



*Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation*



*European Economic and Social Committee*

## **5<sup>th</sup> Joint workshop between the European Economic and Social Committee and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation**

**Moscow, 25-26 June 2012**

### **DECLARATION**

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 fifth joint workshop, organised by the EESC and the CCRF, was held in Moscow in the presence of Staffan Nilsson, President of the EESC and Evgeniy Velikhov, President of the CCRF. At this meeting, participants from both sides discussed the latest developments in the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation and the negotiations on the EU-Russia New Basic Agreement, the improvement of people-to- people contacts, public health, food safety and rural development.

#### **The participants agreed on the following conclusions:**

1. We welcome the political will expressed during the last EU-Russia Summit on 3-4 June 2012 to pursue the implementation of the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation and to advance in the negotiations on an ambitious new bilateral agreement between the EU and the Russian Federation. In this respect, we appreciate the recognition of the important role that could be played by civil society.
2. We urge to complete as soon as possible the negotiation process on the EU-Russia New Basic Agreement with the intention to achieve understanding on all topics of mutual interest in EU-Russia bilateral relations, including trade, investment and energy. We look forward to the successful implementation of the commitments made by Russia during the WTO accession process. We are convinced that enhancing trade and industrial cooperation by means of even greater harmonisation and/or mutual recognition of technical regulations and standards, specific provisions for trade in green products and services, transparent implementation of competition rules and appropriate commercial risk reduction and increased protection for investors will contribute to further growth of the EU and Russian economies and call for job creation to be the main focus of this cooperation.

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3. We reiterate our appeal to the negotiating parties to include, in the forthcoming agreement, provisions for civil society involvement in its implementation and, in particular, the establishment of a joint EU-Russia civil society consultative body as a part of the institutional framework of the Agreement. We call for the inclusion of a sustainable development chapter in the new Agreement to help improve environmental, labour and social standards in both parties. The joint civil society consultative body could also be given a remit to monitor the implementation of this chapter of the Agreement. Strengthening bilateral cooperation between the EU and Russia requires the extension of mutual civil society contacts. In this regard we reiterate our joint recent request to the EU-Russia Summit to create, in accordance with point 3 of article 8 of the PCA, all necessary conditions to promote such contacts.

4. In order to meet the important challenges facing both Russia and the EU in the coming years, the EESC and the CCRF have stepped up their cooperation on issues of major international importance, including sustainable development and the economic crisis. Civil society representatives from the other BRICS countries have been involved in this work with a view to presenting a global civil society position. We reiterate the main recommendation of the resulting proposal, namely the need to commit to a concrete action plan that provides for policy tools for sustainable development action.

5. We consider that a vibrant and active civil society, including the economic and social partners, has an instrumental role to play in fostering democracy and human rights, developing political institutions, protecting the environment and people-to-people contacts. To this end, respect for freedom of expression and assembly and independent media play an essential role in developing a credible and constructive civil society. We demand that legislation governing public rallies guarantees such fundamental freedoms in all our countries.

6. We welcome the successful regional cooperation being conducted in the framework of the Northern Dimension policy, in particular the partnership in the areas of environment, transport and logistics, health and culture, and consider that greater participation of civil society in the Northern Dimension's projects, together with moves to increase public awareness of this policy, would be very beneficial for its further development. In addition, we call for improving sectoral cooperation in the Black Sea Region, in particular between Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the EU. We are as well convinced that the incoming Russian Presidency of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) will be beneficial for the cooperation in this region, which is also encouraged by the implementation of the two existing regional strategies – EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region and Russian North-West Federal District Socio-Economic Development Strategy.

#### *People- to-people contacts*

7. We welcome the progress made by the EU and Russian authorities on visa liberalisation. We consider that visa-free travel would to the full extent contribute to the facilitation of contacts between EU and Russian businesses, researchers, students and citizens.

8. We call for specific provisions related to civil society to be included in the upgraded EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement, which is currently under negotiation. We consider that better interaction between civil societies should be a common goal for Russia and the EU as it would contribute towards spreading and implementing common values.

9. We consider that active work on the implementation of the Common Steps towards visa-free travel is essential to improve people-to-people contacts. Civil society involvement, in particular in the formulation and implementation of migration policies oriented towards successful integration of migrants in the host societies, could be a particularly successful way of reducing migration pressure both in the EU and in Russia.

10. We recognise that strengthening contacts between young people is of the utmost importance for developing mutually beneficial cooperation and achieving modernisation goals. Therefore, we call for increased participation of universities, students and academics in programmes for mutual exchanges.

*Public health and food safety*

11. We welcome the progress achieved in the Public Health Dialogue between Russia and the EU in 2011, and in particular the account taken of the regional dimension of public health issues in the cooperation projects conducted under the Northern Dimension Policy.

12. We recognise the challenges health issues present for the development of ageing societies such as the EU and Russia, and consider that cooperation in the areas of pharmaceuticals and communicable diseases could contribute greatly to the welfare of the Russian and EU populations.

13. We also urge the EU and Russian authorities to develop joint strategies to prepare for serious cross-border health threats, in order to strengthen their capacity to respond rapidly to all kinds of emergency affecting public health.

14. We affirm that food safety should be guaranteed by the State and society. It is a necessary condition for the society's sustainable development, and demands transition to green technology in agro-industrial production in order to prevent economic growth which is detrimental to the environment.

15. We recognise the importance of promoting trade in food and agricultural products between the EU and Russia without endangering the health and safety of the consumer. At the same time, we urge the Russian and EU authorities to consider the interests of economic operators and to better assess the proportionality of their action when adopting specific measures or restrictions related to food imports. In addition, we consider that one of the main missions of civil society is a competent open monitoring of food markets of the respective countries, in order to expose potentially dangerous agricultural products. Civil society organizations can also monitor their compliance with standards of information disclosure on the presence of genetically modified components in agricultural products and food. In this respect, we encourage the EU-Russia contacts aimed at the promotion of theoretical and practical

research which could lay the basis for progress in food production, its security, drinking water production, waste recycling.

16. We call for implementation of the commitments made by Russia in the WTO framework regarding SPS issues, and a progressive convergence and harmonization of standards and norms applied in the EU and Russia that would facilitate the flow of agricultural products between Russia and the EU. We call for Russian standards to be brought further into alignment with international standards, and hope that successful implementation of the Customs Union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus will facilitate the access of European goods to those markets.

#### *Rural development*

17. We emphasise that rural areas cover the biggest part of the EU and Russia territories and could therefore be an important contributor to sustainable growth and job creation. Nevertheless, rural areas are being particularly affected by the economic crisis and climate and demographic change and therefore need a specific strategy for the development of their competitiveness and the improvement of their quality of life.

18. We acknowledge that the development gap between rural and urban areas is more significant in Russia than in the EU and call on the EU and Russian authorities to initiate cooperation in the sphere of rural development in the framework of the Partnership for Modernisation, with a view to modernising Russian agriculture and rural areas.

19. We call for an exchange of best practices between Russia and the EU Member States as regards the restructuring and modernisation of the agriculture sector, the environmental performance of farms and forestry, organic farming, training, and research and development in the agricultural sector. We also recommend that the training of young people is done through the respective international programmes, in particular “Junior Achievement - Young Enterprise”.

20. We consider that one of the main tasks of the EU and Russia in the field of rural development is to preserve unique cultural traditions and cultural features of various ethnic groups representatives, to protect natural resources, to develop recreational potential of territories and rural tourism. We urge the EU and Russian authorities to take into account these directions during the implementation of their respective State policies. We emphasize the role of civil society in monitoring the mentioned aspects of rural development, placing priorities, attracting investments to the rural economy and promoting the introduction of advanced technologies and research. We support their involvement in the definition of the most promising projects, based on analysis of unique features of rural territories and “development points” so that they contribute to lay the foundation of social and economic development of rural areas, also in cooperation with regional and local authorities.

21. We acknowledge that civil society should actively participate in preservation and popularization of historical and cultural heritage of rural areas, supporting and promoting art handicraft, as one of the elements which help to maintain rural development.

22. We note that public association and socially active citizens should maintain programs of volunteering in the field of environmental protection, including forests and unique natural complex protection, rare species of plants and animals in order to preserve natural riches sustaining rural life.

23. We urge the EU and Russia to improve interaction as regards experience exchange in waste collection and processing, attracting investors for construction of rubbish recycling plants and modernized polygons in order to overcome “garbage challenges” that are extremely difficult to tackle in rural areas.

24. We support assist civil initiatives of rural dwellers, which contribute to the training of responsible rural local communities which would participate actively in the management of their local government also through cross-border exchanges of experience. We emphasize the importance of programmes aimed at the training of local actors so that they can identify and share the best practices of local self-government in rural areas.

25. We agree to organise the next seminar in the European Union in 2013 and to include subjects related to human rights and trade following Russia’s WTO accession amongst the possible topics for discussion.

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

Moscow, 26 June 2012

President of the Civic Chamber of the Russian  
Federation:



Evgeniy Velikhov

President of the European Economic and Social  
Committee:



Staffan Nilsson

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