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STATEMENT ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF COOPERATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF UKRAINE

In the frame of the BRIDGE project – fostering mutual understanding and cooperation of the EU with Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine (2008-2012), co-financed by the European Commission, a seminar for representatives of civil society and institutions was organized in Odessa on May, 9-10, 2010.

The conference provided a thorough analysis of different aspects of the EU – Ukraine cooperation, covering both theoretical and practical dimensions of this cooperation.

The scope of the Seminar included a diverse range of topics such as: the theoretical background on decision-making procedure within the EU in the context of the Lisbon Treaty, EU Neighborhood Policies (ENP) and Eastern Partnership policy with emphasis on EU-Ukraine relations, the renewed strategy of Ukraine towards the EU, as well as the practical aspects of EU-Ukraine cooperation with a focus on the assessment of the threats of illegal migration to Ukraine, EU instruments of technical aid for Ukraine, energy cooperation between EU, Ukraine and Russia, cooperation between the EU and Ukraine on educational issues, regional and cross-border cooperation etc.

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Among the most important goals on the EU-Ukrainian agenda are the following: 1. the issue of introduction of visa-free regime, tackling the migration issues. 2. issue of free trade area with the EU. 3. preparation of the association agreement.

The main conclusion of the participants was that the current state of EU-Ukraine cooperation doesn't meet the needs of both sides and there has been a setback in European integration of Ukraine. The discussants having arrived to varying conclusions as for the current level of this cooperation, nevertheless the expediency of further promotion of this cooperation was underlined. During the discussion the importance of the uniting national idea and consensus was emphasized as a precondition for development of Ukrainian civil society and its activation in European integration process. In this regard civil society should be involved in elaboration of all agreements between the EU and Ukraine.

The participants of the seminar agreed on the following recommendations for the EU and Ukrainian institutions:

1. The European perspective of Ukraine is linked to the necessity to build European mentality and decent level of life within the country. This process is as important as the aim in itself and will contribute to the development of a clear European strategy. The real realization of European values and standards in Ukraine are more important than the formal framework of relationship with the EU.
2. Visa liberalization regime could be an exemplary sphere for joint efforts of the EU and Ukraine. Visa regime topic being a sensitive issue on the bilateral agenda, parties should continue to work on the integration of their visa policies, to work with the population on

explanation of the visa regime and to attract EP Civil Forum for the involvement of Ukrainian organizations.

The EU states should undertake the real liberalization of visa regime especially in the following: - to provide Ukraine with more diplomatic representations; - to simplify the set of documents required for visa application; - to accept the documents in English and not to demand their translation into languages of the EU states; - to elaborate the enhanced visa regime for members of the Euroregions.

3. As the interregional and regional cooperation is a main target of ENP and EP, the experts agreed on the necessity to increase the regional component of the EU-Ukraine cooperation, stimulating self-organization of the population. The independent role of regions in European integrations should be encouraged by the government. At the regional level it is essential for the EU to support the contacts between the civil society organizations with local authorities, to develop local programs of self-organization of civil society and to encourage the work of consultative groups of local authorities.

4. In this respect the EU should assist the efforts of Ukraine to build a transparent model of governance, provide relevant programs and projects for the civil society bodies in order to influence state agents – to contribute to the popularization of European ideas, contribute to consequent institutionalization of integration, uniting the efforts of all parties concerned.

5. The most relevant approach for the EU to the cooperation concerning civil society would be: to facilitate the transparent allocation of the technical aid and its smooth distribution; to upgrade the level of the expertise provided; to ensure that the funds provided are allocated to

concrete NGO or private companies rather than to Ministries and other governmental institutions; to let the partner-countries develop the list of priorities by themselves; to provide for post-project monitoring. The general recommendation is to work out a clear strategy, to make this cooperation more well-structured and functional.

Active involvement of the EU in realization of all aforementioned would be an efficient mobilizing framework for Ukrainian civil society to implement the positive European experience.

The participants of the seminar authorized Prof.Dr. Silvo Devetak, the BRIDGE Coordinator, and Prof.Dr. Igor Koval to share this statement with the EU institutions and the government of Ukraine.

Odessa, May, 9-10, 2010