

# The GONGO Challenge: Preserving Open Dialogue in OSCE Meetings

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## Abstract

This paper examines the growing presence of government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) in international platforms, using the example of OSCE human dimension meetings and focusing on cases from Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Drawing on field observations from 2018 to 2025, it analyzes GONGOs' tactics, including diluting norms, crowding out independent voices, discrediting critics, and challenging the universality of human rights. These organizations function as tools of authoritarian "sharp power," exploiting the OSCE's open architecture to advance state narratives, simulate civic engagement, and undermine institutional credibility. The paper situates this phenomenon within broader debates on authoritarian internationalism and virtual politics, showing how GONGOs blend propaganda, procedural manipulation, and rhetorical strategies such as whataboutism to defend repressive regimes. It concludes with recommendations to strengthen OSCE resilience, preserve inclusivity, and counter disinformation without undermining the principles of openness and pluralism that are central to the Organization's mandate.

## Keywords

GONGOs, OSCE human dimension, authoritarianism, disinformation

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## Introduction

This paper examines the government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGO) phenomenon within the OSCE context and situates it in the broader crisis of liberal internationalism. Over the past three decades, these organizations have become a defining fea-

ture of contemporary authoritarian and hybrid regimes' engagement with civil society. Initially emerging in the post-Cold War period as states sought to manage or emulate the burgeoning NGO sector, GONGOs serve as instruments through which governments simulate pluralism, co-opt independent activism, and legitimize state narratives domestically and internationally. Far from being marginal anomalies, GONGOs now operate across diverse political systems, from Russia and China to Egypt and Azerbaijan, and

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increasingly participate in multilateral forums where they amplify official positions and crowd out independent voices.

For decades, the OSCE has stood as one of the most open and inclusive multilateral forums, offering civil society an unparalleled space to raise human rights concerns directly with participating States. Many OSCE meetings allow the open participation of civil society representatives on equal terms with government representatives. OSCE rules for NGO participation are simpler than those of most other international organizations; the only grounds for exclusion are if organizations “resort to the use of violence or publicly condone terrorism or the use of violence.”<sup>1</sup> NGOs have equal access to the speakers list and can organize side events. Yet this very openness has become a vulnerability. Over the past two decades, GONGOs have grown increasingly active at OSCE human dimension meetings, particularly the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference (WHDC), and Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings (SHDMs). These GONGOs, while presenting themselves as independent civil society organizations, are in reality extensions of authoritarian states that deploy them to distort public debate, discredit genuine activists, and reshape the OSCE’s liberal norms from within.

Drawing on direct observation of ten OSCE human dimension meetings between 2018 and 2025, along with informal discussions with participants, OSCE offi-

cial, and independent activists, this study combines ethnographic observation, content analysis of speeches and documents, and triangulation through interviews and online archives. These field data are complemented by insights from the author’s longer monograph (*Unmasking GONGOs as Agents of Illiberalism*, 2024),<sup>2</sup> which provides the conceptual framework and comparative cases.

The paper proceeds in five main sections. The first section traces the historical and conceptual evolution of GONGOs as tools of authoritarian resilience, situating their rise within broader global trends of autocratic consolidation and the international diffusion of “sharp power.” The second section problematizes the conventional binary between GONGOs and independent NGOs, demonstrating the porous boundaries and hybrid realities of civil society under authoritarian regimes. The third section examines how GONGOs perform at OSCE human dimension meetings, analyzing their tactics of narrative construction, procedural manipulation, and disinformation as forms of “virtual politics” that simulate democratic engagement. The fourth section explores how these activities contribute to undermining the OSCE’s credibility by both eroding the Organization’s open and pluralistic ethos and advancing the normative challenge to the universality of human rights. Finally, the conclusion proposes a set of policy recommendations aimed at reinforcing the OSCE’s resilience—through transparency, procedural safeguards, and strengthened

collaboration with independent civil society—without compromising its foundational commitment to openness and dialogue.

### **Spotting GONGOs: Tools of influence**

The resilience of autocracies is sustained not solely through coercion but through sophisticated strategies of co-optation and the deliberate structuring of civil society. Authoritarian regimes have developed both formal and informal mechanisms of influence, notably through the establishment of GONGOs. While the concept of GONGOs has roots in Soviet-era practices,<sup>3</sup> the proliferation of such organizations over the past two decades marks a significant evolution in terms of the sophistication of their operations and messaging, which combine old propaganda tools with new technologies, including social media. These organizations often receive extensive political, financial, and logistical backing from the state, enabling them to bypass burdensome administrative regulations, such as restrictive registration procedures that typically hinder independent NGOs. In return for this privileged status, GONGOs align closely with official narratives, engage in self-censorship, and avoid criticizing government policies. Their outputs, including social media content, public statements, and media articles, often mirror or amplify state propaganda and disinformation campaigns. By occupying these spaces, some GONGOs successfully attract for-

eign funding and engage emerging social constituencies, trying to position themselves as critical civil society actors.

GONGOs also operate transnationally and have been increasingly active in international forums. Chinese GONGOs, for example, play a visible role during the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, endorsing Beijing's positions and discrediting independent critics.<sup>4</sup> Similar patterns have emerged with GONGO participation at the Summit of the Americas (Cuba and Venezuela) and the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (Cambodia and Myanmar), where they serve to legitimize authoritarian narratives and mask domestic repression.<sup>5</sup>

GONGO involvement has been particularly evident at the HDIM in Warsaw, especially since Kazakhstan's bid for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2008. In that context, Astana mobilized GONGOs to contest criticism of its human rights record and present the regime as committed to political reform and compliance with OSCE standards. Since then, GONGOs from other authoritarian states such as Azerbaijan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have established a presence at HDIMs and other OSCE human dimension meetings, adapting their tactics over time to reinforce state narratives.

### **Beyond the binary: Addressing the GONGO-NGO distinction**

GONGOs are generally understood as state-created entities designed to advan-

ce governmental agendas, distinguishing them from independent NGOs initiated by citizen groups without official affiliation. While NGOs typically address societal concerns and may critique state policies, GONGOs are often viewed with skepticism for presenting a façade of civic engagement that obscures government shortcomings and simulates democratic values.

However, GONGOs are not a monolithic category, and the conventional binary of GONGOs versus NGOs fails to capture the complexity of civil society dynamics. Civil society is not always wholly autonomous from the state, nor solely a vehicle of opposition. Instead, it acts within a web of material exchanges, personal networks, and institutional linkages that sometimes blurs the lines between state and non-state actors.<sup>6</sup> GONGOs can act as state surrogates in areas where the government has little appetite to engage, such as education, healthcare, women's rights, and environmental protection. Some NGOs may be viewed as GONGOs to the extent that they receive state-controlled funding or are led by individuals affiliated with the government; conversely, they may regain independence as those ties weaken. In very authoritarian settings where civil liberties are heavily restricted, such as in Turkmenistan, the distinction between GONGOs and NGOs becomes especially ambiguous, with genuine autonomy being the exception rather than the norm.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, despite their ties to political power, GONGOs are not always mere conduits of state propaganda. Some

contribute to social or economic initiatives and play a role in fostering limited social cohesion.<sup>8</sup> Their functions can therefore extend beyond simple state replication.

At OSCE events, although many GONGOs exemplify the classic model—i.e. state-established or state-funded organizations directed toward advancing government narratives—their diversity is also evident. Some were initially independent but have since been co-opted. Others follow a dual-track strategy, seeking international legitimacy and funding for their work while concurrently promoting state-aligned messaging that questions the universality of human rights and casts doubt on Western institutions. These tactics reflect the constrained operating space of civil society under authoritarian rule, where organizations must often align with official narratives to survive. Moreover, some “ghost” GONGOs, which appear to have been solely created to disseminate government viewpoints in international arenas, have registered for events without even basic organizational transparency.

Overall, a wide range of GONGOs routinely participate in OSCE meetings. Recognizing their multidimensional nature, the following sections examine them as instruments of authoritarian regimes: organizations that disseminate disinformation, try to sanitize government records despite serious human rights abuses, seek to discredit independent NGOs and dissenting individuals, and challenge the OSCE's mandate and the universality of fundamental freedoms.

## **Performing democracy: GONGOs and the transnational spread of virtual politics**

Andrew Wilson has coined the term “virtual politics” to describe the illusion of democratic process in post-Soviet political systems, whereby sophisticated techniques mimic democracy and entire political parties and opposition figures are fabricated—phantom entities without substance or genuine political power.<sup>9</sup> Rather than relying solely on overt repression, virtual politics manipulates public perception to maintain control, projecting the appearance of pluralism while consolidating state dominance. Mass media and state-controlled civil society serve as key vehicles in constructing and amplifying these artificial narratives.

At OSCE meetings, GONGOs have acted as agents of virtual politics, employing seemingly democratic rhetoric to depict their governments as committed defenders of human rights and the rule of law, aiming to reinforce their domestic and international legitimacy. They have promoted such narratives through three primary strategies. First, they assert that their countries’ constitutional and legal frameworks are in full alignment with international human rights standards. Second, they offer sweeping, unsubstantiated claims intended to demonstrate their governments’ respect for the rule of law and human rights. Third, they employ rhetorical devices, particularly hyperbolic language, to highlight their statements by magnifying the si-

gnificance or insignificance of matters.<sup>10</sup> GONGOs from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan have used these approaches to highlight supposed progress in political reforms, gender equality, and media freedom. During the 2024 WHDC, for instance, several Kazakhstani GONGOs, including the National Endowment for Prosperity, asserted that constitutional amendments had reduced presidential powers and expanded parliamentary oversight—claims that were contradicted by independent monitoring organizations.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, GONGOs have constructed and disseminated narratives with the explicit aim of engendering broad-based endorsement of these perspectives, including among Western stakeholders. Their narratives delineate a significant dichotomy between democratic societies and their authoritarian counterparts.<sup>12</sup> While independent civil society organizations participating in OSCE human dimension events have sought to expose human rights violations, including those occurring within their own countries, GONGOs representing authoritarian states have projected a sanitized, often flawless portrayal of human rights conditions in their respective territories.

## **Rebutting criticism and opposition: Defensive narrative strategies**

GONGOs’ narrative strategies have gone beyond merely projecting an overly positive image of their home countries. In in-

ternational forums such as the OSCE, independent civil society organizations and opposition figures can speak out with far less censorship than at home and can more safely raise concerns and criticism about human rights abuses. In response, GONGOs have assumed a central role in countering these critical voices with competing, defensive state-aligned narratives.

At the human dimension conferences, most GONGOs have adopted a posture of categorical denial in the face of criticism related to the implementation of core OSCE commitments, including democratic elections, media freedom, and religious liberty. They seek to invalidate these criticisms by claiming, ostensibly on behalf of civil society and the general public, that the actual conditions in their countries diverge sharply from the accounts presented by independent NGOs and international human rights organizations. This defensive strategy is especially evident in their responses to allegations of electoral manipulation and lack of competitiveness, such as concerns about the conduct of recent elections in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, as documented by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Claiming to represent the voice of their country's people, GONGOs have argued that citizens have freely participated in fair and transparent elections, selecting their leaders without coercion.

Additionally, at the 2023 and 2024 OSCE human dimension meetings, GONGOs from Uzbekistan and Russia actively sought to deflect international

criticism of state repression and military aggression. Uzbekistani GONGOs such as *Jas Pikir*<sup>13</sup> and the Karakalpak Branch of the Children and Families Support Association<sup>14</sup> sought to reframe the 2022 unrest in Karakalpakstan as a violent insurrection rather than a peaceful protest suppressed by force. Russian GONGOs such as the Information Group on Crimes Against the Person defended Moscow's invasion of Ukraine as a humanitarian operation aimed at "denazification,"<sup>15</sup> while Azerbaijani counterparts such as the Turkish Institute for Democracy and Human Rights justified the 2023 military offensive in Karabakh as a peacekeeping effort.<sup>16</sup> Tajikistani GONGOs like the Association of Tajik Youth in the Russian Federation routinely denied reports of repression against journalists and opposition parties, claiming that the media in Tajikistan enjoyed "complete freedom."<sup>17</sup>

GONGOs have also frequently employed whataboutism, a rhetorical tactic that deflects criticism by highlighting perceived double standards on unrelated grievances, to undermine accountability and divert attention from authoritarian practices.<sup>18</sup> This strategy, rooted in Soviet-era propaganda that deflected scrutiny of the gulag system by invoking issues such as US slavery, has been revived and intensified in contemporary Russia since the mid-2000s.<sup>19</sup> At OSCE human dimension meetings, GONGOs have operationalized whataboutism to counter Western criticism. For example, Russian GONGOs have cited the imprisonment of Julian Assange to question the United States'

commitment to press freedom, or drawn parallels between the annexation of Crimea and peaceful state transformations such as the reunification of Germany or the dissolution of Czechoslovakia.

Moreover, GONGOs have actively manufactured alleged threats of destabilization or terrorism, purposefully sowing confusion by accusing independent organizations and opposition groups of having violent intentions. They routinely label opposition figures, journalists, and activists as criminals, terrorists, or foreign agents, framing them as a security threat and advancing narratives that official state representatives may struggle to convey with credibility. During Russia's 2019 campaign against Crimean journalists, for example, Russian GONGOs echoed state rhetoric by branding detained reporters as terrorists. Azerbaijani GONGOs similarly accused imprisoned journalists of misconduct or fraudulent accreditation, while Tajikistani GONGOs portrayed exiled activists as fugitives evading justice. In 2024, multiple Uzbekistani GONGOs were mobilized to discredit human rights defenders and opposition voices, particularly those who had criticized the government's violent response to the unrest in Karakalpakstan. These GONGOs accused exiled activists of corruption, foreign interference, and criminal behavior, closely mirroring state strategies aimed at vilifying the opposition and suppressing scrutiny.

## **GONGOs as tools of sharp power: Challenging the OSCE**

Beyond discrediting critics and opposition figures, GONGOs have played a pivotal role in bolstering the sharp power strategies of authoritarian regimes. The concept of sharp power, introduced by Christopher Walker, refers to tactics aimed at manipulating and undermining the integrity of independent institutions, including international organizations.<sup>20</sup> Countries such as Russia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan have undertaken sustained efforts to challenge both the mandate and the activities of the OSCE, seeking to weaken its ability to serve as a platform for open dialogue and questioning its commitment to defending fundamental human rights. At OSCE human rights meetings, GONGOs have played an instrumental role in advancing these efforts through several disruptive tactics.

### **Efforts to regulate NGO participation in OSCE events**

First, GONGOs have echoed their national delegations in advocating for restrictive measures aimed at limiting the participation of independent NGOs in OSCE events.

Chapter IV, paragraph 16 of the 1992 Helsinki Document outlines the criteria for NGO participation in OSCE events. It specifies only that “persons or organizations which resort to the use of violence or publicly condone terrorism or the use of

violence” can be barred from OSCE meetings.<sup>21</sup> No other grounds for exclusion are mentioned in the OSCE regulations. However, although the decision has traditionally fallen to the Chairman-in-Office, some states have pushed for a formal vetting process that could enable them to potentially block unfavorable NGOs. Russia—where judicial independence is lacking and politically motivated prosecutions are widespread—has proposed barring participation by individuals with criminal records and restricting access for NGOs not legally registered in their home countries. Such proposals echo domestic restrictions used to silence dissent and, if adopted, would serve to exclude independent voices under the pretense of procedural legitimacy.

The push by certain states to block the participation of specific NGOs has escalated in recent years. In 2016, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan walked out of the HDIM in protest of the presence of NGOs from their respective countries of which they did not approve. From 2018 to 2023, Türkiye boycotted the Warsaw conference, objecting to the participation of NGOs it had designated as affiliated with the Fethullah Gülen movement. Several GONGOs from Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have demanded the exclusion of certain NGOs from the HDIM, branding them as corrupt, terrorist, or extremist organizations.

## Taking up space at OSCE events

While efforts to ban the participation of NGOs they deem troublesome have so far met with limited success, GONGOs have adopted alternative strategies—including taking up space and time at OSCE meetings—in order to marginalize independent organizations. At HDIMs, the number of oral interventions per session is capped, usually at fifty. If that many speakers register, the time allocated to each drops from five minutes to just one or two, reducing the quality and depth of the interventions. In practice, the large presence of GONGOs has meant that some civil society organizations critical of authoritarian governments have been unable to speak at all in the most contentious sessions (such as those dealing with elections, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly) or that their criticisms have been eclipsed by GONGO praise. Before Russia started boycotting most OSCE human rights events, government representatives from Russia were seen at the Warsaw meeting assisting their GONGOs in cutting the speaker registration line, thereby pushing independent NGOs further back in the speaking order or even preventing them from being among the first fifty able to deliver their statements.<sup>22</sup>

This manipulation of procedure has been paired with obstructionist behavior. GONGOs have frequently made off-topic statements that require moderator intervention, while government delegations from authoritarian countries have raised

procedural objections to cut off independent NGOs' statements on the grounds that they were off topic, all while consistently remaining silent when their affiliated GONGOs engaged in the same behavior.<sup>23</sup>

More recently, GONGOs have adapted to procedural changes that have limited their delegations' ability to respond to criticism. For instance, between 2022 and 2024, Warsaw conference sessions no longer permitted official delegations to exercise their right of reply orally. During this period, several GONGOs informally assumed this role. For example, Azerbaijani GONGOs responded directly in their statements to criticisms raised by independent NGOs and other delegations, particularly those from Armenia, thereby circumventing formal restrictions on state rebuttals.

GONGOs' obstructionist tactics have also included the use of verbal abuse and disinformation campaigns against independent civil society actors. Moderators have, on several occasions, been forced to call for decorum due to aggressive language. One notable example occurred during a human dimension meeting in Vienna in June 2025, when, in response to interventions by several representatives of Armenian civil society who had raised concerns about the rights of Armenian refugees and alleged war crimes committed by Azerbaijan, Ahmad Shahidov, director of an Azerbaijani GONGO, accused Armenia of engaging in revanchism and concluded that "during the next war, Armenia may completely lose its sovereignty, and the

Azerbaijani army may drink Turkish tea in Yerevan, pray and perform namaz in Yerevan's Blue Mosque."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to verbal attacks, some GONGOs have resorted to spreading false printed materials. In 2024, Uzbekistani GONGOs circulated a fake leaflet bearing the logo of the independent NGO Freedom of Eurasia during the Warsaw meeting, apparently in an effort to discredit the NGO's work and sow confusion among other participants. These actions reflect a growing trend of hostile behavior that has sought not only to neutralize dissenting voices but to actively damage the reputations and credibility of independent civil society actors within international spaces.

Some GONGOs have also challenged the credibility of the OSCE and ODIHR. Usen Suleimen, founder of the National Endowment for Prosperity, published an article accusing ODIHR of welcoming "corrupt officials, fugitive oligarchs, thieves and criminals" who, in his view, exploited human rights discourse for personal gain. He further alleged that conference organizers had intentionally sidelined his organization's interventions while privileging statements from "quasi-human rights activists" and "extremist structures," accusing them of replacing legitimate voices with paid operatives serving a "criminal oligopoly."<sup>25</sup>

## Challenging the principles of universal human rights

Finally, and importantly, GONGOs form a key component of the authoritarian toolkit deployed to challenge the normative foundations of international organizations. They amplify the rhetoric of authoritarian leaders who seek to recast human rights and democratic principles as allegedly alien constructs, culturally incompatible with their nations' historical legacies and societal values. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, for example, Putin's rhetoric has become increasingly confrontational, presenting Western liberal values as not only decadent but morally degenerate, at times even equating them with the normalization of pedophilia.<sup>26</sup>

In this alternative narrative, democracy is not rejected outright but reinterpreted through the lens of sovereignty and state control. Models such as Russia's "managed democracy" or China's "socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics" are presented as legitimate, culturally appropriate alternatives to the democratic standards enshrined in OSCE commitments. Echoing the discourse of figures such as Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping,<sup>27</sup> GONGOs have contributed to a broader narrative that portrays liberalism as obsolete and a threat to security and social stability and frames Western advocacy for democracy and human rights as interference in the sovereign affairs of other states. Within this worldview, at OSCE meetings they have advocated to redefine

fundamental rights, proposing an alleged necessary recalibration of the balance between civil liberties and national security. Invoking the global threat of terrorism, they advance the argument that rights such as freedom of expression and assembly may be subordinated to public order and state sovereignty, thereby further undermining the universality of human rights norms.

## Conclusion and recommendations

GONGOs have become key instruments of authoritarian influence. Presented as independent civil society groups, they instead promote regime interests and act as updated successors to Soviet-era propaganda. By exploiting the openness of liberal democracies, especially free speech protections that do not exist at home, GONGOs spread disinformation, undermine democratic values, and work to legitimize illiberal narratives. Their activities go beyond international meetings, with many maintaining websites and active social media channels to amplify state messaging.

At OSCE human dimension meetings, GONGOs are used to discredit independent NGOs and normalize authoritarian practices, threatening the integrity of one of the few remaining platforms where genuine civil society can speak openly to governments. Addressing this phenomenon requires coordinated attention from democratic states, international organizations, and real NGOs through monitoring,

analysis, and sustained advocacy. Countering GONGOs is not procedural house-keeping; it is part of a broader effort to defend human rights and protect multilateral institutions from authoritarian capture.

While remaining its greatest strength, the OSCE's inclusive design can also be a vulnerability. To preserve space for independent civil society and prevent authoritarian regimes from denying entry to activists they do not like, the OSCE does not have a formal vetting system. The Organization's consensus-based decision-making prevents it from sanctioning states that abuse its forums. This institutional weakness mirrors a broader crisis facing liberal multilateralism. Just as the United Nations struggles with the politicization of the Human Rights Council, the OSCE must contend with the susceptibility of its procedures to misuse. GONGOs exploit this vacuum, seeking to transform the OSCE from a space of accountability into one of confusion and contestation.

An effective response requires a comprehensive and principled strategy, one that acknowledges the complexity of international engagement without compromising the foundational values of the OSCE. The emphasis should be on identifying the presence of GONGOs, calling out their narratives, and countering their disinformation campaigns, particularly their strategic manipulation of language and misuse of civil society frameworks.

Installing some type of vetting mechanism aimed at prohibiting GONGOs from participating in OSCE events would be incompatible with the Organization's principles, especially its commitment to openness, pluralism, and freedom of expression, and would likely cause collateral damage by also undermining the participation of independent NGOs. It would also be incorrect to cast GONGOs as uniformly detrimental agents of disinformation, or to idealize independent NGOs as inherently virtuous. For example, lack of state funding alone is not a reliable indicator of a civil society organization's credibility or independence; many legitimate organizations, such as the National Endowment for Democracy and the United States Institute of Peace, receive government support while maintaining transparent operations and a strong commitment to democratic values. These institutions do not act at the behest of their funders but rather operate within ethical mandates and robust accountability mechanisms.

Equally important is avoiding content-based exclusion of GONGOs. OSCE regulations rightly prohibit the participation of individuals or organizations that promote or use violence or terrorism, but political alignment or controversial rhetoric does not constitute valid grounds for exclusion. Disqualifying groups based on their views would set a dangerous precedent, inviting authoritarian regimes to apply the same standards to silence independent voices. This risk is compounded by the fact that the decision to permit or

exclude organizations lies with the OSCE Chairmanship, a role that has at times been filled by authoritarian states with questionable human rights records. During Kazakhstan's 2010 Chairmanship, for instance, several NGOs were excluded from the Warsaw meeting following objections from Turkmenistan and Russia. Attempts to ban GONGOs could thus backfire, creating a mechanism that authoritarian states might exploit to restrict civil society participation.

Instead, a more effective approach would be to confront GONGOs' rhetoric and activities while ensuring robust engagement with genuine civil society actors. Democratic states should work in partnership with independent NGOs to monitor, document, and publicly expose instances where GONGOs distort facts, disrupt dialogue, or serve as state proxies. A practical step would be the creation of a standing working group composed of civil society representatives, researchers, and regional experts focused on OSCE processes. This group could monitor GONGO participation in OSCE meetings, trace their affiliations with state structures, and document inconsistencies between proclaimed missions and observed behavior. The group's findings could be disseminated in an annual report presented to OSCE delegations and made available to the broader public. Such transparency efforts should be replicated in other international forums, including the United Nations, to strengthen global resistance to authoritarian co-optation of civil society mechanisms.

Effective countermeasures are also needed during OSCE meetings themselves. Participating States should be encouraged to publicly challenge the legitimacy of GONGOs during sessions, making clear that their interventions are recognized as disingenuous and politically motivated. To support this, the OSCE should reinstate the oral right of reply, a valuable tool for clarifying distortions and challenging misinformation in real time.

Moderators also play a critical role in maintaining the integrity of discussions. They must ensure that all speakers adhere to the agenda and that no organization monopolizes speaking time to pursue unrelated agendas. Moderators should intervene if GONGOs use the platform to impersonate official delegations, advocate violence, or issue personal attacks on independent activists. Statements that accuse others of criminality, threaten legal action, or reveal personal information cross the line of acceptable discourse in international meetings and should be explicitly disallowed. Such actions are essential to preserving the integrity of the meeting sessions within the OSCE framework.

## Notes

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  - 23 Numerous examples demonstrate this complicity. While the delegation of Tajikistan regularly interrupts the interventions of opposition groups by arguing that they are off topic, it remains systematically silent on the off-topic statements of Tajikistani GONGOs dedicated to denigrating the opposition.
  - 24 The author of these statements himself circulated his threats on his social media platforms. See, for example, Ahmad Shahidov, "A New Conflict Could Result in the Complete Loss of Armenia's Sovereignty," posted June 4, 2025, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pfNXl6Pwa8>
  - 25 Usen Suleimen, "OSCE/ODIHR Warsaw Conference: Double Standards Have Not Been Abolished," National Endowment for Prosperity, October 19, 2024, <https://nepfund.org/tpost/x5b57de621-osceodihr-warsaw-conference-double-stand>
  - 26 Pauline Brault, "Poutine ressasse sa haine contre l'Occident un an après le début de l'invasion en Ukraine," *Huffington Post*, February 22, 2023, [https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/international/article/poutine-ressasse-sa-haine-contre-l-occident-un-an-apres-le-debut-de-l-invasion-en-ukraine\\_214350.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/international/article/poutine-ressasse-sa-haine-contre-l-occident-un-an-apres-le-debut-de-l-invasion-en-ukraine_214350.html)
  - 27 A. J. Nathan, "China's Challenge," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 156–70.