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I would like to thank the Commission for this opportunity. I would also like to thank the commission, the State Department, the USAID, and our courageous Russian NGOs who have been working with us on NGO law.

I understand that other panelists will provide with background on democratic developments in Russia. I have been asked to focus on NGO law.

We're currently in the process of finalizing the comprehensive analysis of the NGO law. But this afternoon, I would like to address only four key issues: its extensive reporting requirements for all NGOs; excessive governmental control over activities of NGOs; broad list of reasons for denial of registration of NGOs; and also, issues of monitoring and implementation.

Let me take next three minutes to explain.

The new law requires all NGOs to report on intended use of money, how you use the money, and also on beneficiaries. Then your reporting requirements are going to affect not only human rights groups but all NGOs, if you imagine abused women seeking assistance from NGOs knowing that these NGOs will have to provide their name to the government authorities.

And yet, if NGOs fail to provide the required information, they can be terminated.

To make matters worse, the government can prohibit funding of any activities for very broad reasons, for example, if they can see that activities are contradictory or a threat for Russia's cultural heritage or unique character.

Second, the government has overly broad authority to control NGOs. Using but one example, government officials can participate in any internal meeting or event conducted by an NGO.

BROWNBACK: They can participate in any meeting under this law?

BOURJAILY: They have authority. They can decide in which meeting to participate, and they have the right to participate in any internal meeting or event.

Suppose, for example, a Russian NGO wants to plan next advocacy campaign. The government can sit in the planning meeting. That's making it virtually impossible to carry over the activities. And this is the definite intrusion of the government into their private space.

The Council of Europe, in its opinion on the draft NGO law, has stated that government has only authority to review activities and to request documents when there's valid reason exist to believe that the NGO in question does not comply with existing legislation. And this recommendation clearly has not been met in the adopted law.

Third, denials of registration. There's a broad list of reasons which are not very well-defined. Some of these reasons are if the goals of established of the following NGO are contradictory to or create a threat to unique character, cultural heritage, and national interest of the Russian Federation.

That's the same argument I had presented earlier in regards to reporting requirements. And my colleagues and I are still in the process of trying to interpret, trying to define what these terms actually mean.

The fourth and the last issue is monitoring and implementation. Some have asked: Why are we concerned about the law, even though it's not yet been enforced? The first reason is that several provisions in this law are raising red flags.

ICNL has been assisting with the NGO legislation in over 90 countries, and several countries have used very similar provisions, misusing, abusing them to restrain civil society.

That said, this will be my last point. I agree that it is important to monitor the implementation of the law. Some have told us that the law will not have negative effect on Russian civil society.

Let's see. Indeed, we call upon Russian government to establish a joint nonpartisan body which would include all interested parties to monitor the implementation of the new law. And perhaps there will be no problems with it, and perhaps there will be problems. And then we will see how the Russian government is going to deal with this problem.

Thank you.