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## STATEMENT

### ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF COOPERATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND WITH EU AGENCIES

As part of the Project BRIDGE fostering mutual understanding and cooperation of the EU with Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine (2008-2012), co-financed by the European Commission, a seminar was held on 17 - 18 May 2010 in Moscow region for civil society representatives and civil servants from Russia. It was attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations from 16 regions of Russia and by 9 distinguished experts in the fields on the seminar agenda representing institutes of Russian Academy of Sciences, universities, etc.

The participants of the seminar have analyzed and discussed thoroughly different aspects of the situation in Russia related to the seminar's agenda and of EU – Russia cooperation and also elaborated several proposals, aimed at further development of cooperation with the EU and especially those with which the civil society organizations and institutions are concerned.

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The main conclusion of the participants was that the civil society organizations and institutions from Russia are not sufficiently involved in the development of the EU – Russia cooperation in the context of the Strategic EU – Russia dialogue and the newly established European Partnership Civil Society Forum in particular. This situation does not foster successful development of the cooperation of Russia with the EU.

The participants of the seminar adopted the following recommendations:

**Firstly**, they supported the opinions expressed by Mr. Georgy Satarov, the president of INDEM Foundation, in his lecture at the seminar in which he among other things called for further development of democracy and the rule of law in Russia.

**Secondly**, they agreed that migration is a very important source for the growth of Russia's population and meeting its labor needs for unhampered development. Hence it is crucial that Russia develop relevant selective immigration and integration policies. In this frame, they proposed to establish an independent, autonomous Federal migration agency.

**Thirdly**, they requested the European Commission and the government of Russia to make efforts to include in adequate ways Russian civil society organizations and institutions in the EU-Russia preparation, supervision and implementation of activities

and especially in the fields where members of civil society organizations have outstanding expertise and experiences.

**Fourthly**, they welcomed the signature of agreements for realizing five projects on cross-border cooperation on the borders of Russia with Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and proposed the inclusion of relevant civil society's organizations in the activities within these cross-border cooperation projects. They called upon the Russian government to adopt relevant legislation in order to provide local and regional authorities with necessary competencies to take part efficiently in this cooperation.

**Fifthly**, they supported the continuation of the EU-Russia dialogue on visa facilitation and liberalization in order to create an adequate, harmonized, rational, smooth, inexpensive and quick procedure for issuing visa to Russian citizens. The procedure should oblige the officials of consular offices to respect human dignity and human rights of applicants without any discrimination. Without regulating the visa issue in an adequate way, people to people aspect of EU-Russia cooperation will be restricted and even meaningless. On the other hand, they also called upon the Russian government to facilitate the procedure of granting visas to foreign citizens.

The participants of the seminar authorized Prof.Dr. Silvo Devetak, the BRIDGE Coordinator, and Georgy Satarov, Candidate of Science and President of INDEM

Foundation, to distribute this statement as wide as possible, and to send a letter in this regard to EU institutions and to relevant ministries and agencies of the government of the Russian Federation.

Moscow region, 18 May 2010