



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

## **Appeal of the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum to the Newly Elected Members of the European Parliament**

**July 1, 2014**

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum congratulates the Members of the European Parliament on their election. The Steering Committee calls on the new Parliament to use its powers to uphold human rights, rule of law, and democracy both inside the European Union and in its relations with Russia as well as to move Europe and the world towards a just and sustainable economic, social, and environmental model.

The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and its member organisations work to maintain and develop Europe as a continent in which both the European Union and Russia peacefully and productively cooperate and adhere to jointly agreed standards, in particular those developed by the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The overcoming of the current crisis in Eastern Ukraine and putting an end to violence there is possible only if the Russian government and security forces return to implementation of the international and European principles and mechanisms of law and common security, acknowledge inviolability of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and stop providing military and material support to armed insurgents. We call on the EP Members to stand on for this in all their relations to Russian deputies and officials.

We call on the European Parliament to strongly stimulate that the Ukrainian authorities strictly adhere to international human rights standards in their efforts to protect territorial integrity of the country and that they engage in meaningful reforms to ensure effective democratic transition. Development of an inclusive and rule-of-law based state, free from the plague of corruption, where the rights of members of all minorities are fully respected and the government is accountable to the public, would give a chance to Ukrainian people to overcome the legacy of the past and become a true part of a larger Europe. We urge the

European Union member states and institutions to provide all necessary assistance to the people of Ukraine in this challenging and historical moment.

At the same time, the continuing steps of the Russian government to suppress and stigmatise any civil society activities, which it sees as critical towards its policies, are clearly in breach of international and European standards. These steps have hit hard a large number of Russian NGOs, including our member organisations, through paralysing inspections, long and time-consuming court cases, and government actions to put a derogatory label of “foreign agents” on them. Several of our member organisations have closed down to avoid being convicted in court. The scope of activities of many organisations has diminished. Along with freedom of association, a range of other fundamental rights and freedoms has been under assault in Russia lately, including freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

We urge the European Parliament to continue pushing for full implementation of international standards by the Russian Federation. International support for the promotion of these standards in Russian society should be enhanced. We call on the European Union to use all the possibilities with a special focus on cooperation with and support to civil society as well as facilitation of contacts between citizens of the European Union and Russia. This should be a key consideration in visa facilitation talks, which should be resumed as soon as possible.

At the same time, the preservation and promotion of international standards inside the European Union must receive more attention. In the view of many European Union citizens, the Union has not been able to deal in an adequate way with the economic crisis. Inequality between and inside countries and the danger of a ‘lost generation’ are increasing. This damages not only the acknowledgement of the EU within the Union itself but also its respect in the neighbouring countries like Russia. Financial and economic policies need to take into account their impact on socioeconomic rights of citizens in a much more profound way.

The economic crisis has contributed to rising support for xenophobic or racist policies in a number of EU member states. This worrying development affects both citizens of the Union and persons from outside the Union. An almost completely open labour market inside the Union with great differences in living standards between countries is bound to lead to substantial labour migration and a danger of exploitation of workers who are prepared to work for low income. The process of reception and integration of these migrants cannot be left to the market but must be accompanied by strong social policies.

Not just internal migration but also arrivals from outside the EU borders have to be dealt with in a humane way by the European Union. Grave armed conflicts and severe repressive situations close to the borders of the EU inevitably lead to large numbers of people fleeing to the safe area of the Union. Solidarity with these victims of violence and repression and a much greater effort to provide them with the safety they seek is called for in this situation, in solidarity among EU member states and in cooperation with the millions of EU citizens who are prepared to help.

Russian society demonstrates much similar issues of xenophobia and racism, and, again similar to the European Union, the authorities have not always decisively rejected such tendencies. On the contrary, a number of politicians and civil servants have manipulated xenophobic sentiments to generate public support. This is one area in which much more extensive, genuine exchange of expertise between the EU and Russia would be worthwhile – at the level of both civil society and authorities.

The future of the European Union and Russia, its greatest neighbour, are closely linked. Fighting corruption, money laundering, and tax evasion can play a substantial role in releasing resources for proper socioeconomic policies. We see this as a priority area for civil society and politicians alike. Corrupt linkages between Russia and the EU member states should be uncovered and addressed. The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum plans to stimulate this area of civil society activities. We also plan to boost civic cooperation by organising and facilitating open discussions and cooperation in the fields of conflicting historical memories, community development, civic participation, and education.

Finally, one clearly over-arching issue is the fight for sustainable environment and against climate change. The effects of inadequate policies by definition are felt beyond borders. Energy efficiency must be hugely increased, and a massive shift made in energy production and use of renewables. This requires major changes in which civil society can play an important role both in Russia and in the European Union. Again, we stand ready to push for and contribute to the changes needed.

We invite the newly elected MEPs to actively cooperate with the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and to use its expertise, contacts, and recommendations.

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**The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum** was established in 2011 as a permanent common platform of non-governmental organisations. It aims at cooperation and coordination of at the moment 126 member organisations from Russia and the European Union as well as greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. It has been actively involved inter alia in the questions of visa regulation, development of social, environmental and human rights standards, dealing with history, and civic participation.

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

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