

# CHARTER OF THE EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

**Adopted at the Founding Meeting in Prague on March 29, 2011**

## 1. General Provisions

**1.1.** The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (hereafter – Forum) is an open platform aimed at promoting cooperation between civil society in Russia and the European Union. The Forum serves as a permanent framework for interaction and exchange between civil society organizations from countries of the EU and Russia and for their influence on and dialogue with the EU and Russian public authorities and other European and Russian partners.

**1.2.** Members of the Forum are civil society organizations from the EU countries and Russia. Observers may also participate in the work of the Forum but they cannot participate in decision making.

**1.3.** Decisions of the Forum are taken by its members and are reflected in documents and statements voted or approved by them. Working languages of the Forum are equally English and Russian.

**1.4.** Other provisions concerning the Forum structure and functioning are regulated by the following articles of this Charter and other basic documents of the Forum, adopted by the General Assembly, in particular, by the Mission Statement of the Forum.

## 2. Membership in the Forum

**2.1.** Registered and non-registered non-profit and non-governmental organizations, civic initiatives and social movements, except political parties, religious communities, educational and scientific institutions, trade unions, and employers' organizations, which:

- share the values, goals and objectives of the Forum,
- have been, as a rule, active for at least one year,
- and possess recommendations from at least two Forum members, may become members of the Forum and participate in its activities.

**2.2.** Membership is valid for 5 years and may be extended upon the member's application submitted six months before the membership expiration date in a form of a simple statement confirming the organization's interest in continued membership.

**2.3.** When receiving an application for membership according to a form established by the Steering Committee, the Steering Committee shall evaluate the eligibility of the applicant, taking into consideration, in particular:

- are the basic documents and present and past activities of the applicant in line with the values, goals and objectives of the Forum, stated in its Mission;
- is the applicant a real, independent civil society organization or must it rather be deemed to be controlled by or serving the interests of another entity (such as a state, a political party, a corporation, etc) in a way that could undermine the independent functioning of the Forum;
- is the application signed by an authorized representative of the applicant.

The Steering Committee may request additional information about composition, finances and activities of the applicant in order to evaluate its eligibility.

**2.4.** The Steering Committee shall send its decision to the applicant without delay. If after a thorough evaluation the Steering Committee rejects an application, it shall include in its decision the concrete reasons for the rejection. The negative decision shall also be sent to all Forum participants before the next General Assembly, where it shall either be confirmed or overturned by a simple majority vote.

**2.5.** A Forum member can be excluded by the SC if:

- a member's activity contradicts values, goals and objectives of the Forum;

- a member has been inactive for more than two years;
- a member decides to withdraw from the Forum on its own will by informing the Steering Committee.

**2.6.** Applicants and members may appeal the decisions on their membership. For review of appeals and for cases of conflicts the General Assembly may create a Conflict Commission. The Commission has the right to suspend the membership of organisations immediately in case of serious violation. A full termination of the membership has to be approved by the General Assembly.

**2.7.** Member organisations have the right to found regional or national panels or alliances and thematic working groups. Panels, alliances and working groups are open to any member of the Forum. Panels, alliances and working groups may elect coordinators. The Steering Committee may consult with such panels and working groups regarding new applicants and other initiatives. The foundation of such regional and national panels and thematic working groups does not confine the right of each member organisation to apply individually for participation in the General Assembly or participation in other activities of the Forum.

### **3. Observers**

Organizations and individuals interested in the work of the Forum may apply to become observers. Decisions on observers' participation in the General Assembly or other Forum activities shall be taken by the Steering Committee.

### **4. General Assembly**

**4.1.** The General Assembly, composed of Forum members, is the highest decision making body of the Forum. The General Assembly establishes and terminates the Forum, adopts and amends its basic documents, determines its work programme and common positions, elects the Steering Committee of the Forum to guide the work of the Forum between meetings of the General Assembly, approves the budget and the audit of the Forum and the Steering Committee.

**4.2.** The General Assembly meets, as a rule, at least once a year. It is convened by the Steering Committee at least three months in advance by informing all members and by a public announcement. An extraordinary General Assembly may be convened by a decision of the Steering Committee. Alternatively, a proposal to convene an extraordinary General Assembly may be put forward by any member of the Forum. Steering Committee must put this proposal to an online voting by all members of the Forum if a proposal to convene an extraordinary General Assembly is initiated by a group of no less than 10 per cent of Forum members. Steering Committee must convene an extraordinary General Assembly if a proposal has been supported by voting of 50 per cent of the Forum members. An extraordinary General Assembly is to be held within two months after the demand is received by the Steering Committee.

**4.3.** Decisions of the General Assembly are made by a simple majority of the members taking part in the General Assembly. Decisions about modifications of the basic documents or termination of the Forum are made by two thirds majority of the members taking part in the General Assembly. Such issues put for voting have to be announced in the invitation for the General Assembly. One member organisation has only one vote. The quorum of the General Assembly consists of half of the General Assembly participants from the EU taking part in the General Assembly and half of the General Assembly participants from Russia taking part in the General Assembly.

**4.4.** Decisions concerning invitation of the Forum members to the meeting of the General Assembly are made by the Steering Committee on the basis of applications by members and must ensure regional and thematic balance. The number of the General Assembly participants is distributed between EU, Russia and international organizations at a ratio of approximately 50 to 40 to 10%.

**4.5.** Procedure of invitation to the General Assembly is defined by a special document, proposed by the Steering Committee and approved by the General Assembly by a simple majority of votes.

**4.6.** The General Assembly may delegate part of its competencies to the Steering Committee, but the right to constitute and to suspend the work of the Forum remains the exclusive right of the General Assembly.

## 5. Steering Committee of the Forum

**5.1.** The Steering Committee is the highest decision making body of the Forum between the General Assemblies. It convenes the General Assemblies and prepares them with regard to their content and organisation. It coordinates the work of the Forum on the basis of the basic documents of the Forum and the mandates by the General Assembly. The Steering Committee is bound by decisions of the General Assembly and reports to it.

**5.2.** The Steering Committee has a minimum 8 and maximum of 14 members, half from the EU and half from Russia, elected individually out of all Forum members for a two year term by the General Assembly by a simple majority of the attending representatives of the members participating in the voting. Members of the Steering Committee serve in individual capacity. Steering Committee members can be re-elected. Maximum duration of consecutive service of the Steering Committee members is six years. Composition of the Steering Committee should be regionally balanced and reflect the mission and other principles of the Forum. In case a member of the Steering Committee retires before the end of the two year term, the Steering Committee has a right to co-opt an alternative member for the rest of the term with a subsequent approval by the next General Assembly. An alternative member should be elected from where the retired member came from – EU or Russia, respectively.

**5.3.** The Steering Committee has a right to temporarily suspend some of its members, if s/he during the previous 3 months has participated in less than 50% of the Steering Committee meetings (in both online and in-person format) and has not implemented any programmatic tasks agreed upon by the Steering Committee. In this case, suspension of membership is valid until voting by members of the Forum at the next conference of the Forum.

The decision on this issue is taken by a qualified majority of 2/3 of the members of the Steering Committee.

**5.4.** Decisions of the Steering Committee are made, as a rule, by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, a simple majority vote is taken. Voting may be carried out during the SC meetings, through Internet, conference calls and other communication tools. SC is mandated to conduct negotiations on co-operation, agree upon partnership with other bodies and authorise members to fulfil tasks and projects on behalf of the Forum. The Steering Committee is responsible for the Forum budget. It instructs and supervises the Secretariat of the Forum and, if necessary, appoints and supervises a Treasurer.

**5.5.** The Steering Committee represents the Forum in relations with the public, the government authorities and the media and publishes agreed positions of the Forum and its own statements.

**5.6.** The Steering Committee works in a transparent manner and inform members promptly of all developments, including the lists of members invited to the General Assembly and the General Assembly agenda.

## 6. Secretariat of the Forum

The Steering Committee may establish a Secretariat of the Forum to be hosted by one of the Forum member organisations to support technical, information and organisational work of the Forum. The mandate to host the Secretariat is given to a member organisation for two years with a possibility for extension. An organisation has to fulfil the necessary institutional requirements in order to host the secretariat. It should be bound by principles of neutrality and equal distance from other members. The Secretariat plays a purely technical function, is subordinate and reports to the SC.

## 7. Forms of Activities of the Forum

**7.1.** Forum activities include thematic work groups, panels, hearings, position papers, statements, analyses and research, polls and other activities.

**7.2.** Working groups may elect coordinators. Coordinators of the working groups constitute a Program Council of the Forum. Program Council serves for coordination between the working groups and elaboration of programmatic activities of the Forum in consultations with the Steering Committee.

**7.3.** The General Assembly and the Steering Committee are allowed to initiate or support other activities and projects in order to develop the work of Forum.

## 8. Funding of the Forum

**8.1.** The Forum aims for a diverse and multilateral financing of its activities by a wide range of private and nonprivate donors, insofar the objectives of donors do not contradict the mission and principles of the Forum and do not restrain its independence and the openness of its work.

**8.2.** The General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Steering Committee, may decide on introduction of an annual participation fee.

**8.3.** Any member organization planning to submit an application for funding of the Forum's activities should inform the Steering Committee prior to submitting the application and get an approval of the Steering Committee. If a member organization receives such funding, it should inform the Steering Committee about this. Steering Committee should inform all members of the Forum about funding received by any members for the Forum's activities.

## 9. Public Information

The Forum is committed to operating in a transparent manner. It runs the website [www.eu-russia-csf.org](http://www.eu-russia-csf.org) and releases different publications to inform the members of the Forum, other interested persons and institutions and the general public. The work of the General Assembly, the Steering Committee, panels and groups, as well as the composition of panels and groups, the financial planning and reporting and other aspects of the Forum work and activities will be presented on the website. Member organisations, panels and groups may propose materials for publications. The right to release a publication in the name of the Forum is reserved to the General Assembly and the Steering Committee. Working groups may release publications on their own behalf.