



# 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**

## **ON THE PROCESS OF LIBERALISATION OF VISA REGIME BETWEEN THE EU AND RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

Taking into account that the freedom of movement across the borders is one of the key values of the European society and is crucial for cross-border cooperation and development of people-to-people contacts, the General Assembly of the EU – Russia Civil Society Forum welcomes the ongoing process of negotiations on facilitation of issuance of visas and liberalisation of the visa regime between the European Union and Russia. The Forum, gathering 123 non-governmental organisations from both sides of the Schengen border, united in the aim of further and deeper cooperation between Russian and European Union's societies, calls on responsible bodies in Russia and the EU to accelerate the process of negotiations on visa facilitation and liberalisation.

The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum acknowledges some positive developments that have taken place in 2013: the “List of Common Steps for short-term visa-free travel” has been made public, some progress has been reported in the negotiations on amendments to the Agreement on the facilitation of the issuance of visas, and simplified rules of the issuance of visas for spectators of the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games have been announced. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be enough.

We call on responsible bodies to publish the first progress report on the fulfillment of the “List of Common Steps”, expected this autumn, because only making all the documents of the visa liberalisation process public and accessible to civil society actors guarantees transparency and reliability of the process.

We also call on the Russian and European Union’s authorities to conclude negotiations on the amended Visa Facilitation Agreement, so that it may enter into force no later than in 2014. Given that the Russian and European Union societies at large are to benefit from the visa facilitation process, as it will enable important social groups to obtain visas easier and quicker and no visa fee will be required from some of them, this entire process should not be hampered by the parties’ disagreement on the issue of service passports concerning only a limited number of their holders. Therefore, Russia should resign from this additional demand.

Finally, we call on the Russian authorities to fulfill their commitments and introduce simplified rules of entering to the territory of the Russian Federation for spectators of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. This will not only encourage more foreigners to visit Russia for this upcoming sports event, but will

also constitute an important exception in the existing restrictive visa regime. We further invite the Russian authorities to extend this good practice and apply similar rules on other international events. This would be a sign of good will, reasonable from the point of view of economic development and will stimulate the process of visa liberalisation.

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

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