



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

The “Different Wars” Exhibition Has to Be Continued in Lithuania

Statement by the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and the Working Group “Historical Memory and Education”

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and the Working Group “Historical Memory and Education” condemn the request by Žygimantas Pavilionis and Povilas Urbšys, MPs of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, to close down the Exhibition “Different Wars: National School Textbooks on World War II” published on 16 March 2017 on the Seimas’ webpage.¹

The “Different Wars” Exhibition is the common product of scrupulous work by representatives of independent civil society organisations and historians from six European countries – the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. No government officials or advisors from any country were involved. The exhibition was financially supported by the European Commission and other institutions and donors.

The exhibition reveals the differences in the narration and perception of the history of WWII in modern high school textbooks. None of them is presented in the exhibition as the only one holding the ultimate truth. That is why it is absolutely incorrect to say that ‘Soviet crimes presented at the exhibition are not only not condemned but justified’, as said in the request by Žygimantas Pavilionis and Povilas Urbšys.

We are upset by the fact that the participating NGOs, some of which have to operate under difficult conditions in their countries, specifically in Russia, are subjected to ungrounded accusations in an EU member state. Furthermore, the call to close down the exhibition goes against the spirit of European values, in particular the freedom of expression. Intolerance to critical thinking, pluralism of opinions, and dissent is something one does not expect from politicians of a democratic country.

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and the Working Group “Historical Memory and Education” is convinced that an open dialogue about the most dramatic events in the past and a discussion on our common European history are necessary to develop critical thinking in our societies, overcome stereotypes and propaganda that allowed the tragedy of WWII to happen, learn important lessons from the past, and prevent such terrible crimes from happening again. Discussions and critical reflections on historical memory are more important than ever in the turbulent times Europe is experiencing now.

The Steering Committee and the “Different Wars” team are open for comments and encourage members of the public to visit the exhibition and form their own opinion on the items shown.

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¹ See http://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=119&p_k=1&p_t=170489

Contacts:

Harry Hummel, Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, Netherlands Helsinki Committee, The Hague, Netherlands, tel. + 31 653 22 46 72, e-mail: hhummel@nhc.nl

Yuri Dzhibladze, Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Moscow, Russia, tel. + 7 916 673 5153, e-mail: yuri.dzhibladze@gmail.com

Kristina Smolijaninovaite, Working Group "Historical Memory and Education", Secretariat of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, Berlin, Germany, tel. + 49 151 58 13 48 49, e-mail: kristina.smolija@eu-russia-csf.org

Nikita Lomakin, Working Group "Historical Memory and Education", Memorial International, Moscow, Russia, tel. + 7 926 119 64 58, e-mail: lomakinu@gmail.com

The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 152 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history, and civic education.

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

Address (Secretariat): Deutsch-Russischer Austausch e.V. (German-Russian Exchange) – 44, Bad St., 13357 Berlin, Germany, Tel. + 49 (0)30 46 06 45 40

Адрес (Секретариат): Немецко-Русский Обмен–Бадштрассе 44, 13357 Берлин, Германия, тел. +49 30 44 66 80 0

Website: www.eu-russia-csf.org **E-mail:** info@eu-russia-csf.org

Facebook: EU-Russia Civil Society Forum **Twitter:** @EU_Russia_CSF **YouTube:** EU-Russia Civil Society Forum