



## **EU-Russia Civil Society Forum demands an end to persecution of ecological activists in the host region of the Winter Olympics 2014**

Statement of the Steering Committee of EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

On the night of 8th/9th November, Dmitrii Shevchenko, the deputy coordinator of a member organisation of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, “Ecological Watch in the North Caucasus” (EcoWatch), was detained at Krasnodar airport. Plain-clothed officers of the Federal security service (FSB) detained D. Shevchenko as he arrived on a flight from St Petersburg. It took the FSB and the police more than four hours to establish Shevchenko’s identity, examine his possessions and question Dmitrii. The activist was kept in the police station in the airport without any charges brought against him and no protocol of his detention written, as prescribed by the law. The police released Dmitrii only at 07:30am, after having written a report to the police chief officer about Dmitrii allegedly insulting representatives of the authorities.

Taking into consideration that in the course of the past year activists of “Ecological Watch in the North Caucasus” have been systematically subjected to persecution by the Russian authorities, the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses serious concern about the current situation in the region on the eve of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

On the 10th October 2013 information about the FSB illegally tapping the telephone of the head of the organisation, Andrei Rudomakha, became available. On 31st October he was detained in Sochi after a criminal case against Rudomakha from the previous year was resumed under which he was suspected in allegedly insulting justice of the peace. On 23rd October a member of EcoWatch, Mikhail Plotnikov, along with two German citizens, was detained for photographing the area around the town of Tuapse. On the 25th October EcoWatch’s secretary, Ivan Karpenko, was detained and arrested for five days for photographing a picket in support of Greenpeace activists, who had been detained for their action on the Prirazlomnaya oil rig in the Barents Sea. On 4<sup>th</sup> November an EcoWatch activist, Evgenii Vitishko, while on a motorway between Krasnodar and Tuapse was detained and accused of violating the conditions of his suspended sentence from 2012. Evgenii Vitishko and Suren Gazaryan were given a suspended sentence for a so called ‘damage’ to a fence in the Krasnodar forest, which environmental activists considered to be illegally situated in a public forest while it was proved that some landplots inside the fence belong to the Governor of the Krasnodar region Aleksandr Tkachev. With regard to Suren Gazaryan, another criminal case was brought against him with charges in a threat of homicide, as a result of which he had to flee the territory of the Russian Federation.

“Ecological Watch in the North Caucasus” is an internationally renowned environmental NGO and a member of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. It carries out extensive work in monitoring the ecological situation in the unique natural site of the North Caucasus in the south of Russia and tries to oppose the violation of ecological legislation in the region, including in the course of the construction of facilities for the Olympics.

The events which have recently taken place in the Krasnodar region leave no doubt that the persecution of ecological activists has taken on a systematic character and is linked to the approaching Olympic Games in Sochi. Federal and regional authorities say that increased security measures have been introduced in order to guarantee that the Olympics run smoothly. Nevertheless, it turns out that these measures are not being used against potential terrorists, but are in reality used against environmental and human rights activists who are trying to draw the public attention to widespread violations of environmental legislation and human rights in the run-up to the Olympics. It is feared that the authorities will further expand this clampdown on civic activists and independent journalists in order to prevent them from carrying out their professional duties until the end of the Olympics in Sochi.

In relation to the above, the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum:

- Draws the attention of the Russian authorities to the fact that it is unacceptable to exert pressure on civic activists who are not breaking the law or inciting violence by explaining such measures as a guarantee of security during the Olympic Games;
- Demands that the Russian authorities stop persecution of representatives of “Ecological Watch in the North Caucasus” on unsubstantiated grounds;
- Calls upon international non-governmental organisations, the public and the media to strengthen their presence and monitoring of human rights and environmental safety of the Krasnodar region in the period leading up to and during the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi;
- Calls upon the International Olympic Committee to turn its attention to violations of human rights by representatives of the Russian state during the lead up to the Olympic Games in Sochi and demand from the Russian authorities at all levels observation of human rights as a condition of a dignified carrying out of the Games;
- Calls upon the International Olympic Committee to consider in the future potential consequences for the local population during preparation and holding the Olympic Games when reviewing applications for holding the Games and develop a mechanism of an advance provision by candidate countries of guarantees of observation of core humanitarian values and international legal norms in preparation to and during the Olympics.

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