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| **No 49/2017** | **29 September 2017** |

**Civil society ties are vital for better dialogue between the EU and Russia**

People-to-people contacts remain one of the main channels

for engagement between the EU and Russia

The European Economic and Social Committee and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation held their seventh joint seminar in Brussels on 27 September 2017. Both sides **highlighted that civil society has an instrumental role to play** in contributing to sustainable economic, social and cultural development, democracy and human rights, and fostering people-to-people contacts – one of the guiding principles underpinning the EU's engagement with Russia.

"*Russia is a great neighbour of ours. I am convinced that organised civil society can play an important role in the establishment of friendly and good neighbourly relations. We must pursue an honest and effective dialogue and I hope that this will be an inspiration for policy-makers at the highest level*", said the **EESC President, Georges Dassis,** in his opening speech. **The Secretary of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, Valery Fadeev,** welcomed the renewed dialogue with the EESC and emphasised the fact that Europe has accumulated great experience in civil society development. He pointed out the current development of Russian civil society and said that each of the regions in Russia had its own Civic Chamber: "*The most important thing is the regional agenda, because this is where people live*."

* *Cooperation in higher education, science, research and innovation*

While scientific relations between the EU and Russia are among the most long-standing areas of cooperation between the two sides and are based on a large, dense and refined network of scientific institutions and scientists, the participants pointed out the sharp decline in Russian participation in the **Horizon2020** programme compared to the 7th Framework Programme and called for this to be addressed. The opening up of the **2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme** to partner countries, including Russia, was cited as a successful example of cooperation.

* *Economic development in rural areas*

Policies addressing urban-rural divides must be based on the correct premises and statistical evidence if they are to be effective, and must avoid measures which aggravate the situation because they are based, for example, on the flawed conception that innovation is concentrated in urban areas.

The seminar acknowledged the positive outcomes of the five cross-border cooperation programmes which Russia, the EU and several EU Member States co-financed in 2007-2013 andwelcomed the new programmes for the period 2014-2020. To ensure the future sustainability of these results, there was a need for closer cooperation between the EU and Russia.

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[VIDEO: How has the EESC made a difference](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.videos.41081)

*The European Economic and Social Committee is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The Committee has 350 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union. It represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.*

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