



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

STATEMENT BY THE BOARD OF THE EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Endorsement of the Memorandum by Russian Human Rights Defenders on the Crisis in Relations between the Council of Europe and Russia

We, the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, express our endorsement of the Memorandum by Russian human rights defenders “Addressing the Crisis in Relations between the Council of Europe and Russia: Uphold the Values and Fulfil the Mission to Protect Rights across all of Europe”.

We share the Memorandum’s strong concern about the ongoing crisis in relations between the Council of Europe and Russia. We believe that a way can be found to restore Russian participation in key procedures and mechanisms of the Council of Europe, and at the same time continue, even step up, scrutiny of Russian compliance with Council of Europe principles and obligations.

We have spoken out, and continue to do so, against Russia’s violations of freedom of expression and association, of direct relevance to the operations of civil society and to its capacity to protest Russia’s aggressive actions in Ukraine and elsewhere - actions that are in direct violation of obligations of Russia as a member of the Council of Europe. We strongly disapprove actions by the Russian authorities in the course of the current crisis in relations with the Council of Europe, while evading to address the cause of the steps limiting Russian participation in the Parliamentary Assembly.

However, we believe that the potential costs of Russia’s departure from the Council of Europe would be too high and far-reaching – not only for the Russian society, but for the whole of Europe. As described in detail in the Memorandum, it is the Russian public who would suffer the most, not the culprits of violations of international law. For millions in Russia, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has been the ultimate hope for justice, which in many cases they cannot find in Russia. Thousands of its judgments have had a significant positive impact on Russian laws and judicial practice – and the life of the Russian population.

Russia’s departure from the Council of Europe would not help controlling the aggression of the Russian government in the international arena or contribute to the implementation of the Minsk agreements. On the contrary, without constraints stemming from the country’s membership in the Council of Europe, the scope of such violations as well as human rights problems in the country might grow exponentially, while the Council of Europe would be deprived of tools of critical dialogue and leverage with Russia.

We call on all parties concerned in the Council of Europe and its member states to take responsibility in addressing the current crisis and work towards a solution that would both uphold the Council of Europe values and principles and allow it to fulfil its mission to advance and protect democracy, rule of law and human rights across all of Europe, including Russia.

29 November 2018

Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum:

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The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 153 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.

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