



European Economic and Social Committee

REX/306
EU-Russia relations

Brussels, 9 December 2010

OPINION

of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on
EU-Russia relations
(own-initiative opinion)

Rapporteur: **Mr Voleš**

At its plenary session held on 17 and 18 February 2010 the European Economic and Social Committee acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw-up an own-initiative opinion on

EU-Russia relations.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 23 November 2010.

At its 467th plenary session, held on 8-9 December 2010 (meeting of 9 December), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 195 votes to none with eight abstentions.

*

* *

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The EESC welcomes the Joint Statement on the Partnership for Modernisation (PfM) adopted at the EU-Russia summit in Rostov-on-Don (31 May – 1 June 2010), including an appeal to civil society to foster its participation in the EU-Russia cooperation through enhanced dialogue. EU-Russia relations have a strategic meaning for both sides and should be based on mutual trust. Civil societies in the EU and Russia should activate their cooperation and contribute to the implementation of the PfM initiative. The EESC is prepared to contribute actively to this.
- 1.2 Regarding the Common Spaces, the EESC supports the existing structure but calls for a greater involvement of civil society from both sides in presenting their views and initiatives in various fields of activity.
- 1.3 The EESC suggests involving more relevant stakeholders in the dialogue on economic and trade relations and that consideration be given to the establishment of a widely representative EU-Russia Business Forum.
- 1.4 The EESC supports efforts to quickly reach progress in the negotiations on simplification and liberalisation of the visa regime.
- 1.5 More non-state actors should be involved in EU-Russian human rights consultations. The EESC is prepared to join this platform.
- 1.6 There should be more platforms where civil society organisations from the EU and Russia could contribute to the follow-up and monitoring of EU-Russia relations. The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum similar to the Eastern Partnership CSF could become such a tool.

- 1.7 The EESC calls for an increase in people-to-people contacts and exchanges in the field of education and intercultural dialogue as a tool to improve mutual understanding and confidence.
- 1.8 The position of the Member States vis-à-vis Russia should be more coordinated so that the EU speaks with one voice with ambitious but at the same time realistic goals and with a sufficient flexibility.
- 1.9 The EESC regards Russian membership of the WTO as essential, fully supports this process and wishes to see its completion as soon as possible.
- 1.10 The EU should revise the rules of financial support to NGOs through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights which foresees a high share of co-financing prohibiting many of the Russian NGOs from using these grants.
- 1.11 The EESC recommends seeking opportunities for the involvement of Russia in large regional projects that would be discussed with the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries especially in the field of environment, public health, transport and energy efficiency. Russian civil society should be invited to attend the meetings of the different platforms of the EaP Civil Society forum where such projects of common interest between the EU, EaP and Russia would be discussed. Stronger engagement of civil society in the implementation of the Northern Dimension policy, Baltic Sea Strategy, Black Sea Synergy and other relevant initiatives is also recommended.
- 1.12 The EESC reiterates its proposal to incorporate the establishment of a joint civil society body between the EU and Russia in the forthcoming agreement.
- 1.13 The EESC will establish a contact group dedicated to EU-Russia relations and will continue to develop its interaction with the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (CCRF) proposing at the same time to enlarge the participation to other civil society organisations that are not represented in the CCRF in the common activities.

2. **EU-Russia relations: the state of affairs**

- 2.1 EU-Russia relations have been experiencing several up-and-down periods over the last two decades. The Russia-Georgia military conflict in August 2008 and the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute in January 2009 had a negative effect on mutual relations. Nevertheless both sides have been continuing in their efforts to overcome the stalemate. The main goal of this opinion is to present the EESC recommendations how to improve EU-Russia relations, and how civil society from both the EU and the Russian Federation could contribute to this aim.

- 2.2 Talks on a new EU-Russia bilateral agreement that should replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1994 were launched in Khanty-Mansiysk in June 2008 and formally opened in July 2008. Both sides approached the negotiation process with a different emphasis on the nature of the new agreement. The EU wants to conclude a comprehensive and detailed strategic agreement whereas the Russian side prefers the conclusion of a basic framework political agreement that would be followed by detailed sectoral agreements in the sectors of Russia's interests¹.
- 2.3 The 12th round of negotiations between the EU and the Russian Federation that run through the working groups mirroring the Common Spaces started in the middle of November 2010. The present results of the negotiations are viewed by the European Commission with a cautious optimism; however, it is still too early to predict when the talks on the new agreement could be completed.
- 2.4 The slow progress in the ongoing talks on a new Agreement reflects the different views of both parties on their mutual relations. The EU supports a complex societal, political and economic modernisation in line with the European *acquis* and institutions. Russia, on the other hand, wants to be treated as a sovereign global power with its own approach to democracy, human rights, economic and security interests². To play this role Russia is using all the available assets it has – supply of natural gas and oil, nuclear arms capacity, space programmes, etc., including its position within international organisations, e.g. UN Security Council, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, CIS, G-20 etc. However, the international projection of the above ambitions is limited due to the weaknesses of the present socio-economic conditions in Russia³.
- 2.5 The EU and Russia differ substantially when it comes to possible changes in the European security architecture. Russia wants to revise the European security architecture as was reflected in Russia's proposal to conclude a new European Security Pact voiced by President Dmitry Medvedev in June 2008.
- 2.6 Deep differences remain also in the field of energy security. Russia wants to achieve special treatment as the EU's main energy supplier of natural gas and oil, including preferential treatment of its energy companies and their access to the EU market, including recognition of its special position and interests in the energy sectors of Belarus and Ukraine⁴. Russia

1 Meeting of EESC representatives with the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Mr Alexander Zhukov, 29 June 2010.

2 See – National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 approved by Decree No 537 of the President of the Russian Federation on 12 May 2009.

3 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 approved by Decree no 537 of the President of the Russian Federation on 12 May 2009; see part 2. The modern world and Russia: the state of affairs and development trends, p. 4-8, and part 9. Strategic stability and equal strategic partnership, p. 29-31.

4 Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2030 approved by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No 1715-r on 13 November 2009; see part 9: Foreign energy policy, p. 55-58.

withdrew from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) in August 2009. For its part the EU considers ECT a basis for any further liberalisation of its energy market, including its openness to Russian energy companies. The recent initiative of President Medvedev on concluding a new Global Energy Security Treaty that would replace ECT was addressed to the member states of G-20, not to the EU exclusively, even though the EU remains the key trade partner of Russia in the field of energy.

- 2.7 Russia attempts to manage its interests vis-à-vis the EU through developing special relations with the traditional "big" European powers. Indeed, the EU Member States have their own bilateral relations with Russia reflecting their traditions and interests but it is essential that they work to ensure that their positions and activities should become more coordinated in terms of formulating an overall EU policy towards Russia. The new Lisbon Treaty enhanced the EU Common Security and Foreign Policy as well as gave new competences to the EU regarding energy security.
- 2.8 Russia and the EU are also in disagreement regarding the Eastern Partnership, which Russia sees as an attempt to expand the EU's sphere of influence. On its side the EU views the Eastern Partnership as a tool to share its common values and standards with its Eastern neighbours since their implementation leads to their economic and social modernisation and contributes to security and stability of the whole European continent.
- 2.9 EU-Russia cooperation has improved positively in the context of the joint EU-Russia-Norway-Iceland Northern Dimension Policy. Tangible results have been achieved in partnership projects in the field of environment, public health, culture, transport and infrastructure. The EESC has continuously contributed to the implementation of the policy, stressing the importance of engaging civil society therein in its opinion on the Northern Dimension policy⁵.
- 2.10 Notwithstanding the existing misunderstandings and difficulties mentioned above, a general common understanding of the strategic importance of bilateral relationship prevails in both the EU and Russia. The political will to upgrade bilateral relations has been clearly demonstrated by the Conclusions of the EU-Russia summit in Rostov-on-Don (31 May-1 June 2010), including the Joint Statement on the Partnership for Modernisation initiative⁶.

⁵ REX/217 "The future of the Northern Dimension policy", rapporteur Mr Hamro-Drotz, 5 June 2006 (OJ C 309, 16.12.2006, p. 91-95).

⁶ Priority areas of the Partnership for Modernisation will include: expanding opportunities for investment in key sectors driving growth and innovation, enhancing and deepening bilateral trade and economic relations, and promoting small and medium-sized enterprises; promoting alignment of technical regulations and standards, as well as a high level of enforcement of intellectual property rights; improving transport; promoting a sustainable low carbon economy and energy efficiency, as well as international negotiations on fighting climate change; enhancing cooperation in innovation, research and development, and space; ensuring balanced development by addressing the regional and social consequences of economic restructuring; ensuring the effective functioning of the judiciary and strengthening the fight against corruption; promoting people-to-people links; and enhancing dialogue with civil society to foster participation of individuals and business.

3. **Lessons learned from the Common Spaces**

3.1 **General Findings**

3.1.1 The institutionalised dialogue under the umbrella of Common Spaces⁷ allowed for the most intense dialogue the EU has ever had in the history of its external relations with any third country. For the negotiations of the new EU-Russia agreement the following lessons of the existing cooperation within the EU-Russia Common Spaces should be learned:⁸

- the Common Spaces (CS) structure is a well-established institutional framework to maintain a wide-ranging political and sectoral dialogue between the EU and Russia, and should be preserved;
- in spite of several positive samples of progress achieved on sectoral issues CS has brought rather modest outcomes in relation to the initial expectations of both sides;
- in order to improve the dialogue and cooperation more political will, mutual trust and the ability of both sides to agree on terms and values including the mutually agreed standards is needed.

3.2 **Common Economic Space**

3.2.1 The EU objective for the establishment of the Common Economic Space (CES) was the creation of an open and integrated market between the EU and Russia. Progress towards achieving this goal is slow and a free trade area seems to be rather distant reality. It is essential that Russia becomes a member of the WTO and the EESC welcomes the wish of the Russian side to accomplish its accession to the WTO as soon as possible. However, the creation of the Customs Union with Kazakhstan and Belarus has raised questions how it will effect its negotiations with the WTO.

3.2.2 The CES dialogue in different areas is multileveled and it involves many aspects of the economic, trade, financial and industrial issues⁹. The EESC recommends that the CES dialogue should cover also employment and social policy with the involvement of the social partners that are not yet included in the negotiating process, taking at the same time into

⁷ In May 2003 the EU and Russia agreed on a new structured format of cooperation within four Common Spaces: the Common Economic Space, the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, the Common Space on External Security, and the Common Space on Research, Education and Culture. In May 2005 both sides negotiated a package of road maps to implement the Common Spaces. See also http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/russia/docs/commonsaces_prog_report_2009_en.pdf.

⁸ See - Searching for New Momentum in EU-Russia Relations. Agenda, Tools and Institutions. Bratislava: Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2009.

⁹ There are the following main working groups within CES: Transport; Industrial and Enterprise Policy; Regulatory Dialogue on Industrial Products; Space; Information Society; Agriculture; Fisheries; Macro-economic Policy; Financial Services; Energy; Procurement; Environment; Trade Facilitation; IPR; Investment; Inter-regional cooperation; Statistics; Macroeconomic and Financial Issues.

consideration the limits of EU competences in these fields. Special attention should be devoted to public health issues including sanitary and phytosanitary measures and consumer protection.

- 3.2.3 The EU-Russia Industrialists Roundtable is the institutional platform for the involvement of the business in the CES. Besides the positive aspects of the strong support of the business communities from both sides to the deeper economic integration, some working groups established with the aim of facilitating the EU – Russia dialogue on regulatory and industrial issues are still not functional¹⁰ and recommendations and proposals are not taken into account by politicians and state administration. Larger and more systematic involvement of relevant stakeholders in the negotiation process would contribute to the identification and removal of "artificial" obstacles hindering the mutual trade and investment. Tools to support such involvement need to be put in place. A EU-Russia Business Forum representing the main economic and business actors could become such a tool.
- 3.2.4 The key issue for all the working groups within CES should be to remove obstacles to business and investment, to prevent protectionism, to ensure fair competition and to negotiate the harmonisation of legislation and standards. The EESC calls for a higher accountability of progress and strengthening of Russia's capacities to implement the changes to legislation and practice. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty gives the EU competence in relation to investments, in terms of both regulation and protection. Therefore, the EU should include substantial investment provisions in the new agreement replacing and updating the PCA, including provisions on fair and equal treatment and, in particular, credible and reliable arbitration clauses to safeguard investor-State relations.
- 3.2.5 EU financial tools assigned for the support of cooperation in this field should be more connected to policies and their use must be simplified as regards administrative procedures. The implementation and evaluation phases of the process must be strengthened. In particular, small projects trust funds should be established with simplified procedures, so that funds are available to broader target groups and institutions including women entrepreneurs, SMEs, the social economy and used for small but concrete and results-oriented projects¹¹. Eventual reduction of available funds should be compensated by higher co-financing on Russia's side which should have more impact on and ownership of programmes and projects.

3.3 Common Space on Freedom, Security and Justice

- 3.3.1 The area of freedom, security and justice is a very important one since it involves the issues of democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Both sides have a

¹⁰ Working Groups, including subgroups on Construction Products, Machinery and Electrical Equipment, Conformity Assessment and Standardisation, Aerospace, Competition, and Public Health.

¹¹ World trade, fair trade, fair competition, access to justice, data protection and privacy, durability, energy efficiency, water supply, consumer education, e-commerce, food policy, group action, health, liability for defective products and services, financial issues, telecommunications, contract terms etc.

common interest in addressing challenges such as organised crime, terrorism, drugs and illegal migration.

3.3.2 One of the main subjects of the negotiations is a visa and readmission policy. The EESC requests that the views of civil society on the facilitation of issuing visas for businesses, civil society organisations, students, multiple visas for the inhabitants of border regions, the reduction or abolition of visa fees, registration for foreign citizens and its simplification, balanced and non-discriminatory implementation of the respective rules pertaining to work and residence permits are taken into consideration respecting the competences of the Member States in these matters. The EESC supports speedy simplification and liberalisation of the visa regime based on the implementation of mutually agreed commitments.

3.3.3 The EU has to continue its efforts aimed at involving other non-state actors in the EU-Russia human rights consultations.

3.4 **Common Space on External Security**

3.4.1 The joint EU-Russia endeavours in the area of external security are limited. The EU certainly should strive to engage Russia in joint activities aimed at maintaining security, following the positive experience from joint missions in the Western Balkans and Chad.

3.4.2 The EU was invited by Russia to mediate the conflict settlement with Georgia after the Russia-Georgia conflict in August 2008. Russia still needs to implement all obligations under the 12 August and 8 September 2008 Agreements. The European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) is an indispensable factor for the stabilisation efforts in Georgia. Access of EUMM to Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains a crucial yet unfulfilled part of its mandate. In this regard, Russia's cooperation is of utmost importance.

3.4.3 In spite of their different views on the security in Europe and in the world both sides should continue to maintain the bilateral security dialogue and dialogue through the existing international institutions that should be used to debate on EU-Russia relations: the UN, Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the NATO-Russia Council.

3.4.4 The EU cannot neglect the interests of its Eastern neighbours in its relations with Russia and vice-versa and it needs to stay firm in its commitment to facilitate the Eastern partners' transformation.

3.4.5 Unity on key issues (relations with Russia; energy policy; relations with the Eastern partners) will strengthen the EU's position in dealing with the Russian Federation. The EU should first of all start speaking with one voice.

3.4.6 While official contacts take place, civil society organisations, research institutes and think tanks in the EU and Russia cooperate in a still small number of issues. Insufficient contacts

and lack of cooperation result in a stereotyped perception of interests and intentions of "the other" partner. Therefore, bilateral civil society dialogue should be a contribution to the search for new approach to the issues of mutual concern such as international terrorism and its roots.

3.5 **Common Space on Research, Education, and Culture**

3.5.1 This common space can serve as an example of the most successful EU-Russia cooperation with hard science projects strongly dominating.

3.5.2 The sign of success is both sides' active engagement evidenced by the programmes and funds provided and the bottom-up approach that means letting the scientists structure their work and choose the most suitable forms¹².

3.5.3 On the other hand this success contrasts with the rather limited mobility in the education field, where some exchanges have been achieved, for instance through Tempus and Erasmus Mundus Programmes. There is also difficulty in getting further information on the functioning of working groups. More attention should be given to the youth movement and intercultural exchanges. Civil society should become more involved also in the negotiations and follow-up of the agreements in this common space in order to monitor the effects of research projects on the knowledge-based society.

4. **The state of civil society in Russia**

4.1 The available information about the situation of Russian civil society and about the social and civil dialogue¹³ indicates that it does not correspond yet fully to the European standards, nevertheless its position and influence has partially improved since our last evaluation of EU-Russia relations¹⁴.

4.2 The Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (CCRF) established in 2006 has become the official body representing the civil society in Russia. The Chamber was established by the decree of the President who nominates one third of its members. The Chamber has managed to become an instrument of expression of views of the civil society on important issues at the national and regional level where local chambers have been established in many regions. The Chamber presents its recommendations, comments on the draft legislation and does the

12 There are the following working groups in the areas of health, food, agriculture and biotechnology, nanotechnologies and new materials, energy, aeronautics and environment, nuclear fission and nuclear fusion, information and communication technologies and seven groups were established in the field of space cooperation.

13 The Report on the situation of the civil society in the RF published by the CCRF in 2009 <http://www.oprf.ru/documents/1151/1256/>, briefing paper of DG Relex for the European Parliament from February 2009.

14 REX/181 EU-Russia relations, 13.7.2005, rapporteur Mr Filip Hamro-Drotz (OJ C 294, 25/11/2005 p. 33 – 37).

analysis of the sectors and situation in regions. The positions of the Chamber are sometimes very open and critical towards governmental policies¹⁵.

- 4.3 According to the Report on the situation of civil society in the Russian Federation in the year 2009¹⁶ published by the CCRF, the number of non-profit non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) registered in Russia reached 670 thousand legal entities. Between 2004 and 2009, their total number dropped by 17%. The CCRF recommends changing the classification of NNGOs and using the UN method that does not regard the institutions established by the state authorities as NGOs.
- 4.4 By the field of their activities, the largest number of NGOs are involved in social affairs (54%), followed by science and education (44%), defence of rights (42%), charity (39%), tourism and sports (32%), culture (30%), information (27%), health (22%), environment (12%), municipality (9%), religion (9%), economy (6%), housing (5%) and others (5%).
- 4.5 The CCRF has established relations with foreign partner organisations including the EESC (Memorandum of Understanding in 2008) and became a member of the AICESIS and hosted its Board meeting in December 2009. EESC-CCRF relations have since then been strengthened via the organisation of joint workshops on topic of common interest and the adoption of joint conclusions as a result of these workshops¹⁷.
- 4.6 The Russian leadership is becoming aware that without the involvement of civil society it would not be possible to realise the strategic goal of the modernisation of Russia. During the last year, several amendments to the existing legislation have been adopted in order to improve the state of civil society, including the easing of restrictions on the activities of NGOs funded from abroad.
- 4.7 In spite of the gradual growing of the understanding of the role of organised civil society for the modernisation of the Russian political system there is still a long way to go.
- 4.8 The social dialogue between social partners on the national level takes place in the Russian **tripartite committee** for the regulation of the social and labour relations. The general agreements are negotiated between the All-Russian trade unions and the employers' association with the participation of the government. The collective agreements are usually concluded in the enterprises where there are trade union representatives; nevertheless sometimes the disputes lead to strikes. Russia has ratified most of the ILO conventions but it is essential that these conventions are fully respected.

15 See the web site of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, including the list of documents (opinions, monitoring reports, interventions, etc.): <http://www.oprf.ru>. For major achievements in terms of successful interventions vis-à-vis state authorities on federal and regional level see the column "We did it!": <http://www.oprf.ru/ru/press/984/>.

16 See footnote no 13.

17 Information about the Joint Workshops and the text of the joint conclusions can be found at: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-eu-russia-june-2010>

- 4.9 **The employers** are represented by the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP) as an independent non-governmental organisation. The Union represents over 120 regional alliances and industry associations of key industries of the economy and plays an active role as the social partner in the Russian tripartite committee. It can initiate new bill drafts and makes continuous efforts to improve the existing legislation related to the economy and entrepreneurship. The Union cooperates closely with BusinessEurope and supports the improvement of the business relations between Russia and the EU and its Member States.
- 4.10 Alongside the RSPP there are other organisations representing entrepreneurs and employers such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation¹⁸, Russian Managers Association, Opora Rossii (SMEs Association) and others. They are represented in the CCRF.
- 4.11 The **trade unions** are represented by two trade union organisations: the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) and the Confederation of Labour of Russia (KTR). Both are members of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and its regional structure for Europe – the Pan-European Regional Council (PERC)¹⁹.
- 4.12 The EESC is concerned about problems facing the trade unions in Russia which have intensified in recent years. The free trade unions consider the absence of respect of the basic worker rights for the association, collective bargaining and strike as the most acute problem. There are obvious cases of uncovered pressure on trade unions and their members and their leaders to hinder their legal activities and cases of discrimination. There is an absence of effective legal protection of workers from the government administration responsible for the enforcement of the law in the industrial relations.
- 4.13 There is a large variety of **non-governmental organisations**. Their field of interest is indicated in the point 4.4. The organisations for protection of human rights opposed to the government²⁰ face different kind of obstructions, pressures and threats. The grassroots' NGOs representing consumers, environmentalists, social economy, youth etc.²¹ face mostly funding problems. Besides the civil society organisations working on the federal level there are thousands of NGOs active on the regional and local level, some of which face boycott or an unfriendly attitude from the local authorities.

18 The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation is member of Eurochambers.

19 The President of the FNPR is the currently elected President of Pan-European Regional Council (PERC). According to its statutes the General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) serves as the General Secretary of the PERC.

20 Some of the most prominent are Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Human Rights Institute Russia, Youth Human Rights Movement, Public Verdict, Glasnost Protection Foundation, Golos Association in Protection of Voters' Rights, Human Rights Watch (Russian chapter), Memorial (human rights group), SOVA etc.

21 Such as Freedom of Choice, Interregional Organisation of Automobilists, Greenpeace Russia, Bellona (Environmental protection), Institute for Collective Action, Movement Against Illegal Migration, Pamyat (preservation of historical monuments and recording of history), Russian Orthodox Church, Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, SOVA Analytical-Information Centre, Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, World Wildlife Fund (Russian chapter).

5. EESC proposals for the improvement of EU-Russia relations

5.1 General suggestions

- 5.1.1 Establishment of mutual trust between Russia and the EU is strongly needed – this is a task, first of all for political leaders but also for civil societies on both sides, which must play a major supporting role in this process. Without trust, further progress in the EU-Russia negotiations of the new treaty and the development of dialogue within Common Spaces structure is hardly possible.
- 5.1.2 On the EU side, a common approach agreed among Member States, greater clarity of goals, realistic ambitions and more flexibility could help in progressing with EU-Russia relations in broad terms and specifically in the building of the four Common Spaces.
- 5.1.3 The EU-Russia relationship needs a new political momentum that would allow both sides to revive their cooperation and to regain a sense of strategic partnership. The agenda of the Partnership for Modernisation (PfM) as agreed at the Rostov on Don Summit on 1 June 2010 should be considered by the EU side as a future-oriented package of cooperation proposals. They should give a new momentum to EU-Russia relations based on lessons learned from the Common Spaces and at the same time complement the Eastern Partnership offer already made to six East European countries.
- 5.1.4 The EESC welcomes the fact that the Partnership for Modernisation agenda includes not only technological and economic aspects but also the promotion of people-to-people contacts and the enhancing of dialogue with civil society to foster the participation of individuals and business. We are convinced that the modernisation of Russian society cannot be achieved without special stress on issues like human rights, democracy, the fight against corruption, the rule of law, freedom of media, social dialogue, increasing the role of civil society in the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the necessary reforms.
- 5.1.5 In order to make EU assistance to the activities of Russian NGOs more accessible and operative, the EESC recommends that consideration be given to a possible reduction of the existing 20 percent co-financing requirement for Russian NGOs if they wish to apply for support within the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights grant scheme. The requested co-financing for EIDHR grants significantly limits the scope of Russian NGOs that might benefit from EU support.
- 5.1.6 Russia's concerns regarding the Eastern Partnership initiative should not mean that the EU cannot propose and seek cooperation and partnership with Russia in the concrete regions and regional projects under condition of the equal and constructive participation of their common neighbours. In this respect the recommendations from the EESC opinions on the Northern

Dimension²², the Baltic Sea Strategy²³, the Black Sea Synergy²⁴, the Eastern Partnership²⁵ and the Danube Strategy should be taken into consideration. It is important that the goals agreed by the European Union with the Eastern partners and Russia are as compatible as possible. The sectoral dialogues with the Russian Federation and the action plans agreed with the Eastern partners should essentially lead in the same direction, although they are most likely to differ in scope and ambition.

- 5.1.7 The EU, the Russian Federation and their common neighbours should develop overarching projects in areas such as energy policy, infrastructure development, border management, environmental issues and approximation of standards that would help to transcend the dividing lines that may eventually result from the implementation of the Eastern Partnership.
- 5.1.8 Civil society should be involved in identifying the projects of interest for the EU, the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia, and Russian civil society organisations should be invited to the respective working groups of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum whenever they will be discussing the issues relevant for the whole region. The similar EU-Russia Civil Society Forum could become a tool for involving Russia's civil society organisations in the development of EU-Russia relations.

5.2 The role for EESC

- 5.2.1 EESC and the Russian independent civil society organisations should be invited to participate in the EU-Russia human rights consultations that have been taking place since 2005.
- 5.2.2 In order to strengthen interaction between European and Russian civil society the following steps should be taken:
 - 5.2.2.1 To establish a new contact group within the EESC REX section that would be dealing with the EU-Russian relations.
 - 5.2.2.2 To propose the establishment of a joint civil society body between the EESC and the Russian civil society as one of the points of the future EU-Russia Agreement. Its main goal should be a civil society contribution to the development of EU-Russia cooperation.
- 5.2.3 The interaction with the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation and steps taken towards an enhanced dialogue should be continued and developed so that it becomes permanent and

22 REX/217 The future of the Northern Dimension, 12.7.2006; rapporteur Mr Filip Hamro-Drotz (OJ C 309, 16.12.2006, p. 91–95).

23 REX/262 Baltic Sea region: the role of organised civil society in improving regional cooperation and identifying a regional strategy, 13.5.2009; rapporteur Ms Marja-Liisa Peltola(OJ C 277, 17.11.2009, p. 42–48).

24 REX/245 Setting up civil society organisations networks in the Black Sea region, 9.7.2008; rapporteurs Mr Mihai Manoliu and Vesselin Mitov (OJ C 27, 3.2.2009, p. 144–151).

25 REX/271 Involvement of civil society in the Eastern Partnership, 13.5.2009; rapporteur Mr Ivan Voleš (OJ C 277, 17.11.2009, p. 30–36).

regular. At the same time the EESC should ask the Russian side to invite to the joint activities representatives of other civil society organisations which are currently not represented in the CCRF.

- 5.2.4 The EESC should, as well, continue to contribute to the existing contacts between European and Russian civil society in the context of the Northern Dimension Policy, the Baltic Sea Strategy, the Black Sea Synergy and other relevant regional initiatives.

Brussels, 9 December 2010.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Staffan Nilsson
