



**The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum
calls for an end to violence and
for repealing of repressive laws in the Ukraine
23 January 2014**

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (CSF) expresses its great alarm at the growing violence in Ukraine and mourns the victims of the clashes. A key factor in the latest upsurge of confrontation between the government and its critics has been a package of legislative amendments pushed through the Ukrainian parliament on January 16th, 2014, with an utter disregard for the parliamentary procedures and without any public consultations, and subsequently signed by the President of Ukraine on January 17th, 2014. We are particularly concerned not only about the way the new laws were adopted, but about their content, which undermines fundamental rights and freedoms that should be guaranteed in a democratic state and contradicts international obligations of Ukraine. Introducing such measures will have a long lasting impact on democracy in Ukraine and is a brutal response to massive, overwhelmingly peaceful protests that have been taking place in Ukraine since the end of November.

In particular, the new laws require Ukrainian non-governmental groups that receive funding from foreign sources and participate in “political activities” to register as “foreign agents.” They also criminalize libel, impose additional restriction on freedom of expression and the use of Internet, and introduce administrative and criminal penalties for a wide range of violations related to protest activities.

The “foreign agent” concept is blatantly modelled after Russian legislation introduced in 2012, which led to an unprecedented crackdown on many leading Russian NGOs, especially those which deal with human rights and public control of the authorities. The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum has repeatedly expressed its clear position that the Russian “foreign agents” law should be repealed and has urged the Russian authorities to enable unhindered operation of civil society organizations in accordance with international standards. Today, however, instead of changes in Russia, we see negative developments in Ukraine, where repressive laws are copy-pasted from Russia and are inspired by an authoritarian and nationalistic approach to civil society.

We condemn the spread of this repressive practice and are concerned that this development may have a huge impact on our whole region, including member states of the European Union, where a recent government legislative proposal in Bulgaria introduces penalties for persons who work for a foreign-run or “foreign-controlled” NGO and “harm the Republic”.

We express our solidarity with the people of Ukraine and the Ukrainian civil society and express our grave concern about parliamentary and governmental steps that are not aimed at finding a peaceful solution but at polarization and marginalisation of active citizens critical of the government.

Therefore, we call on:

- Ukrainian authorities and opposition groups to refrain from violence and avoid further victims among participants of the protest movement and any other people;
- The Ukrainian authorities to repeal the package of restrictive laws (including the law on “foreign agents”) in order to provide for unhindered operation of civil society;
- Ukrainian authorities to engage in dialogue with the opposition and protesters acknowledging the grievances of Ukrainian people regarding the recent political decisions and legislative changes;
- This dialogue to include a mechanism for credible and impartial investigation of killings, abductions, torture, and other abuses committed during recent months, leading to legal prosecution of perpetrators;
- The Russian government to freeze with immediate effect all loans and other funding to the Ukrainian authorities until they start a real dialogue with the protesters, and to persuade President Yanukovich to do everything in his power not to escalate the situation;
- The EU to freeze with immediate effect all loans and funding instruments to the Ukrainian authorities until they start a real dialogue with the protesters;
- The EU to take serious account of the policy recommendations of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on the current situation¹;
- The EU and Russia to support international observation of developments in Ukraine by a pan-European organization such as the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, based on the human rights and the human dimension standards which have been jointly subscribed to;
- The EU and Russia to support international efforts by the leadership of these inter-governmental organizations for mediation in the Ukrainian crisis.

The Steering Committee of EU-Russia-Civil Society Forum underlines its willingness to work together with civil society in Ukraine for peaceful development in a common democratic Europe. The CSF is ready to support and contribute to a meaningful dialogue between representatives from Ukraine, EU and Russia, and inter-governmental organisations, which should also include representatives from Ukrainian civil society.

The Steering Committee
of the EU-Russia-Civil Society Forum

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¹ <http://www.eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/statement-eu-must-cease-financial-assistance-to-ukraine-government-and-impose-sanctions-on-legislators-that-voted-for-dictatorial-legislation/>