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of the Scout Movement
Organisation Mondiale
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January 2000

Questions and answers on Scouting in Russia

An interview with Dr Jacques Moreillon, Secretary General, World Organization of the Scout Movement

- Q. The situation of Scouting in Russia appears somewhat complicated to the outsiders. Could you enlighten us on it.
- A. Yes, it is a complex situation, mainly because it is born of a complex history. It would be difficult to give you all details, but I can try and tell you who were and are the main institutional actors and how they interrelate.
- Q. From what we know it is a history that starts a long time ago.
- A. Indeed. Scouting was born in Russia at the time of the Tsar. The Soviets persecuted and prohibited it. In exile, the Russian diaspora used Scouting to preserve Russian culture, language, traditions, religion, etc., amongst young people born outside Russia, just as the Ukrainians, Armenians or Baltics did. These Russian Scouts abroad had a complicated history, with controversies between two groupings: NORS (National Organization of Russian Scouts) and ORUR (the Organisation of Russian Young Razvetchiks).

In 1989-90, as a result of the Perestroïka, ORUR created a Russian entity, called OrUR (Organisation of Young Razvetchiks). At the same time, in the early nineties, a number of other Scout entities were created, such as

- FSR (Federation of Scouts of Russia),
- FOS (Federation of Orthodox Scouts),
- and more local entities, such as the St. Vladimir Scouts, NSOT, OST and groups in the Autonomous Republics of Komis, Chuvashia and Udmuntia,

each one growing pretty much in isolation from the others, in spite of efforts of the World Scout Bureau to encourage them to constitute a single National Scout Organisation.

- Q. And is it still the case today?
- A. Yes and no! In fact what happened was the simultaneous but separate creation of two entities in April 1998.
- Q. Can you be more specific?

A. Well on one hand, on 29 April 1998, NORS abroad concluded an agreement with part of OrUR in Russia – colloquially called “Red OrUR”, as opposed to “White OrUR” which was not part of the agreement – consisting in creating, together

with FSR and the St. Vladimir Scouts, a new entity called NORS-R (National Organisation of Russian Scouts – Razvetchik) or NORS in English.

Q. And what about the others?

A. The next day, on 30 April 1998, another entity was created, called VNSO in Russian and ARNSO in English: the All Russia National Scout Organisation, which was composed mainly of breakaway groups from FSR (mainly the Union of Scouts of Moscow), the FOS and all other smaller groups and those of Autonomous Republics.

Q. So now you had two main groupings: NORS and ARNSO. But, apart from their composition, what were the differences?

A. One main difference is of constitutional nature.

Q. Can you be a bit more precise?

A. Well the ARNSO draft Constitution is quite clever, in the sense that it adapts itself to both the specificity of Russia and the requirements of the WOSM Constitution. Its authors have managed to conceive a solution which has “the best of both worlds”, in the sense that it combines the advantages of a single organisation and those of a federation: in fact, at first glance it looks like a federation, but in reality it is closer to a single organisation. Moreover, it answers the requirements of the Autonomous Republics of Russia.

It “looks like a federation” because it has three groupings:

- a) the FOS and other confessional Scout associations,
- b) all Autonomous Republics,
- c) an Open Association (called “Scouts of Russia”) which brings into a single entity all those who are neither (a) nor (b),

But at the top legislative, executive and presidential levels, these entities constitute one single entity, with - legally - a sufficiently strong leadership and enough cohesion to guarantee the unity and quality of the ensemble.

In fact, it is quite a clever solution, not only compatible with the WOSM Constitution, but which could possibly serve as a model in other countries.

Q. What about the NORS draft Constitution?

A. Well, unfortunately, it is much more problematic. In fact, as we wrote to its President in November 1998, it had innumerable problems, amongst others, in terms of

- goals and objectives, which could be those of any youth organisation,
- institutional membership: it is an open-ended federation,
- individual membership,

- democratic decision-making process,
- autonomous republics.

Q. Can you summarise the main problems?

A. Well, if I was to select the main problems, out of many more, I would summarise them under three headings:

Decision-making process

It is a barely disguised dictatorship under the former Soviet model.

NORS has three decision-making levels:

- the *Congress*, which meets once every four years;
- the *Conference* which meets every year;
- the *Council* of seven members, meeting twice a year.

The dictatorial nature of the system comes from a very simple (and well tried) formula: the Congress - although it is supposed to be the “Highest organ” of NORS - has *no set membership*; it is the Council (not even the Conference) which decides who will participate in the Congress. And it is the Congress which elects the Council! In other words the present Council has the possibility of designating who will be its own electors four years from now. This is more or less how the Central Committee of the communist party of the USSR maintained itself *legally* in power for so long!

Open-ended federation

At first glance, it appears to be a single organisation. But, when one looks at it, one realises that, by a clever combination of articles, two results are obtained: firstly it is a federation (in which FSR and OrUR - although not mentioned by name - can perfectly well keep their respective legal identities as “independent Scout Associations” with their respective Conferences, Committees, etc.), and secondly (and worse!) it is an “open-ended” federation, in the sense that (again!) the Council (not even the Conference) can “admit” any number of new similar independent entities, their only requirement for belonging to NORS being that they “conform to the Constitution of NORS”.

Thus – apart from the fact that already two “open”, non confessional, associations such as OrUR or FSR would be incompatible with WOSM’s requirements – we could face an endless multiplication of new Associations, on the simple whim of the Council ... which is of course quite unacceptable.

Scouting is hardly present

Finally, there is very little about Scouting in the Constitution, be it in terms of purpose or principles or method. Apart from the Scout law and a passing mention of the Scout method in an article about associate members, this could be the Constitution of any youth movement, ... although even the youth element is hardly present in it.

Q. So what did the World Scout Bureau do on the basis of these two projects of NORS and ARNSO?

- A. Well, basically two things: we encouraged them, on one hand, to talk to each other in order to arrive at a common constitutional project acceptable to WOSM and, on the other hand, to talk to us, in the case of ARNSO to improve their draft Constitution on points of detail and, especially, to establish separate Constitutions for its member associations, and in the case of NORS to fully understand why their draft Constitution was an absolute non-starter.
- Q. And what happened?
- A. Here again, it is a long story. But the bottom line is that ARNSO not only worked with us (and is still working with us) on its draft Constitutions, but also repeatedly proposed a dialogue to NORS. But to no avail. NORS refused any serious dialogue both with ARNSO and with the World Scout Bureau. We finally gave them a deadline but, here again, it did not lead to any dialogue. There was an offer to organise some kind of a Congress, where one could oppose both draft Constitutions and “let the best one win”! But this completely ignored the fact that the NORS Constitution was, as I said above and for the reasons summarised, an absolute non-starter for WOSM.
- Q. In other words, there was a deadlock?
- A. Indeed! And, what is worse is that there was no sign of this deadlock being broken in Russia itself as long as NORS was neither ready to change its Constitution nor willing to dialogue with ARNSO.
- Q. So what was the next step?
- A. Well, confronted with this situation, the World Scout Committee considered that it would be improper and unfair to let an entity with a non-constitutional approach to World Scouting block the WOSM recognition process of Scouting in Russia, especially when another entity had a sound constitutional basis for such recognition; it therefore decided to “cut the Gordian knot” and to proceed with a process that should lead to the recognition of ARNSO as THE National Scout Organisation of Russia. The Chairman of the World Scout Committee sent the following letter, on November 16th, 1999, to the Presidents of both NORS and ARNSO:

Dear friends,

1. *At its meeting of 14 November 1999 in Cairo, the World Scout Committee has considered the situation of Scouting in Russia.*
2. *It has noted that, while Scouting exists again in fact, though under various forms, in what is today the Federation of Russia, since 1989-1990, it has constituted itself since April 1998 (after having taken the shape of different, self-proclaimed entities over the past years) into two main groupings, namely:*
 - *the “National Organization of Russian Scouts” (in Russian NORS-R, in English NORS), founded on 29 April 1998 in St. Petersburg and composed of*
 - *the Federation of Scouts of Russia (FSR),*
 - *the Organization of Young Razvetchiks (OrUR),*
 - *the St. Vladimir Scouts,**with Mr Alexander Karasiiov as President*

- *the “All Russia National Scout Organization” (in Russian VNSO, in English ARNSO), founded on 30 April 1998 in Moscow and composed of:*
 - *the Federation of Orthodox Scouts (FOS),*
 - *the Russian Union of Scouts (RUS),*
 - *the Scout Association of the Autonomous Republics of Komis, Chuvashia and Udmuntia,*
 - *the Union of Scouts of Moscow and other groups previously belonging to FSR,*
 - *several smaller Scout associations (NSOD, OSJ, etc.)**with Mr Vladimir Gromov as President.*
- 3. *The World Scout Committee has also taken note that, constitutionally*
 - 3.1. *the draft Constitution of VNSO (which has been discussed in detail, both orally and in writing, with the World Scout Bureau at the request of VNSO) now provides a valid basis, according to the WOSM Constitution, on which to build a Russian National Scout Organization recognizable by World Scouting,*
 - 3.2. *whereas the draft Constitution presented by NORS is, on a number of key points, incompatible with the WOSM Constitution and that NORS has been warned of this in detail, and repeatedly, by the World Scout Bureau since 23 November 1998.*
- 4. *The Committee has regretted that the numerous and genuine attempts made by ARNSO to enter into dialogue with NORS (as recommended to both parties by the World Scout Bureau in order to arrive at a commonly acceptable Constitution compatible with that of WOSM) were not accepted by NORS; it has equally regretted that the various offers of direct dialogue made by the World Scout Bureau to NORS were also not accepted.*
- 5. *Convinced that it is very detrimental to the possibility of Russian Scouting to become a member of World Scouting that this deadlock be prolonged, the World Scout Committee has taken the following decision:*

The World Scout Committee

- ***decides*** *to open the way for the recognition of ARNSO as the only National Scout Organization of Russia under the WOSM Constitution.*
- ***requests*** *its Constitutions Committee to study the ARNSO Constitution, so as to present its recommendation for recognition, with possible amendments, to the meeting of the World Scout Committee in May 2000.*
- ***invites*** *all those Scouts who are at present members of NORS to join, as individuals, one or other of the Associations which are members of ARNSO, so as to avoid further division and later dissidence of Scouting in Russia.*
- ***requests*** *the Secretary General to make the present decision known throughout Russia and the Eurasia Scout Region through the WOSM Eurasia Regional Office and to inform the interested WOSM members of the above.*

Hoping that you will give all necessary follow-up to this decision, I am,

Sincerely yours,

*Garnet de la Hunt
Chairman
World Scout Committee*

Q. What should be the next step?

A. As indicated above, we are working on fine-tuning the ARNSO Constitution and studying the draft Constitution of its member associations.

Meanwhile, we can only encourage any Russian Scout (or Scout group) who wants to belong to WOSM one day to join either FOS or the Scouts of Russia or – if they are in an Autonomous Republic which has Scout members of ARNSO to join that Association. In that way they will be joining the future National Scout Organisation of Russia, which – when all legal procedures are completed – should be presented for recognition to the Constitutions Committee of the World Scout Committee, then to the World Committee itself.