**Joint Conclusions of the 2nd meeting between the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (CSF) – 30 June 2015, Brussels**

* Members of the EESC and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (CSF), participating in the meeting, believe that building mutual trust and ensuring that Russian and EU civil societies can interact freely, and providing as much support as possible to Russian independent civil society organisations (CSOs), have never been more important than at this time of severe crisis in EU-Russia relations.
* The EESC and the EU-Russia CSF underline and express their disappointment over the deteriorating situation with respect to the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, and the position of civil society in Russia over the last two years, and consider that the international community should pay increasing attention to negative developments regarding freedom of speech and freedom of association in Russia.
* The EESC and the EU-Russia CSF consider that civil society and human rights issues should be part of all bilateral and multilateral dialogues with Russia. Human rights dialogue should be maintained and civil society stakeholders with relevant expertise should be brought to the table whenever possible. The EU should coordinate its efforts and speak with one voice, addressing the issue of political challenges as well as the restrictive measures imposed on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media in Russia. The EU authorities should insist that Russia repeal the "foreign agents law" and abolish the "foreign agents" registry. The law on "undesirable" organisations should also be repealed.
* The EESC and the EU-Russia CSF consider that current EU funding to Russian civil society is still inadequate. Terms should be reviewed and the amounts available increased. EU authorities should think of more flexible and innovative tools for providing support. The EU's current funding policies should not be exclusively about aid projects. Institutional support is essential for the sustainability of civil society. An urgent action/alert system should also be developed for groups and individuals in danger or acute need. This should include, for instance, better access to asylum, granting of visas and visa extensions, etc. It is also of utmost importance to assist and support civil society activists who have already been forced to leave Russia for political reasons.
* The EESC and the EU-Russia CSF feel it is important that contacts between citizens from the EU and Russia should not suffer because of the deterioration in official relations. On the contrary, stepping up people-to-people exchanges would contribute to moving Russian society closer to European values and would help to counteract propaganda. The EU authorities should promote – including by unilateral steps – the facilitation of visa procedures for Russian citizens taking part in academic, cultural or other exchanges with EU countries.
* The EESC and the EU-Russia CSF stress that civil society should continue to interact and address issues of equal importance for both sides such as migration, the fight against corruption and extremism, and far-right nationalism.
* The EESC and the EU-Russia CSF agree that better safeguards are needed against international complicity in the use of opaque and improper procedures for large-scale extraction and industrial projects in Russia.
* The EESC and the EU-Russia CSF recommend that European governments and institutions press for greater transparency, to prevent the use of private or public funds to finance corrupt activities abroad. Implementation of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention should be improved across the Member States.