



**TO ABOLISH THE LAW ON «FOREIGN AGENTS» IN RUSSIA**

**Statement of EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

Saint Petersburg, 10 October, 2012

The federal law on non-commercial organizations, who function as «foreign agents» will come into force on November 21, 2012. According to the law, Russian NGOs that receive financial support from abroad and «conduct political activities» will be publicly labelled as «foreign agents». Organisations, which refuse to follow the definition of the legislative requirement, will face harsh sanctions, ranging from temporary termination of their activities and permanent closure to criminal prosecution of their leadership.

We believe this law contradicts the Constitution of the Russia Federation and violates the European Convention on Human Rights. In addition, the United National General Assembly in its Resolution of December 9, 1998 stated that: “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to solicit, receive and utilise resources for the express purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means”.

We believe that the main goal of this law is to label independent NGOs as the agents of foreign states even when NGOs are acting based on their own initiative in accordance with their own ethical and moral principles. Civil society emerges in the situation when citizens jointly and actively promote their interests; can provide critical views on governmental policies at the local, national and international levels.

The participants of the Third General Assembly of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum are deeply concerned about the growing number of obstacles to the activity of civil society organizations in the Russian Federation, which among others include the recently adopted law on public assembly and increased pressure on international organizations. All these actions create obstacles on the way to the development of a free and modern civil society in Russia and its integration in the international community.

We appeal to the Russian authorities to abolish the law on «foreign agents» and call on civil society and policy-makers in Russia and the EU member-states to support this appeal. Civil Society Forum welcomes an initiative of civic organisations to increase their transparency. In case the law will not be abolished and will be used against civil society organizations in Russia, the European Union should monitor the legal practices of this law and express solidarity with those Russian non-governmental organisations, which will be prosecuted. We also call upon the sponsors from the EU to publish their position in regards to the new law and whether they intend to further financially support the activities of civic organisations in Russia.