



European Economic and Social Committee



Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation

**6th Joint workshop between
the European Economic and Social Committee and
the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation**

Brussels, 28 May 2013

CONCLUSIONS

Cooperation between the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (CCRF) is being pursued in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2008 with a view to establishing regular contacts between the two Parties and fostering the exchange of information and expertise in order to acquire a better understanding of the political, economic and social situation in the EU and Russia and contribute to people-to-people contacts and mutual understanding.

This sixth joint workshop, organised by the EESC and the CCRF, was held in Brussels in the presence of Mr Jose Maria Zafra, President of the EESC's External Relations Section, and Alexander Sokolov, Head of the Inter-commission working group on international cooperation and public diplomacy of the CCRF. At this meeting, participants from both sides exchanged views on several topics, including latest development in EU-Russia relations, challenges and opportunities for trade relations after Russia's accession to the WTO, human rights issues as well as the role of civil society in the shaping of the Arctic region cooperation.

The participants agreed on the following conclusions:

1. We call on both negotiating parties that a new dynamism is urgently injected into the on-going negotiations on the new EU-Russia Agreement which is of crucial importance for EU-Russia bilateral relations. The agreement should cover a broad spectrum of issues, including those related to trade and investment, energy, economic cooperation and facilitation of visa regime.
2. We urge both the EU and Russian authorities to speed up their work on visa liberalisation while respecting the need for proper implementation of the necessary technical conditions as specified in the "common steps" towards visa liberalisation between the EU and Russia which were jointly agreed in 2011. We consider that visa-free travel would greatly contribute to the facilitation of contacts between EU and Russian citizens.

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3. Furthermore, we reiterate our appeal to both negotiating parties to include in the body of the new agreement specific provisions for civil society involvement in its implementation, including the establishment of a joint EU-Russia civil society consultative body as a part of the institutional framework of the Agreement. We also repeat our request to include a sustainable development chapter in the new Agreement which would provide the framework for the improvement of environmental and economic conditions as well as labour and social standards. The above mentioned joint civil society consultative body could also be entrusted with the task of monitoring the implementation of this chapter of the Agreement.
4. We welcome the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation and the progress report agreed by the EU and Russia coordinators and presented to the EU-Russia Summit on 21 December 2012, including the reference to the joint contribution by the EESC and the CCRF (point 5 of the coordinators report). In this respect, we appreciate the continued commitment of the EU and Russian authorities to enhance involvement and dialogue with civil society. We therefore call for greater and more systematic involvement of the civil society representatives in various dialogues under the Common Spaces and in the activities foreseen in the Work Plan for the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation. We welcome as well the progress in the partnerships under the Northern Dimension Policy, as noted in the Joint Statement of the ND Ministerial Meeting in February 2013 in which the appreciation for the stakeholders' active involvement in the ND cooperation was also expressed.
5. We consider that various non-governmental organisations together with economic and social partners from the EU and Russia have an instrumental role to play in relation to democracy and human rights, sustainable development and fostering people to people contacts. We therefore insist that all parts of civil society are involved in discussions and in the implementation of actions aiming at enhancing the overall EU-Russia relations.
6. We also consider that there is a need for more regular dialogue between the EU and the Russian Federation on issues related to employment and social policies with an increased participation of social partners from both sides in order to ensure that efforts related to the modernisation of the economy are mirrored by efforts to preserve the social stability.
7. Furthermore, we encourage the two parties to emphasize the need for an improved access to public information and more transparency as regards EU-Russia relations, with the overall objective to contribute to an increased mutual understanding between civil societies of Russia and the EU and the dissemination of information about benefits resulting from such strengthened cooperation.
8. We agree that further improvement of cooperation with the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee will contribute to the overall promotion of EU-Russia relations; therefore both the EESC and CCRF will take actions in this direction.



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9. We welcome the initiative of announcing 2014 the "EU-Russia Year of Science", to encourage the multifaceted cooperation between the EU and its Member States and Russia in the field of science and technology.

Trade relations

10. We warmly welcome the Russian accession to the WTO and consider this as fundamentally important for both EU and Russia, as close neighbours, Strategic Partners and as very important trading partners. Entry of Russia into the WTO could potentially lead to an exceptional growth in trade, investment and wider opportunities but we consider this would require accompanying modernization of domestic economy and business environment to bring tangible results in terms of GDP growth and welfare gains. We also believe that a deeper and more substantive relationship should result between Russia and the EU.
11. Now when Russia is part of the WTO, we believe that a new EU-Russia agreement could contribute to a better quality bilateral relationship focusing on economic cooperation. This is essential if we take into account the need to address a complicated global financial and economic situation which has an adverse impact on economic and social stability.
12. We again urge both the Russian and European authorities to step up joint efforts aimed at implementing specific actions leading to greater harmonisation of technical standards and regulations, appropriate protection of intellectual property rights, commercial risk reduction and increased protection for investors in order to further boost trade and industrial cooperation between Russia and the EU. In this respect, the entry of Russia into the WTO and establishment of the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia should also be taken into consideration.
13. We see an important role for the civil society from EU and Russia to work together on sharing expertise in reconciling trade liberalization with social and environmental protection.

Human rights

14. We consider that non-governmental organisations together with economic and social partners from the EU and the Russian Federation have an instrumental role to play in relation to democracy and human rights, protection of the civil and social rights and fostering people to people contacts.
15. We welcome the positive changes in the Russian law connected with enlargement of opportunities for activity of political parties, introduction of election of governors of the Russian Federation, and general democratization of the electoral process and liberalization of the political system. We acknowledge that the independence of the judiciary system is a cornerstone of democratic society. Along with the existing internal problems of development

of the judiciary system, a further broadening of public monitoring over the judiciary power and legal procedure is necessary. Both delegations held an extensive and open discussion on provisions on foreign funding included in the Law on NGOs, but no joint position could be reached on the issue. At the same time we consider that it is necessary to promote more active engagement of civil society in civic monitoring and control over the implementation and practices resulting from the Law on NGOs in Russia in relation to which certain organizations expressed their concerns.

16. We agree that freedom of expression and freedom of the media to inquire and inform is a backbone of democracy. We demand that civil rights are guaranteed and we encourage that steps are taken to improve the situation concerning media freedom.
17. We agree that both EU and Russia have a shared interest in ensuring that both sides meet their international human rights obligations. Both the EESC and the CCRF, we intend to engage into the monitoring of the situation concerning human rights and step up our efforts to promote the cooperation between the EU and Russian civil societies in defending human rights, including social and economic rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.
18. Aggravation of financial and economic crisis and worsening of social and economic situation create a fertile ground for violation of basic human rights, stirring up of extremist movements and organisations. Both sides consider that it is crucial to contribute to mobilization of civil society organisations in facing xenophobia, radical nationalism and its extreme manifestations.

Cooperation in the Arctic

19. We recognise the growing strategic importance of the Arctic region which is mirrored by an increasing global interest in the region. We call on all the relevant participants in the Arctic multilateral cooperation to clearly respect their responsibilities when developing cooperation in the Arctic region while also securing the needs of its local population and sustainable use of its natural resources.
20. We consider that the EU and Russia need to demonstrate their commitment to the Arctic region by consolidating cooperation and developing fully-fledged Arctic strategies for the region that should be consistent with objectives and principles of the Arctic Council. In this context we advocate for an increased and regular involvement of the civil society, including indigenous groups, when shaping policies and strategies towards the Arctic. Various social stakeholders, including business, employees and environmental conservationists, should also be involved in both multilateral and bilateral activities relating to the Arctic.
21. We are convinced that the Arctic Council plays a central role in enhancing multilateral cooperation in the Arctic. We call on representatives of civil society of all sides engaged in

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this dialogue to be actively involved in the work of its structures and to strengthen their bilateral cooperation on the Arctic issues of mutual interest.

22. We argue that there is a need for more comprehensive and credible data on climate changes in the Arctic, whose environmental conditions are unique and whose ecosystems are fragile. A clear focus should be on joint scientific research and monitoring in relation to climate change and ecological, environmental and meteorological issues in the Arctic. The preservation of Arctic environment and sustainable management of marine resources should be coupled with the social and economic consequences of climate change.
23. We consider that a closer cooperation is needed between EU and Russia when it comes to the development of infrastructure, especially rail, road, air and maritime transport. All actors involved in developing economic cooperation in the Arctic should take into account the need to preserve the fragile ecosystem of the Arctic region and act in compliance with the highest international standards of sustainable development.
24. Promoting economic activity in the region would positively affect employment, economic growth and people's well-being there. We urge for measures aimed at promotion of integrated house-building in the region, e.g. population centres, use of IT in sparsely populated areas (distance schooling, e-healthcare) and tourism.
25. We agree to hold the next joint seminar in Russia in 2014.

This declaration will be submitted to the political authorities of the European Union, its Member States and the Russian Federation.

Brussels, 28 May 2013

President of the External Relations Section
European Economic and Social Committee



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Mr Alexander Sokolov

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