

EU Civil Society Contact Group

Tony Blair
Prime Minister
President of the European Council
10 Downing Street
SW1A 2AA London
United Kingdom

Brussels, 05 December 2005

Re: Russian NGO sector under grave threat

Dear Prime Minister,

The last vestiges of democracy in Russia are deteriorating rapidly. After several years of systematic clampdowns on independent media, private business and the judiciary as well as the near total control of the current parliament, the **last remaining pillar of civil society – the NGO sector – is now under grave threat**. Proposed legislation that would severely undermine the sovereignty of 450,000 Russian NGOs by imposing heightened surveillance and re-registration procedures has overwhelmingly passed the Duma in a first reading. Additionally, under the proposed law – "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation" – all foreign organizations would be required to re-register as Russian organizations. International programs supporting HIV, the environment, and human rights would all be called into question, not to mention the comprehensive civil society activity advanced by local Russian organizations. Were the legislation to go forward, Russia will become increasingly isolated from Europe and the international community as a whole.

The **next two readings in the Russian parliament are scheduled for 9 December 2005**. In addition to the clear violations of the Russian constitution and other international obligations, we have profound concerns that the proposed legislation will:

- Dangerously increase the intrusive power of the state by allowing unprecedented control over independent NGOs;
- Create an overly complicated registration procedure for NGOs and permit government officials to deny registration arbitrarily;
- Subject NGOs to inspections and audits at any time and without limitation;
- Liquidate NGOs unable to obtain registration;
- Outlaw foreign representative offices;

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The CSCG brings together seven large European NGO platforms in the following fields:
social (Social Platform), development (CONCORD), human rights (HRDN),
environment (Green 10), women (EWL), culture (EFAH), public health (EPHA).
Its Act4europe campaign aims at engaging national NGO activists in the Future of Europe debate

- Diminish the necessary checks and balances intrinsic to any democratic society

Russia is slated to take on the Presidency of the G-8 in January and the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in May 2006. Violating universal rights of freedom of expression and association starkly contravene the principals of these organisations.

As a coalition that brings together seven of the largest European NGO platforms, representing thousands of NGOs throughout Europe, we believe the European Union should live up to its role as a driving force democracy. We thus urge **you to seize the opportunity presented by the UK Presidency to make Europe's voice heard on this crucial issue at latest during the next GAERC Council on 12 December and demand that this legislation does not go forward in its current form.**

With best wishes,



Anne-Sophie Parent,

Chair of the Civil Society Contact Group
President of the European Social Platform

CC: J

Jack Straw, Secretary of State

Douglas Alexander, Minister for Europe

John Grant, Ambassador Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom

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