



# EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

**Statement of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum  
4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, The Hague, 06 October 2013**

## **EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM: CONNECTING COOPERATION WITH SOLIDARITY**

When we started this Forum in 2010, the aim was to increase cooperation and exchange between NGOs from across Russia and Europe on the basis of shared interests and common values and to help both sides seek new partners. We were hopeful to be able to push civil society views onto the official EU-Russia dialogue agenda.

Now, almost three years later, we continue to jointly realise programmes in order to improve the climate in society and to overcome unhealthy tendencies in the spheres of ecology, restriction of human rights and fundamental freedoms whilst solving social problems. However, we have to spend more time and strength on actions of solidarity and support. In Russia, on the one hand, we draw attention to the growth of the level of civic activity. On the other hand, one of the consequences of this development was the crack down by the government, restricting fundamental rights and freedoms. The Forum regards the campaign of pressure on NGOs receiving foreign funds and working in foreign cooperation, unacceptable; these organizations are forced to register as “organizations, fulfilling the functions of a foreign agent”, which does not correspond with reality and is derogatory and inappropriate for NGOs. The administrative and judicial persecution has affected many NGOs, including dozens of members of our Forum.<sup>1</sup>

We are concerned about the systematic violation of human rights and fundamental ecological standards in the preparation of large-scale projects, being conducted in a manner with no possibilities for full civic participation and control, for example in preparation of the Olympic Games in Sochi.

In the countries of the European Union, as a result of the economic crisis, society is increasingly focused on domestic problems, which is not encouraging solidarity in the European space and beyond its boundaries. Growing social inequalities (both within individual societies and between the North and South of the EU), a rise of xenophobia and discrimination on the entire European continent (especially against migrants and Roma) and the insecurity of personal data on the internet, the unlawful access of special services to personal information and other societal problems require powerful and effective international control in the sphere of human rights.

We understand, that over the years the conditions for the development of such initiatives as the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, will become more and more difficult, and this is one the reasons why we have to continue our work. In difficult times people who share the same values need to coordinate their efforts.

We, members of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, urge that:

- Civil societies of the EU and Russia join their efforts, participate actively in cooperation and solidarity actions, be more open, and draw more attention to the success of their own efforts;

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<sup>1</sup> The result being the forceful liquidation of two of our members, GOLOS and the Kostroma Civic Initiative Support Center; and the unprecedented persecution of Anti-discrimination Centre Memorial.

- The governments of our countries dedicate positive efforts to NGOs' international cooperation as a key resource to overcome lack of trust between Russia and the EU.
- The governments of Russia and the EU recognize civil societies as real partners and engage in meetings with NGO leaders and civic activists, most definitely as a part of official visits.
- The governments of Russia and the EU be especially careful towards curtailing of international programmes, since it leads to the growth of anti-Western and anti-Russian states of minds.
- The Russian government end its crackdown on civil society, repeal its recent restrictive legislation in the area of fundamental human rights and freedoms and stop the prosecution of participants of peaceful protests and civil activists.
- The Russian government repeal the policies that enforce the discrimination of LGBT persons and implement effective measures to counter xenophobia and racism against migrants and members of ethnic and other minorities;
- The Russian government and companies from both the EU and Russia acknowledge their responsibility for the protection of vulnerable environmental areas, including the Caucasus and the Arctic;
- International political, economic, scientific, cultural and other contacts with Russia include particular attention to the compliance with human rights and environmental standards, including in the run-up to and during the Sochi Olympics and the 2018 World Cup.
- The European Union to include the problem of the crackdown on Russian civil society and the restrictions of human rights and freedoms in all bilateral engagements with governmental structures of the Russian Federation.
- The European Union to increase the support of joint projects of European and Russian NGOs by means of funding and other instruments of international cooperation. The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is prepared to extend recommendations and expertise to European institutions for the development of indispensable programs and instruments of financial support.
- The EU provide effective and non-bureaucratic protection to civic activists fleeing Russia in fear of persecution, using fellowship programs, temporary shelter, and in case of necessity provide the state of political refugees;
- The governments of Russia and the EU to systematically react to instances of the violation of human rights and corruption with the use of the judicial mechanisms of the European Convention for Human Rights and international anti-corruption agreements;
- The EU and its member states implement policies to counter social and economic marginalization, xenophobia, racism and against discrimination of ethnic minorities in the EU; and develop and implement effective policies to counter these phenomena outside its borders.
- The Russian government to work out and implement effective measures to ensure the real protection of citizens against illegal activities of the special services, including the "wire-tapping" of civil and political activists engaged in political struggles.
- The government of EU countries to effectively counter any attempts of special services of other countries that illegally collect personal data on the internet.
- The EU institution and Russian government should take on themselves the obligation to sign the visa facilitation agreement no later than the end of 2014, and to come to a final agreement on the common aim regarding the introduction of a free visa regime for short-term travel no later than 2017; in this regard the Russian government has to refrain from the demand for special rights for service passport holders.

- The EU institutions and Russian government provide substantive responses to statements, policy papers, reports, recommendations and other initiatives of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and meet with its representatives on a regular basis.

The Hague, 6 October 2013

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