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Dear members, friends and supporters of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum,
The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (Forum) wishes to share with you its latest news, developments and events dedicating a special section to its 4th General Assembly, held in The Hague on October 5-7 2013.

1. General Assembly in The Hague, 5-7 October

More than 120 civil society actors from Russia and EU member states, including both members of the Forum and organisations having an observer status, gathered at the 4th General Assembly in The Hague (the Netherlands) on 5-7 October 2013.

As recent developments indicate that in many areas the EU and Russia are moving apart, the General Assembly offered a remarkable opportunity to meet and increase networking, exchange views and innovative ideas, evaluate the development of the Forum and tackle the consolidation of its structure and agenda.

During the sessions of Saturday 5 October the Assembly participants assessed the activities of the Forum since the 3rd Assembly in St. Petersburg (October 2012), exchanged views and strategies on the Forum programmatic and organisational development, and discussed priorities for the coming two years, on what questions to tackle and how to concretely address them. TED-type talks were followed by election of the new Steering Committee of the Forum on Sunday 6 October. Parallel Working Groups sessions included meetings of the existing and two new Working Groups, “Historical Memory and Education” and “Civic Education”.

THE ASSEMBLY ADOPTED THREE STATEMENTS

Connecting Cooperation With Solidarity (read the main resolution of the General Assembly in The Hague)

“ [...] 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. [footnote] 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. [...] “

Learn more about the latest news on trial of Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial and about the Bajkal Environmental Wave, one more Forum member organisation recognised as “foreign agent”.

Release of Greenpeace Activists and Environmental Safeguarding of the Arctic (read the full statement)

“ [...] We should not forget about the essence of the protest. Extraction of oil and gas in the Arctic is associated with an exceptional risk to the delicate ecological balance of the Arctic. Further concerns are related to Gazprom’s unavailability to show an adopted oil spill response plan for the platform “Prirazlomnaya” to the public. [...] More than 10 attempts by Greenpeace and WWF to enter into a discussion regarding the project in different ways failed without any feedback from authorities or the corporation. In these circumstances environmental activists had to hold a non-violent direct action to defend the public interest and prevent the realization of such a dangerous project. [...] ”
The Process of Liberalisation of Visa Regime between the European Union and the Russian Federation (read the full statement)

underlying that a speedy adoption of a new agreement on facilitation of the visa regime should be a priority for EU-Russia cooperation in 2014 and the adoption of visa free regime a common goal in the nearest future.

On the public session on 7 October, The Hague hosted a panel discussion on the Assembly’s outcomes and on EU-Russia developments with Mikhail Fedotov, Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation and Chairman of the Presidential Council for Development of Civil Society and Human Rights, Vincent Degert, Head of Division for Russia of the European External Action Service, and Daphne Bergsma, Europe Director, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fraser Cameron, Yuri Dzhibladze and Annegret Wulf.

Annegret Wulf, Daphne Bergsma, Mikhail Fedotov, Fraser Cameron, Vincent Degert, Yuri Dzhibladze.

Read the full press release and visit our website section dedicated to the Forum’s 4th General Assembly in The Hague for detailed information, programme and photos.

VISIT TO DUTCH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, AMSTERDAM, 7 OCTOBER 2013

In the afternoon of Monday 7 October 2013, Assembly participants had the opportunity to visit Dutch civil society organisations in Amsterdam, namely Amnesty International Netherlands; Anne Frank House; Pink in Blue, police working on LGBT issues; Milieudefensie, environmental NGO; Indische Buurt, an NGO focused on neighbourhood action.

“Forum members were presented with information about Amnesty’s work on limiting detention of ‘illegal’ aliens and were showed some of Amnesty’s campaigning visuals and activities” said Harry Hummel (Netherlands Helsinki Committee) about the visit to Amnesty International Netherlands.

Polina Baigarova (EU-Russia Civil Society Forum Volunteer) visited Amsterdam police to learn more about the activities of the anti-discrimination group Pink in Blue Police Network Amsterdam, reporting that many guests “could hardly imagine a similar group to be established in their homelands.”

Read more on the impressions of Assembly participants about the visit to Dutch civil society organisations.

IREX EUROPE ROUND-TABLE “FREEDOM OF SPEECH ONLINE IN RUSSIA”, THE HAGUE, 07 OCTOBER 2013

In parallel, IREX Europe, a French member organisation of the Forum, held a round-table on Freedom of Speech on the Internet in Russia as a side event to the Forum General Assembly at The Hague, where invited experts and members of the Forum discussed increasing restrictions on freedom of the Internet in Russia.

Learn more on the event at: http://www.irex-europe.fr/IREX-Europe-holds-roundtable-on.html?lang=en. The statement of the round-table will soon be available in English and Russian at IREX Europe website.

PANEL DISCUSSION AND VISIT TO SENIOR EU OFFICIALS, BRUSSELS, 8 OCTOBER 2013

Following the General Assembly in The Hague, on 8 October, three members of the Steering Committee, Ksenia Vakhrusheva Yuri Dzhibladze and Rostislav Valdova, visited Brussels to meet senior EU officials and to participate in a public meeting organised by the EU-Russia Centre on the Kremlin’s crackdown on civil society. They were joined on the panel by Vincent Degert, Head of Division for Russia, EEAS, and Brigitte Dufour, Director of International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR). After a working lunch with Veronique Arnault, the Director for Human Rights in the EEAS, the Steering Committee met with the Managing Director for Russia, Louis Felipe de la Pen, and the EUSR for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis.

Read the full report on the public discussion “Putin’s Crackdown on Civil Society in Russia - Can the EU do anything to help?”.

Panel discussion, Brussels, 08 October 2013.
Ksenia Vakhrusheva, Rostislav Valdova, Fraser Cameron, Vincent Degert, Brigitte Dufour, Yuri Dzhibladze.
WHAT DO PARTICIPANTS THINK ABOUT THE FORUM?
The Communication Team conducted an evaluation of the participants’ views on the Forum after the General Assembly through a questionnaire. Main results of the evaluation are:

- **GA as a place to connect with network members**: 75.5%
- **GA as a place to influence official EU-Russia cooperation**: 58%
- **GA as a place to meet partners**: 75% and discuss cooperation 55%
- **GA as a learning place**: 33%

Most interesting GA sessions:
- conference opening (48%), TED format session (44%), EU-Russia civil society challenges (40%), Forum strategy discussion (40%), cross-cutting workshops (31%), session about results and statements (22%)

Suggested topics for future GA meetings:
- official EU-Russian cooperation, developments in Russian civil society, impact of corruption, national identities in the EU, development of local communities, global civil society, media freedom in Russia, ‘soft’ power in Russian foreign policy, frozen conflicts, implementation of the UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The full report will soon be available on the Forum website.

2. Inside the Forum

NEW STEERING COMMITTEE ELECTED IN THE HAGUE

The **new Steering Committee (SC)** of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was elected in the framework of the General Assembly in The Hague, as its members completed their mandate, except Anna Skortsova and Ksenia Vakhrusheva who were elected in 2012.

As a result of the voting, the mandate was renewed to: Oksana Chelyshova, Yuri Dzhibladze, Stefan Melle, Natalia Taubina and Rostislav Valvoda. The newly elected members are Anton Burkov, Katarzyna Batko-Toluć and Harry Hummel.

- Newly elected members [explain their reasons for joining the Steering Committee](#)
- More about new and former Steering Committee members

INTERVIEW WITH FRASER CAMERON ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE AS FORMER STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER

“Improving EU-Russia relations is a long-term challenge, but one in which civil society has a vital part to play”, said Fraser Cameron, Director of the EU-Russia Centre, in an interview about his experience as former Steering Committee member. Reflecting on his completed mandate as Steering Committee member, he claimed that “it has been a basically positive experience. We could probably have done more to reach out to the regions in Russia and to try and secure civil society support from at least one NGO in every EU member state.”

Read the full [interview with Fraser Cameron about his experience as former Steering Committee member.](#)

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1 These results provide only indicative perceptions (40% of participants) of a wider opinion about the General Assembly. Percentage are calculated on average of the 45 questionnaires returned by Assembly participants.
TWO NEW WORKING GROUPS ESTABLISHED IN THE HAGUE

Working Group 5 on “Civic Education”

Initiated by Forum members in a preliminary meeting in St. Petersburg in May 2013, the Working Group on “Civic Education” consolidated its objectives and agenda at in The Hague. The Group’s main goals are to create cross-sectoral and cross-thematic frames for knowledge transfer, exchange of experience and best practices among Forum members on citizenship. It also strives to establish cooperation with other organizations, networks and stakeholders, working on similar topics.

Learn more about the Working Group on “Civic Education” (under construction).

Working Group 6 on “Historical Memory and Education”

The initiative to establish a Working Group on “Historical Memory and Education” emerged from Forum members’ need to find ways for uncovering aspects of Europe’s and Russia’s history over the last century, which may involve conflicting memories among different communities and generations.

One of the major objectives of the History Group is to work on historical education in Russia and Europe enabling an exchange and critical views of the past. The History Group will create a website for sharing of knowledge and opinions on historical events relevant to the Working Group. Among others, the History Group strives to push EU-Russia dialogue ahead through initiating communication and civic initiatives dealing with historical past.

Learn more about the Working Group on “Historical Memory and Education”.

FORUM’S UPCOMING EVENT

The latest publication of the Forum Expert Group on "EU-Russia Visa Facilitation and Liberalization" is the Report on Visa Facilitation and Liberalisation, which contains analysis of legal frameworks of EU-Russia visa regime, existing practices, challenges on the way to abolishing visas, and policy recommendations to decision-makers. The Forum and Visa-Free Europe Coalition cordially invite you to the Higher School of Economics in Moscow on November 5 at 18.00 for the presentation of the Report and for the open discussion "Overcoming Borders, The EU-Russia Dialogue on Visa Facilitation and Liberalization". We look forward to welcoming you in Moscow!

More information: Invitation “Overcoming borders”; Programme "Overcoming Borders".
To participate at the open discussion, we kindly ask you to register in advance via e-mail at visaevent@eu-russia-csf.org indicating your name, organisation and contact details.

Contacts: Kristina Smolijaninovaite, Jakub Benedyczak, visaevent@eu-russia-csf.org, 0049 151 5813 4849

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This project is supported by:

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