



Again, EU-Russia Summit missed the chance to take down barriers between citizens from the EU and the Russian Federation

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum comments on the conclusions drawn at the EU-Russia Summit in Yekaterinburg on 3-4 June.

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (CSF) is disappointed about the insignificant progress made at the last EU-Russia Summit in Yekaterinburg on 3-4 June. Once again, the chance to take down barriers between our countries and societies was missed. Removing these barriers would be crucial for fostering the development of a unified European space.

In particular, the Steering Committee regrets that once again no agreement on the facilitation of visa regulations has been reached although the draft of this agreement has been waiting to be signed for more than a year already, as both sides claim. Once again, the CSF Steering Committee appeals to the leadership and the parliaments of the EU countries and the Russian Federation to sign this contract on the significant facilitation of the visa regulations on both sides with direct positive impact on millions of citizens. At the same time, this would need to include measures that are in the interest of people and the civil society, as the CSF already stated in their [“Recommendations on the process of facilitation and liberalisation of the visa regime between the European Union and the Russian Federation”](#), published in April 2013. At the same time, the CSF Steering Committee underscores its position that it is not necessary to create special privileges for the holders of service passports; the ruling principle is to safeguard an equal, simple and low-cost access to long-term visas for all citizens.

The CSF Steering Committee considers the citizens' privacy an important element and therefore appeals to the Russian Federation to renounce the introduction of data retention for passengers flying in - or travelling via the Russian Federation on their route - from the European Union as of 1 July. Furthermore, they are appealing to the EU leadership to renounce existing agreements with third countries, such as the US.

For the CSF Steering Committee, key factors for the development of democratic societies in our countries in accordance with international conventions are to create beneficial conditions for an active civil society and an active NGO sector. Therefore we are once again emphasizing the continuing prosecution of independent civic organisations in Russia in the framework of the implementation of the law on “foreign agents” and demand Russia's leadership and law enforcement authorities to stop their repressive measures without delay and furthermore, we appeal to the EU representatives to actively support NGOs in Russia to stand up for their rights.

The CSF Steering Committee regrets that the summits between the EU and Russia, especially those summits that are held twice a year, bring so little results. At the same

time, from our point of view, this must not be a reason to decrease the number of these meetings or their regularity. The low level of results of these summits, however, is much rather an appeal for both sides to pro-actively drive the establishment of working mechanisms and more productive relations in the interest of the citizens and the development of open, beneficial and democratic societies in Europe. The same applies to the relationship between the European Union and other neighbouring countries and regions. The main goal for international relations in Europe have to be the achievement of closer ties between countries and people.

The working groups of the Civil Society Forum formulate their proposals for joint discussion between the governments of the Russian Federation and the European Union on social affairs, environmental policy, questions on the development of democratic institutions and in the area of human rights which are crucial and mutually beneficial for the citizens of [both sides](#).

The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is a common platform of civic organisations and initiatives of both sides to foster the horizontal ties between the civil societies and their more active participation in the intergovernmental dialogue between the European Union and Russia. More than 110 NGOs from Russia, EU members and international NGOs are currently members of the Civil Society Forum.

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