



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

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Enhancing People-to-People Contacts between the EU and Russia: CSF perspective - UPDATE

Background:

Under the current review of the ENP the EU identifies ways how “to support and foster stability, security and prosperity in the countries closest to its borders.”¹ In searching ways how to promote democratic, accountable and good governance the EU intends to develop a deeper engagement with civil society and social partners. Also there is a growing understanding that the incentive-based approach (“More-for-More”) is not sufficient in those countries where there is not the political will for a closer rapprochement with the EU. The strategic and systematic support of civil society in the Russian Federation through the EU would therefore be an important step to express solidarity with those people and organizations in the Russian Federation that stand for common European values and that are the basis for a peaceful common future of the EU and the Russian Federation.

The EU–Russia Civil Society Forum has conducted a needs assessment among its members in four Russian regions (Moscow, St.Petersburg, Perm, Volga region) in October 2016. 24 experienced civil society organizations – both from the human rights and the social sector - were interviewed about their working conditions and expectations towards EU cooperation. All respondents expressed the readiness and interest to develop cooperation with European partners despite the ongoing repressions against civil society in the country.

Russian civil society representatives expressed their urgent need to be included into international professional networks in order to overcome the increasing isolation and separation from international trends and developments.

For the development of a more differentiated and needs-oriented strategy towards civil society in the Russian Federation we would summarize the following key findings and recommendations:

- Regional civil society organizations are acting quite isolated from international trends but also from developments in the bigger cities in the Russian Federation. European support for **platforms for sectoral exchange** of professional experience could boost regional civil society development in the Russian Federation
- Social entrepreneurship, development of local philanthropy, community foundations, innovative fundraising strategies, development of volunteer movement, cross sector

¹ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC and the Committee of the Regions / Review of the ENP, Brussels, 18.11.2015

cooperation with SME are **innovative tools and actual answers to shrinking space for civil society** in the Russian Federation. Russian CSO start to explore them now. European experience could contribute to the systematic development of these trends

- Regional (Volga region) and Moscow based CSOs express the need to further develop **common activities with Ukrainian partners** in the sphere of refugee assistance, counteraction to propaganda, common protection of social and human rights for people affected by the war in Donbas – such programs stabilize the situation in the war zone and contribute to conflict reduction in the region. They could be facilitated by European partners
- The reduction of international financial support for Russian CSO since 2012 has lead to a sharp decrease in the activity of Russian civil society and has reduced their **international visibility**. Possibility of participation in international conferences and networks, analysis of Russian experts to international discussion should be re-established in sectors which are relevant for both sides: European history, human rights, rule of law, refugees, fight against corruption, health issues as tuberculosis and HIV prevention
- Intensify exchange programs among Russian and European twin cities and universities

Structure of aid provision:

The development of tailored, flexible and needs-oriented cooperation programs for the support of civil society actors in the Russian Federation today requires expertise and detailed knowledge of ongoing political and societal processes in the target regions as well as sufficient administrative capacity to reach out to regional grassroot-organizations and to act in a difficult political and administrative framework. Interlocutors warned that only in depth knowledge of the local situation will prevent the support of the increasing number of patriotic “GONGOs” (governmental-organized NGOs) but also to identify spheres of common interest with local and federal structures wherever possible. A more and more centralized administration of EU assistance from Brussels seems contra-productive to these requirements. Smaller grants to regional actors should be given priority over huge “service contracts”. The EU should therefore assess to increasingly include services of “intermediary actors” between the EU administration and the final recipients. These actors would be well positioned to provide the necessary expertise and administrative know-how for a successful development of civil society cooperation programs in the given challenging framework. We recommend therefore

- **To involve the European Endowment for Democracy (EED)** which has an excellent track record, experienced staff, the ability to flexible reaction and to work under difficult circumstances. The EED funding earmarked for Russia should be significantly increased – both from the EU and single member states
- **To engage other intermediary actors**, donors and fora such as the Prague Civil Society Centre, the German Marshall Funds of the US and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum with its experienced member organizations to reach out to regional actors, to assist in organization development, coalition building, to build bridges to European civil society and to develop innovative tools and cooperation formats
- To increase funding for well- established programs as **EIDHR and NSA/LA** and to add human resources for their proper administration at the EU Delegation in Moscow
- **To open up the ENI** for Russian CSO. This would enable Russian CSO to participate in European civil society cooperation and to break up the increasing isolation of the Russian society from the European political and societal discourse

- To **research the experience** of those – mostly American – donors that had to leave the country in the past years and to assess the continuation of some of their successful and important projects where appropriate and possible

Other remarks:

- **Visa facilitation** for civil society actors, youth, scientists and students should be given priority as a precondition for successful implementation of any cooperation programs and as a powerful sign of European commitment for civil society in the Russian Federation

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