growth, mobility, urbanization, and advances in education, coupled with the Great Reforms of the 1860s, fostered the development of organized structures that mediated between the individual and the state. A public sphere that had been developing for more than a century became especially variegated and lively, albeit fractious, by the end of the nineteenth century.

To be sure, Russian civil society was shackled by the state. Russian subjects had none of the rights that undergirded civil society in the West. The institutional guarantors of civil society canonized in Western political thought—freedom from personal dependence and arbitrary domination; inviolability of person and domicile; the rule of law; civil rights; and some sort of parliament or assembly of the estates—were hardly features of the tsarist regime. The refusal of autocracy until 1905 to institutionalize any limitation to the scope of its power created severe difficulties for the development of a civil society possessing rights. Civil society was able to challenge the regime's monopoly on political authority only at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the wake of the Revolution of 1905, Nicholas II (1894–1917) granted a representative body (the State Duma), a written constitution (the Fundamental Laws), and civil liberties. All citizens possessed the right to choose freely their place of residence or

occupation; acquire and transfer property; travel abroad; hold meetings; express their views orally or in writing; form societies and unions; and exercise freedom of religion. At the same time, autocracy continued to inhibit the legal basis of civil society by qualifying civil liberties with clauses in the Fundamental Laws such as “for purposes not contrary to law” and “within limits fixed by law.” Much legislation to spell out civil rights more fully was never enacted; this coupled with other legal limitations and disabilities compounded the difficulties in the exercise of civil rights (Tumanova 2002, 2008). However, such disabilities did not stop Russians from participating ever more fully in an increasingly politicized civil society. Congresses on matters as disparate as livestock breeding and librarianship, to cite just two examples, agitated for the full realization of civil liberties. In 1917 the Provisional Government finally granted civil society full legal status but, by then, the Russian polity was fatally fractious.

The remainder of this article will focus on voluntary associations (also frequently called civil associations) in imperial Russia (Cohen and Arato 1992; Keane 1988; Seligman 1992).¹ To probe the role of voluntary associations in the formation of Russian civil society, I will examine a selected group of voluntary associations, mainly learned societies. Legal recognition, imperial patronage, and a system of rules and bureaucratic practices gave them a certain tutelary protection. The selected associations begin with the Free Economic Society, founded by nobles and academicians and chartered by Catherine II in 1765. A group of wealthy landowners founded the Moscow Agricultural Society in 1819, and explorers, scientists, and government officials founded the Russian Geographical Society in 1845. These early learned societies operated in an associative context that also included the Masonic lodges of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; literary societies, salons, and circles; fashionable clubs in Moscow and St. Petersburg such as the English Club; and charitable societies, animated by Russian Orthodoxy.

The learned societies were the leading edge of private initiative that accelerated in the 1860s during the Era of the Great Reforms. As one government official recalled, at the beginning of the Era of the Great Reforms, “[A]ll at once there appeared a striving toward private initiative” (Zelnik 1971: 84). Increasingly throughout the nineteenth century, associations championed initiative (*samodeiatel’nost’*) and autonomy (*samostoiatel’nost’*) and the diffusion of useful knowledge in patriotic service to Russia. As in nineteenth-century Europe and North America, private initiative founded associations to promote technological development and economic growth; improve public health and education; foster a market for art and music; pursue sport and recreation; and assert ethnic identity in a multinational empire. Through associations, physicians, teachers, engineers, and lawyers, among others, developed a professional consciousness and fashioned a new ethos of public service not completely under

1. No less important than civil associations, though not a subject of this study, were political associations—organs of local self-rule, municipal corporations, and some sort of parliament or assembly of the estates. These constitute what some political theorists, such as Gramsci and Cohen and Arato, call “political society.” Dana Villa (2006: 216–44) asserts the importance of political associations, the constituted intermediary powers of local self-rule. I am grateful to Paul Rahe for bringing Dana Villa’s work to my attention.

state control (Balzer 1996; Engelstein 1992; Frieden 1981; Hutchinson 1990; Ruane 1994; Seregny 1989; Wagner 1994). My selected group of associations will conclude with the outreach projects of the Society of Friends of Natural History, the Russian Technical Society, and the Society of Russian Physicians.

The Free Economic Society and the Moscow Agricultural Society

In 1765 Ivan I. Taubert, court librarian and president of the Academy of Sciences, drafted an organizational plan, along with a charter and bylaws, for a private society, independent of government (*vol'noe*, or “free”; literally, “possessing its own will”), a “patriotic association for the encouragement of agriculture and estate management.” Thus was born Russia’s first association, the Free Economic Society (VEO in its Russian initials). Although her true intentions have long been disputed, there is evidence to suggest that Empress Catherine II wanted “to mitigate the evils of serfdom without arousing excessive expectations among the serfs or hostility among the nobles,” by creating a “climate of opinion in which the nobles might agree to reforms to improve the life of the serfs” (Jones 1973: 137). As in the rest of Europe, a body designed to study agriculture and exchange information seemed to be the most efficacious institutional mechanism for creating such a “climate of opinion.”

During its 150-year existence, the Free Economic Society was governed by a charter (*ustav*). The charter was drawn up by the society (and periodically renewed) and approved by the monarch. The charter stated the goals and scope of activity of VEO, while the bylaws contained the rules by which it managed its own affairs. In their letter to Catherine proposing the establishment of the society, the charter members expressed their desire that “[o]ur Society would be governed in its endeavors by its own obligations and bylaws and this is why it should be called the Free Economic Society” (Khodnev 1865: 11; PSZ 1765, no. 12,502; PSZ 2d ser. 1859, no. 34,192; 1872, no. 51,195; Ustavy 1899: 4; K istorii 1907). The charter and bylaws became a template for subsequent associations.

The founding members established their own goals and the means to attain them. The members’ meetings, or general assembly (*obshchie sobraniia*), the society’s highest decision-making body, by majority vote elected officers by secret ballot, selected new members, and approved projects and a budget. A board (*sovet*), consisting of a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and, later, chairs of divisions and committees, planned the society’s activities and set the agenda for the general assembly. The society could create ad hoc committees and commissions as it saw fit, and the various departments and committees had considerable autonomy to set their own agenda (Khodnev 1865: 618; Pakhman 1855: 30).²

2. In later years these features of the charter were frequently noted in the liberal press. See, e.g., a series of reports in the “Iz obshchestvennoi khroniki” section of *Vestnik Evropy* no. 5 (1896): 434–36; no. 6 (1896): 861–63; no. 6 (1897): 875–76; and no. 10 (1897): 846–48.

Such a document gave associational life a special meaning in tsarist Russia. The charter, explicitly or implicitly, granted certain privileges as well as considerable autonomy to the society to manage its own affairs. The charter functioned as a micro-constitution jealously defended by the society's members. The founding members of VEO wrote their own bylaws in the language of representation. To be sure, the charter had to be approved by the government, and there is no doubt that its provisions were constrained by an understanding of what was acceptable. Nevertheless, in drawing up its own charter and bylaws, the society was actively engaged in the process of self-definition and proclaimed the capacity of self-governance (Ustav 1899: 18–24).

The Free Economic Society's links with government set a pattern for reciprocal and mutually beneficial and collaborative relations between Russia's voluntary associations and the state, a pattern that prevailed until the end of the nineteenth century. The society had imperial patronage, accepted members of the royal family as officeholders, received what we might call today government grants, and petitioned government offices for favors and privileges, such as free postage. Like many future associations in the nineteenth century, VEO was called on to assist the government in the study of a variety of problems and in implementation of policy. In this, a "patriotic society for the encouragement of agriculture and the economy in Russia" was fulfilling its patriotic duty.

Russia's second agricultural society, the Moscow Agriculture Society (MOSX in its Russian initials), was founded in 1819, at a time of crackdown against secret societies and the Masonic lodges. In contrast to VEO, large private landowners rather than notables at the court played the most important role in the founding of MOSX. The relative autonomy granted the new society amidst obscurantism reflected the importance attached to the dissemination of useful knowledge. MOSX was also a product of the ethos of patriotic service and "ardent love of the fatherland" that pervaded the self-definition of a Russian association after Russia's victory over Napoleon (Maslov 1850: 2–3).

The significance of the Free Economic Society and the Moscow Agricultural Society lies in their contribution to three of the most important projects of the European Enlightenment—the application of science and the diffusion of useful knowledge; patriotic service to state and society; and the creation of the public sphere of civil society.

Like European scientific and agricultural societies, the mission of the agricultural societies was the increase and dissemination of useful knowledge. The societies were founded at a time when governments, academies, and private bodies in Europe were preoccupied with agricultural improvement by means of the application of science and the dissemination of useful knowledge. To achieve this goal VEO and MOSX chose means common to the age, among which were publications, essay competitions, data collection, and projects to advance public health and education. The treatises and the reports from far-flung correspondents forced the members to record and measure accurately observations and experiments, provide scientific documentation, maintain scientific journals, compile agricultural data, and catalogue techniques—all essential components in the diffusion of useful knowledge. VEO compiled some of the first systematic survey data anywhere by means of questionnaires sent out in 1766 and

1790. For each of the empire's regions, the surveys compiled data on the natural resources, soil, and climate; cultivation, livestock, farming techniques, and harvests; the state of the rural economy and living and working conditions of the peasants; and the state of transport, handicrafts, women's work, poverty, health, diet, and leisure (Berdyshev 1992, 1: 116; Khodnev 1865: 76).

VEO and MOSX were committed to education. VEO routinely gave prizes to competitions on the best ways to spread "useful knowledge." MOSX founded Russia's first agricultural school in 1822. In addition to its own school, MOSX facilitated the organization and administration of private schools founded by its members (Berdyshev 1992, 1: 111–12; Maslov 1850: 123). MOSX's various education projects culminated in the founding of the Committee for the Popular Dissemination of Literacy on Religious and Moral Principles, or the Literacy Committee for short, in December 1845. The purpose of the committee was to gather information and facilitate the acquisition of literacy by proprietary serfs. Fifteen years later, VEO also created a Literacy Committee. The literacy committees gave meaning to the enterprises of their members. Private efforts scattered across the empire needed publicity and, as it were, the moral support of both public and officialdom. The function, then, of the literacy committees, indeed of the agricultural societies as a whole, was to publicize experiments, stimulate public discussion, and thereby facilitate the spread of literacy and progress (Maslov 1848, 1: 1–13).

The founding of the Free Economic Society marked the beginning of the popularization of the scientific study of agriculture in Russia. The leaders of the two agricultural societies were patrons of science, and service to and promotion of science and the diffusion of science in Russia were their self-conscious missions. But implicit in the self-definition of members was not only the task of bringing science to Russian agriculture; they also endeavored to accomplish the complementary task of elevating Russian agriculture to a science. Both societies funded applied research, the dissemination of knowledge, and the gathering of data. They disseminated Western ideas and improvements, as well as cultivated relationships with foreign scientific and agricultural organizations by exchanging publications and by publishing accounts of the activities of foreign societies. Both agricultural societies publicized Russian and foreign improvements by means of collections, exhibitions, museums, and public lectures. They organized displays of agricultural implements, new farming techniques, and provided judges and medals to validate the efforts of other organizations and individuals. Displays of out-of-date agricultural implements became silent witnesses to technological progress, a goal that was at the heart of so many societies of the period.

Service to the fatherland was one of the driving forces behind VEO and MOSX from the beginning. The members of VEO "wished to contribute to economic growth and to cooperate with its dear fatherland" (Khodnev 1865: 36–37). A byproduct of such service to monarch and nation was the creation of a new sense of identity, self-worth, and mission for the patriotic noble. These and other efforts to disseminate literacy and agricultural training to Russia's peasants are examples of the collaboration between state and society in the patriotic pursuit of national betterment. All

the while the ultimate goal of improvement was the betterment of Russia: applying foreign improvements to Russia; making foreign works available to a Russian readership; collecting data on Russian agriculture, industry, and commerce; and facilitating contacts among landowners, government officials, and scientists.

The appearance of the agricultural societies marks the beginning of a process whereby a public sphere and associational life were sanctioned under autocracy, and VEO and MOSX became public forums for a discussion of, and dissemination of views on, a wide range of scientific and economic matters. A pioneer on terrain undefended by the freedoms of speech, association, and assembly or by a government of law, VEO was one of the few associations untouched by government repression in the wake of the French Revolution. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the impulse to associate stemmed from an increased acquaintance with the independent public initiative possible in Europe, the absence of which had been a perennial bane of Russian political culture. To be sure, public initiative under autocracy could not appear overnight. But as the proponents of associational life never tired of repeating, associations provided the framework for that initiative, combined resources, unified otherwise dispersed efforts, and enabled the many to accomplish what the individual could not (Anufriev 1916: 15–44; Kozlov 2002: 260, 303, 331). The association supported the public self-affirmation of the individual and thereby laid the foundations for the formation of a future civil society.

In associations, argues economic historian Joel Mokyr, knowledge about the natural world became increasingly “non-proprietary, and scientific advances and discoveries were freely shared with the public at large” (Mokyr 2002: 37). By becoming the first public forum for a discussion of and dissemination of views on economic policy, VEO sowed the seeds of participatory public dialogue, civic consciousness, and citizenship. This created a precedent, however tentative, to the representation of interests, a precedent that, as we shall see, was to be followed later by other groups denied citizenship. Legitimized public representation of others promoted a sense of self-respect and individual dignity. At the same time, the capacity to represent others carried with it the willingness to be judged by others, and not only by the government. In the words of a nineteenth-century authority on Russian agriculture, these surveys were thereby presented “for the judgment of the public (*na sud publiki*)” (Indova 1977: 122–23; Khodnev 1865: 413–14; Pakhman 1855: 40–41). “Whether our efforts should be rewarded,” MOSX president Prince Golitsyn addressed members in 1825, “whether the principles guiding the Society to attain its goals will work, this is to be judged by our fellow compatriots” (Maslov 1850: Appendix, 112).

The Russian Geographical Society

Many historians have noted the “Victorian fascination with the past” and an enthusiasm for the study of natural history, the “historicizing of the earth,” in Roy Porter’s felicitous phrase. The vehicle that mobilized the study of natural history and the

stewardship of the national patrimony was the voluntary association. The Victorian era antiquarian societies, the societies of naturalists, and geographical societies “cultivated the capacities of curiosity [and] acquisitiveness” as well as awe of nature and of the abundance of nature (Crane 2000: 91; Dellheim 1982: 45–49; Fox 1980: 554; Levine 1986: 52; Merrill 1989: 32, 47, 54–56; Stocking 1987: 62–63). Societies brought together and coordinated the observations, classifications, and curiosity of otherwise disparate explorers, amateurs, travelers, and civil servants, thereby building up a repository of useful knowledge about the realm.

The broadening scholarly and public interest in the Russian nation and empire through study in a variety of disciplines—history, literature and linguistics, geography, ethnology, and natural history—as well as government support for science under Nicholas I and Count Uvarov, Minister of Education from 1833 to 1849, came together in the 1840s with the founding of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (RGO in its Russian initials). Still located in St. Petersburg, RGO is one of the oldest continually existing societies in the world. During the last years of the reign of Nicholas I, RGO was the most active private organization of the empire. By bringing together scientists, government officials, explorers, and intellectuals to study social and economic questions, RGO and similar societies had not only begun to study imperial expansion and national identity, but also they had begun to create the national heritage. In its quest to study nation and empire, the RGO, like VEO and MOSX before it, contributed to the diffusion of applied science and the creation of a community of knowledge; patriotic service to state and society; and the establishment of a public forum, however limited, under autocracy.

The RGO illustrates well the practice of “Baltic natural history,” as historian of science Lisbet Koerner formulates the term. Many charter members were civil servants of German-Scandinavian origin, serving an empire on the fringes of Europe. Their voyages of discovery led to expeditions to study natural history, agricultural techniques, and ethnography. In “Baltic natural history,” a “proto-romantic cult of the fatherland” created by “diaspora Germans” cultivated the “peasant as an object of scientific investigation.” All aspects of peasant life appeared on the radar screen of Baltic ethnographers and statisticians—“customs, manners, dress, crafts, festivals, cooking, childrearing.” The quest for an encyclopedic natural history not only produced imperial knowledge, but it also promised self-knowledge of the nation (Koerner 1999: 389–422).

How did the RGO produce knowledge and self-knowledge? Like the Free Economic Society, RGO was founded in an age fascinated by the collection and cataloguing of descriptions, observations, and artifacts about human and natural worlds. RGO strove to popularize geography and natural history. Its expeditions, compilations of data, and the reports from far-flung correspondents furthered the dissemination of the scientific method by obliging members and correspondents to record and measure accurately observations, conduct experiments, provide scientific documentation, and maintain scientific journals. Furthermore, RGO contributed to the development of new scientific fields such as ethnography and statistics. Through its projects it created a community not only for the intelligentsia of the capital but also for officials and private persons

across the empire, thereby helping to break down the sense of isolation of educated Russians, particularly important during the reign of Nicholas I.

As in Western and Central Europe, the scientist or amateur who recorded observations and who collected, classified, and ordered new knowledge in the collective company of peers was made to feel “part of a national endeavor.” The study of the nation did more than gather information on local customs and institutions: by promoting a sense of national identity and national self-esteem it was patriotic (Blackbourn 1998: 275; Merrill 1989: 78, 97; Trigger 1989: 210). RGO was on the cutting edge of Russian area studies in service to the nation. By contributing their notes and observations, correspondents in far off corners of Russia could do their bit to study Russia and to articulate Russian national identity. In the 15 years before the Great Reforms, no institution outside of government more self-consciously focused on Russia than did the RGO.

As was true of European geographical societies of the era, especially in northern and central Europe, patriotism and national pride “with the consent of the crown” fostered a collaborative relationship with the state. Because of their links to exploration, empire, and military (especially naval) operations, geographical societies everywhere were inherently close to governments. RGO’s links with government continued a pattern begun by VEO of reciprocal and mutually beneficial relations between Russia’s voluntary associations and the state. In the first century in the development of Russia’s voluntary associations, societies’ goals and the state’s goals coincided, and service to society joined service to state and monarch as a patriotic calling. From 1845 to 1861 RGO’s membership list contained numerous scholar-officials; almost all central government offices employed members of the RGO. Like VEO, the RGO had imperial patronage, accepted members of the royal family as officeholders, received government grants, and petitioned government offices for favors and privileges, such as free postage. Government departments commissioned many of its studies and were the primary consumer of the results. The leaders of RGO believed their mission to be of assistance to the empire in the execution of scientific work and the implementation of policy. “This allowed the Geographical Society to conduct research and discuss financial and economic questions on a collegial basis . . . ; it permitted scholarly and practical recommendations to be translated into government policy.” Even the Third Section (as the political police was known from 1826 to 1880) recognized the benefit to the state when it reported that the society “organizes and guides research and local investigations equipped with those problems unresolved in work conducted by the government” (GARF f. 109 (1848), 1-ia ekspeditsiia, d. 201, l. 1; Uralova 1994: 11–12).

On the eve of the Great Reforms, RGO was a microcosm of an increasingly restless reading and discussing public. RGO became a forum, covered in the press, for a discussion and dissemination of views on many aspects of social and economic life. By becoming a public forum, RGO framed the issues of participatory public dialogue; became a vehicle of interest group articulation and representation; and created a public, among the functions of the associations of civil society. However, a forum outside government in autocratic Russia existed on treacherous terrain. The fate of the short-lived Committee of Political Economy, founded in 1859 by liberal economists

of RGO's Statistical Division to increase public awareness of economic issues and disbanded in 1862 in response to government interference, was a sign of the precarious relationship between associations and the state in tsarist Russia. On the one hand, the government cooperated with associations and granted a rather surprising degree of latitude in its pursuit of scientific investigation and independent opinion. On the other hand, when those investigations and opinions strayed into areas of government policy, the exclusive prerogative of the autocrat and officialdom, the government tightened its supervisory tethers.

In the historiography of the Era of the Great Reforms, the role of the reforming state and enlightened bureaucrats under Alexander II has overshadowed a dramatic rise of government-sanctioned private initiative. The thickening network of associations included organizations with an avowedly public agenda. In the remainder of this survey of Russian associations and civil society, I will identify three forms of public outreach—exhibition and display, education policy, and national congresses. Each of these activities may relate to a particular voluntary association.

Associative Outreach: Exhibition and Display

The leaders of nineteenth-century European science societies wanted the educated population to have a direct experience of the natural world through observation and experiment and to reduce access costs to useful knowledge, in Mokyr's terms. Broadening the appeal of science and demonstrating that natural knowledge can make a better world validated the scientific enterprise, and the scientists, in the court of public opinion; thus, in the long run, the argument ran, popularizing science was good for science. In 1864, a group of Moscow University scientists with a very public mission to popularize science founded the Society of Friends of Natural History, Anthropology and Ethnography (OLEAE in its Russian initials). The founders believed the society needed to "keep up with the times" and be accessible to the general public. In the striking terminology of the charter members, OLEAE could make its greatest mark by spreading the "democratization of knowledge" (Bogdanov 1914: 33; *Protokoly* 1886: 109–10).

At the time of OLEAE's founding, the premier means to popularize applied science and display useful knowledge were the museum and the exhibition. By means of dramatic and crowd-pleasing displays of modern life and the wonders of applied science, museums and exhibitions displayed visions of progress through the division of labor and the cooperation of science, industry, private associations, and governments in service to the public. The demonstrations and displays of science, sometimes called the "performance of science," that combined utility and entertainment helped create a modern public culture (Auerbach 1999: 10, 94, 108, 111; Golinski 1992; Greenhalg 1988: 29, 145; Sutton 1995). Cities built museums to enhance cultural life and cultivate civic pride; display the expertise and civic mindedness of civic leaders; and show what a modern civilized society could offer its citizens. At the same time, museums and exhibitions fostered a collective endeavor to learn about the nation and promote

native industry, thereby instilling a sense of national identity and self-esteem. Finally, scholars have seen exhibitions, alongside museums of natural history and industry, as central features of the bourgeois nation-state, as well as sites of modernity, where identities are “manifested and experienced in public.” In an age of patriotism, nationalism, and imperialism, exhibitions compelled nations to dramatize, even create, “conventionalized versions of their national images” (Jordanova 1989: 32–33; Karp et al. 1992; Shaw 2003; Wallis 1994: 272).

In 1868, OLEAE created a commission to found a museum of “applied science” in Moscow. To publicize the enterprise and accumulate a collection, the commission organized a Polytechnical Exposition in 1872, timed to mark the bicentennial of the birth of Peter the Great. From May to September, more than 750,000 visitors viewed some 10,000 articles displayed in 90 pavilions in and around the Moscow Kremlin. In his oration at the exposition inaugural banquet, Viktor Della-Vos, director of the Moscow Technical School, stated that the purpose of the exposition was to emphasize education, popularize science and technology, and acquaint the public with “the basic principles of production.” Later, museum reports emphasized that the collections of raw materials and machines documented manufacturing processes, demonstrated the division of fields of applied knowledge, and displayed the “state of the art” in all branches of science and industry. Process was to be more important than product (Bradley 2008; Bogdanov in Protokoly 1872: 35; Della-Vos 1874: ix–xi; Vestnik 1872: no. 23: 2 and no. 32: 1). Della-Vos also stressed the obligation of every nation to participate in such international competition, thereby asserting Russia’s arrival in that class of nations with the scientific and industrial capacity to hold such exhibitions. And private initiative enhanced that capacity: “Moscow, the center of Russian industry, demonstrated brilliantly that private initiative and energy in every useful undertaking is a force that can overcome the most difficult and, at first glance, insurmountable obstacles. . . . The engines that switched on this major manifestation of private activity were government support, private initiative, purity of motives, and national pride” (Della-Vos 1872: 58–62).

OLEAE created the infrastructure grounded in civil society for displaying and popularizing science connecting tsarist officialdom, the new municipal government, the business community, the university scientists, and other private associations. By organizing blockbuster exhibitions (there were ethnographic and anthropological expositions in 1867 and 1879) and a grand museum of science and industry, OLEAE popularized science. With its laboratories for future scientists; displays of machinery, technical processes, and the useful products of the natural world; and lectures and demonstrations pitched at a broader audience, the Polytechnical Museum was a key component in Russian society’s rapidly developing scientific potential. Moreover, OLEAE hitched public science to the mobilization of human resources in the service of patriotism and national prestige. Like its European brethren, the Polytechnical Exposition and, later, Polytechnical Museum, fostered a collective endeavor to learn about the nation, thereby promoting a sense of national identity and self-esteem. To assert its place in European civilization in an age of nationalism and imperialism, Russia, ironically, had to assert cultural distinctiveness, patriotism, and imperial pride. In

a claim tirelessly repeated by the society's officers, Russian engineers needed to wrest control of industrial design away from foreigners, and Russian scientists needed to become independent of European science. Less openly stated, but implicit in OLEAE's mission, Russian science also needed to become less dependent on the Russian state and capable of being sustained by a native infrastructure grounded in civil society.

Even a grand undertaking such as the Polytechnical Museum, like its cousins, the 1867 and 1872 expositions, was not the result of government decree, but of private initiative. In the view of exposition and museum organizers and proponents, private initiative, "a new force in every endeavor," while heretofore "meager and bashful," was now "showing itself in full splendor. . . . [A major undertaking] was carried out by private initiative without any kind of outside orders or interference from the government" (Della-Vos 1874: xi; Protokoly 1872: 22; Stasov 1867: quote col. 936). To be sure, this private initiative was sanctioned by a state that shared the goals of a private association. But it is difficult to imagine a "primordial and gelatinous" civil society, Gramsci's oft-cited characterization of civil society in Russia, being capable of the conceptualization, organization, planning, and administration that lay behind the Polytechnical Exposition and Polytechnical Museum. The exposition and museum were an example of a budding civil society in action and a model of state-society partnership.

Associative Outreach: Education Policy

In the second half of the nineteenth century the borrowing, domestication, and generation of industrial technology was regarded as Russia's key to progress, the linchpin of which was the dissemination of applied science and technical education. Beginning in the 1860s, private associations sought to assist the state and employers in developing Russia's human and material resources for industrial purposes. As it had nurtured public science since the eighteenth century, officialdom recognized that the state needed the technical expertise generated in civil society.

The work of private associations may be examined through a case study of the Russian Technical Society (RTO in its Russian initials), the most prominent of a generation of societies founded to promote industrial development and technical education. During the last 50 years of the imperial regime, RTO ran a variety of enterprises including vocational schools and classes; Sunday and evening schools; schools for children of factory workers; and public lectures. It became a resource center for vocational curriculum development and pedagogy and, eventually, an advocate of universal compulsory education. RTO organized congresses on vocational education and technical training that became a forum for a variety of public issues. Such civic activism challenged the tutelage of the authorities, and the efforts of RTO to promote industry and industrial education received mixed signals from the government. Through its myriad projects, RTO provided an example of what private initiative could do to study problems, facilitate solutions, and mobilize talent.

Although education, broadly conceived, was an important part of the mission of RTO as a whole, the main thrust of its efforts was concentrated in a specialized

division, the Permanent Commission on Technical and Vocational Education. At its founding, RTO was authorized to organize worker education. In 1870, the Education Commission opened its first vocational school offering evening classes for skilled workers on the St. Petersburg-Warsaw railroad. Other schools and classes followed, first at state factories, later at private factories. RTO ran vocational schools at the most prominent machine, metalworking, and munitions factories in St. Petersburg. The Education Commission saw its primary mission to gather information, acquaint the public with the state of Russian technical education, and study “the conditions for its proper organization” (Nebolsin 1890: 3; Sreznevskii 1891: 3). It studied child labor, became a resource center for technical education pedagogy, and helped frame a discussion of worker training in the context of general education. These activities involved more than just information gathering and dissemination; they also involved policy formation and advocacy. Accordingly, although RTO was careful to restrict its investigation to the link between child labor and education rather than embark on a wide-ranging investigation of the labor question, the society became ground zero for discussion and policy formation regarding the children of workers. The discussion led to the factory legislation of 1882, an example of advocacy that produced results at the very top.

The Education Commission became a resource center for technical and vocational education in myriad other ways. Publications, of course, were often the most widely used method of such outreach, and the Education Commission published its own *Proceedings*, “in order to offer its affairs to public discussion (*glasnost*)” (Tits 1889: 38). It drafted model rules and regulations for vocational schools and classes. In addition to overseeing the teaching at vocational schools, it surveyed textbooks and teaching manuals and drew up curricula and lesson plans. It ran weekly colloquia on pedagogy and methodology open to teachers at all RTO’s schools. In 1892 the Education Commission launched the Mobile Museum of Teaching Aids that quickly became well known throughout Russia for its innovative collection. By 1902, it had some 80,000 items out on loan to various schools and educational institutions. The Education Commission organized educational excursions; founded and maintained homes in the countryside for sickly children; ran *pensions* to house teachers; and raised money for insurance, burial funds, and financial aid to students. It also provided legal aid and mediation to individuals desiring to open societies and mutual aid funds at schools. In all activities, the Education Commission solicited the opinion of outside (nonmember) experts on educational issues, thereby promoting horizontal linkages in Russian civil society (Andreev 1882: 57, 62, 69, 81; Tits 1889: 38, 110; Filippov 1975: 169; Korol’kov 1912: 15).

RTO facilitated communication and networking among a wide spectrum of government officials, engineers, and industrialists dedicated to Russian industrial development and created an extensive unofficial infrastructure of technical and vocational education. Such education was the linchpin in the development of a more skilled and disciplined industrial labor force. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the Ministry of Finance and RTO led the debate on ways to improve technical education and on-the-job training. Vocational education by means of schooling meant that

experts situated in the institutions of state and civil society, rather than working-class families, could make technical education and vocational training decisions; technical training could thereby be removed from “plebeian” society and placed in the hands of the state and its ally, “bourgeois” civil society. Moreover, institutionalized vocational training would replace workplace socialization and its incumbent practices, especially alcohol abuse, with the socialization of schooling and its concomitant promise of individuality, choice, upward mobility, and the integration of young workers into modern industrial economy and urban life.

While an alliance of state and society tried to wrest control of vocational training from the control of workers, RTO and other technical and education societies, most notably the Petersburg and Moscow literacy committees, were asserting their authority and expertise in an attempt to wrest control of popular education from the state. Beginning in the 1890s, the partnership between the government and one of Russia’s most prestigious and privileged associations was strained, as RTO broadened the scope of its activities and more and more claimed a voice in public policy and as its Education Commission claimed a voice in the very sensitive public policy area of popular education. Accordingly, although the tsarist government sanctioned the specialized public activities of private associations, the scope of RTO’s projects as well as its claims to a voice in public policy raised the specter of a vast archipelago of unauthorized and unscrutinized public initiative in education. Thus, RTO was a vehicle by which a private organization could enter the public arena and claim a role in public policy.

Associative Outreach: The Public Sphere of Scientific Congresses

Russia’s scientific and technical intelligentsia sought new forms of communication, dissemination of knowledge, and popularization of science, as well as venues that extended beyond the reach of the local science society, that might give them a voice in public policy. One of these new forms of communication was congresses. Congresses allow us to enrich our understanding of not only the workings of civil society but also of its normative features. In Europe, congresses were quintessential components of a Habermasian public sphere: venues for people to come together to deliberate matters of common concern. By providing a new form of communication to present the results of scholarly work and to exchange views, scientific congresses contributed to the development of science, the dissemination of useful knowledge, and the development of the professions. Procedures schooled participants in the languages and practices of representative institutions, and the participants represented themselves, or their “constituents,” before an assembly of their peers. Congresses also represented certain causes or projects before the larger arena of public opinion, and before governments. Thus by mobilizing new special interest constituencies and in publicizing a variety of causes, congresses became a new form of public representation, especially in politics lacking national assemblies or for groups not otherwise represented.

We can examine the importance of scientific congresses in the development of Russian civil society through the example of congresses of physicians organized by the Pirogov Society of Russian Physicians, founded in St. Petersburg in 1883 to honor the public work of the physician Nikolai I. Pirogov. In the number and public nature of its projects, commissions, and publications, as well as in its role as an umbrella national organization to network widely scattered physicians and to coordinate local projects, the Pirogov Society became one of the most prominent of Russia's associations by the end of the nineteenth century (Frieden 1981; Gran et al. 1911). More than most science societies, the Pirogov Society existed for its national meetings. The congresses (between 1885 and 1917 there were 17 congresses and 13 more specialized conferences [*soveshchaniia*]) were subsidized by the government and often by the local city councils, a merger of state, civic, and private interests (Hutchinson 1990: 25–28; Obshchestvo russkikh vrachei 1899: 178–79; Pogozhev 1887: 327, 335).

The Pirogov congresses were a public forum for the dissemination of information and advocacy on a variety of professional and medical issues. The Pirogov congresses claimed to speak on behalf of Russian physicians and represent physicians before the government. In the words of a Kiev physician the congresses were “a tribunal for deciding common problems,” first and foremost of which was the sorry state of public health, what was to become a major outreach program of the Pirogov Society (Pirumova 1986: 126; Vladimirova 1984: 55). The first step was information gathering, and the “Pirogovtsy” took advantage of the forum to call attention to the need to gather, process, and disseminate information.

The scientific and technical congresses were patriotic endeavors for the study of a vast [*neob"iataia*] motherland, to use the formulaic phrase. Only by studying Russia could Russian scientists speak of a native, Russian science. Patriotic service to the nation was an impulse shared by participants and officialdom. Thus, despite the sharper tone at the turn of the century, congresses were occasions of state-society cooperation, collaboration, and mutuality. The government found it useful to allow, even encourage, large meetings of the scientific and technical intelligentsia to exchange ideas and practices and to further the development of a scientific and technical infrastructure. Even the Department of Police concluded that while the Pirogov congresses were less significant for science—“scientific congresses don't make discoveries and scientific questions don't require votes”—much valuable clinical and empirical experience was exchanged (GARF f. 102, 2 d/p, d. 20, pt. 527, ll. 46 ob.-47; TsIAM f. 184, op. 5, d. 1432, l. 44).

The emphasis on community, professional identity, and representation at the congresses emboldened physicians not only to petition the government but also to criticize officialdom for its policies and procedures, most sharply in the modest government efforts to relieve the famines of 1891–92 and 1897–98. The issue of famine relief was only the beginning of a struggle between society and the state over the use of the public sphere. The government was fully aware that the Pirogov congresses created and promoted communication and the capacity of society to talk to itself. Indeed, officialdom encouraged congresses of the scientific and technical intelligentsia for

that very reason. However, communication not only strengthened horizontal linkages among different groups, but it also bypassed the vertical lines of communication between society and government. Although it could not prevent such communication, officialdom tried to regulate and confine it.

Increasing antigovernment agitation on the part of physicians culminated in the Ninth Pirogov Congress in 1904. Speakers linked various aspects of public health and community medicine to social, economic, and political reform. And they abandoned the practice of composing deferential petitions to the government in favor of making direct policy recommendations (GARF f. 102 OO, 1904, d. 200, l. 2 ob.; Shidlovskii 1904: viii–ix). In the section on public medicine, the criminologist Dmitrii A. Dril’ argued that cooperation between government, local authorities, and private initiative was the only way to solve the urgent problem of poverty. Several speakers connected tuberculosis to overcrowded conditions in the Pale of Settlement and concluded that Jews must have freedom of movement. Similarly, in discussions of alcoholism, participants emphasized the need to eradicate the conditions breeding the disease and criticized the state liquor monopoly. A paper at the section on factory medicine raised the issue of corporal punishment and called upon all physicians to scorn those doctors who were called upon to be present at corporal punishments and “thereby sanctioned this odious practice.” Papers on childhood diseases, school doctors, and school hygiene led to a discussion of a variety of education issues. The *zemstvo* physician D. Ia. Dorf proposed transferring the administration of the schools from the Ministry of Education and the church to local school boards, whose revamped membership would include teachers, physicians, and *zemstvo* representatives. In one day, the congress passed resolutions supporting the eight-hour day; introducing the *zemstvos* into non-*zemstvo* provinces; abolishing corporal punishment and the death penalty; placing schools under local control; and ending discrimination against the Jews. And, to tweak the authorities, the congress sent greetings to Leo Tolstoy (Deviatiy s’ezd 1904 2: 58; GARF f. 102, 2 d/p, d. 20, pt. 527, ll. 41–42 ob., 45; S IX pirogovskogo s’ezda 1904: 320–21, 332–34; Zhbankov 1927: col. 1288).

The discussions of papers and the ensuing resolutions did not stop at socioeconomic reform; they went for the jugular of politics. Papers linked improvements in *zemstvo* medicine to a broader franchise in the *zemstvos* and city councils; national political representation; the establishment of the rule of law on the countryside; and the creation of local all-estate *zemstvos*. Papers on school hygiene, in which, according to one police report, “it was hard to find anything on school hygiene,” emphasized the importance of the dissemination of information and the abolition of censorship to improve public health. “In order to free these animating forces from the clutches of administrative arbitrariness,” a resolution demanded greater freedom of association (*iavochym poriadkom*), and “the use of the courts rather than of administrative measures to handle infractions of the laws.” An effective fight against the scourges to public health in Russia such as tuberculosis “could only be waged with the guarantee of individual freedom and the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly.” The pattern was clear: Improvement in x could come about only by the creation of y , where x was any one of a number of public health problems facing the country and y was fundamental

change in Russia's political institutions (Deviaty Pirogovskii s"ezd 1904: 5; GARF f. 102, 2 d/p, d. 20, pt. 527, ll. 39–39 ob., 41–44; Skibnevskii 1904: 139–51).³

Congresses like the Pirogov congresses were conducted in the language of representation. As many students of late imperial Russia, and especially students of the professions, have noted, associations and their meetings and congresses were even more important in public life, given the absence of a nationwide representative institution and the illegality of political parties and unions (Balzer 1991: 183–98; Frieden 1981; Ruane 1994: 91). The delegates elected congress officers, and resolutions were openly debated and decided by majority vote. Delegates advocated certain causes or projects before the larger arena of public opinion and before a government unaccustomed to receiving policy recommendations not from officialdom or high personages.

Delegates to the Pirogov congresses, committed to social and professional issues, more and more saw themselves as serving “the people,” and, as a result, were drawn into politics. In a country where everyone was denied the vote, activists saw congresses as an excellent stage for fashioning the tsar's subjects into citizens. Such activity, it was hoped by participants of congresses and their admirers, would be the kind of organized public activity that could encourage greater local autonomy and initiative. The more politicized congresses provided an opportunity for disenfranchised subjects to demand political rights. Indeed, the historian A. A. Kizevetter, writing of three national congresses in 1896 that passed resolutions to abolish capital punishment and to institute universal primary education, recalled that “One sensed that the period of public suppression (*obshchestvennaia podavlennost'*) expired, mouths opened, society began speaking, and attempts to stifle the rising public (*nachavshiisia obshchestvennyi pod'em*) could only open the floodgates” (Kizevetter 1997: 164). As a Pirogov congress participant reporting in *Osvobozhdenie* (the liberal oppositionist newspaper published abroad) put it, “The major achievement in recent years is that people have stopped being afraid to speak” (“Itogi IX s"ezda” 1904: 333). Congresses emboldened the autocrat's subjects as they sought to emancipate Russian public life from government tutelage.

Conclusion

By examining the role of voluntary associations in the formation of civil society, we may see from a different angle how Russian political culture worked, a view often obscured in discussions of state institutions and revolutionary politics. In many ways, of course, Russian civil society was the creation of the state, albeit a state inconsistent in its goals and policies. Most Russian associations, and certainly the august learned societies, saw their role as collaborating with the authorities and assisting the state in

3. Although only one-third of the 72 petitions of its first nine congresses were answered positively, there were eventually a few government decrees in their spirit—the establishment of the Women's Medical Institute in 1895, the establishment of a standard nomenclature of diseases in 1901, and the abolition of corporal punishment of peasants in 1904.

the achievement of mutual objectives. In so doing, the members of associations realized that public discussion, especially on patriotic projects such as the dissemination of learning for the greater good of Russia, was imaginable, even under autocracy, that nonstatist solutions to problems were feasible in a country with a long statist tradition.

From the end of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, Russian monarchs, needing the expertise to build a modern Russia, sanctioned and nurtured the production and dissemination of useful knowledge through an infrastructure grounded in civil society. For more than a century, government departments found it quite useful to have the learned societies apply knowledge, in a dispassionate way, to social and economic problems; to collect and analyze data; and even to make policy recommendations, of course only when asked to do so. Because Russia's learned societies assiduously cultivated their patriotic duty to the prestige of the monarchy and the prosperity of the realm, by and large a relationship of cooperation and mutuality developed between Russian associations and the central government ministries. To be sure, the partnership was unequal: The state maintained its prerogative to approve the charter and bylaws of societies and to scrutinize their activities, and there were periodic crackdowns on private initiative. Nevertheless, associations such as VEO, RGO, and RTO had the capacity to mobilize human resources for the cause of progress and thereby enhance what historians of science and technology call the "scientific potential" of the nation. Thus, the government was willing to concede to them considerable latitude for the autonomous management of their own affairs.

Members of associations thereby populated a civil society that had been created earlier by the tsarist state for its own purposes. Learned associations were autonomous centers of scientific expertise and authority where politically powerless subjects could acquire the capacity of public voice and assert their right to participate in and influence public affairs. The charters and bylaws of science societies, the "founding documents," as they were repeatedly called, were microconstitutions that defined a legal relationship with authority, articulated collective goals, conferred certain privileges, and set rules for self-governance, allowing their members a degree of tutelary protection and maneuverability in public not afforded the population as a whole. This meant that these communities of scientists had an autonomous inner life and were not merely creations or extensions of the state.

Associations signify the potential for the self-organization of society, especially important in authoritarian regimes that make it difficult for their subjects to act freely in concert. Associations enhanced a sensibility of freely established individual identities, autonomy, and choice and provided new group solidarities and venues where sociability merged with education, science, and philanthropy. Such communities cultivated the capacity of individual and collective representation before both peers and power. By giving voice to social problems, by framing and creating public opinion, associations became the training ground for civic engagement in public affairs (Auspitz 1982: 75; Calhoun 1992: 63; Cohen and Arato 1992: 660; Habermas 1989: 23, 27; Habermas 1992: 355; Hoffmann 2003: 276). Thus, associations became the vehicle by which society learned about itself and communicated with itself. In staking out a domain of self-definition, self-organization, and action, the learned societies instigated processes

that later were used by other groups to pursue their own agendas and to imagine a world of individual autonomy and limited political authority. The association was a critical ingredient in the lengthy process by which Russians, to borrow Kant's definition of the Enlightenment, were gradually released from tutelage.

By studying the learned societies, we may also see how the relationship between associations and the state evolved from cooperation and collaboration to confrontation. Government attempts to control and confine public initiative and the resulting conflict between the tsarist bureaucracy and educated society over the autonomy of associations gave associations a special meaning in autocratic Russia. From the beginning, the state was of two minds in its treatment of private initiative, and there was a tension between the patronage and nurture of the state and government restrictions. The government wanted the contribution of private initiative to the modernization project without the political side effects. Along with support toward the achievement of mutual goals, officialdom engaged in a tutelary scrutiny of the public activities of associations to make sure they did not enter forbidden territory, that is, policy and politics. By the end of the nineteenth century, the relationship between associations such as VEO, RTO, and the Society of Russian Physicians and the state became more adversarial, as many associations became *de facto* pressure groups and the proliferation of projects forced officialdom to regulate more closely their activities.

Although civil associations, along with the press, were among the strongest components of Russian civil society, by themselves they could not create a strong and enduring civil society. The balance between associational autonomy and state control was never fixed in law and was perpetually negotiated. A rapidly growing network of associations could not entirely compensate for the absence of a tradition of strong property rights, rule of law, local privileges, and intermediary constituted political bodies (organs of local self-rule, municipal corporations, some sort of assembly of the estates, and, later, political parties) that might have protected civil society from arbitrary state power, as ineffectual as such power often was in the last decades of the imperial regime. Autocracy equated privately organized activity in the public realm with ideas of constitutions and limited government, thereby driving more and more ordinary citizens into confrontation with the state. Consequently, the members and leaders of Russian associations had to act *as if* they enjoyed the rights of assembly and association to claim those rights, to act, in Daniel Gordon's words, as "citizens without sovereignty." Although it sanctioned civil associations, for too long, the state was unwilling to tolerate the existence of a political public sphere that could have allowed the full development of the process that associations began.

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