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Heads of States and Governments, EU Member States and Eastern Partnership countries

Ministers of Foreign Affairs, EU Member States and Eastern Partnership countries

Members of Parliaments, EU Member States and Eastern Partnership countries

13 June 2018

Statement by Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on the 21st FIFA World Cup Hosted by the Russian Federation

The 21st FIFA World Cup starting on 14 June 2018 is hosted by the Russian Federation, a state that systematically undermines international law and threatens Europe's security. It is a state, which has violated the territorial integrity of other countries and human rights while spreading propaganda designed to defend its own actions and sow discord abroad.

The Steering Committee (SC) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) calls upon the governments of participating countries to **boycott the 2018 FIFA World Cup tournament in the Russian Federation at the political level**. The refusal to send official delegations to Russia would become a powerful demonstration of international solidarity and zero tolerance to Russia's aggressive policies and its crimes against human rights. This would also testify to the effectiveness of countries' commitments to respect the norms and the principles of international law.

The SC of the EaP CSF would like to draw attention to the hunger strike of Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian filmmaker who was illegally sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Russian authorities. A month ago, Oleg Sentsov started a hunger strike in the run-up to the 2018 FIFA World Cup and is demanding the release of Ukrainian political prisoners held in Russia. **We urge EU institutions and governments of European countries to put pressure on Russia by all legal means to satisfy Sentsov's demand and to release Ukrainian political prisoners who are being held in Russia on political charges. We also urge that pressure be exerted on the Russian Federation for it to allow Ukrainian and foreign medical workers to visit Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and in the occupied Crimea.**

Such a boycott is justified following the annexation of Crimea and military intervention of the Russian Federation in the Eastern Ukraine. Human rights are being violated in the occupied territories and these violations have resulted in the adoption of sanctions by

the international community against Russia. The relevant international legal instruments are the Resolution of the UN General Assembly 68/262 on the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine (March 2014), as well as the Resolutions on Violating Human Rights in the Occupied Crimea (71/205 as of 20 December 2016 and 72/190 as of 19 December 2017).

The Resolution of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly “On the future of the Eastern Partnership – combating hybrid challenges and security threats together” adopted on 1 November 2017 in Kyiv also pointed to security threats and a breach of international legal norms by Russia. The resolution, among others, called for the immediate release of Ukrainian political prisoners in the Russian Federation. Currently 70 persons are imprisoned for political reasons in Russia and the occupied Crimea. We are also grateful to the European Parliament for consistent attention toward this problem.

The illegal construction of the Crimean Bridge (Kerch Strait Bridge) by Russia opened in May 2018 is a de facto effort to legitimise the annexation of the sovereign Ukraine territory. The unlawful construction of this bridge without Ukraine’s consent is a direct violation of the principles of international law including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and bilateral agreements between Russia and Ukraine. Another instrument, which Russia uses in its hybrid war against Ukraine, is the attack on the freedom of speech. In addition to spreading propaganda and fake news, Russia has resorted to pressure on journalists including assassination. At the end of May 2018, the Security Service of Ukraine prevented the murder of Arkadiy Babchenko, a Russian journalist. Thanks to further investigations, a list of 47 journalists and opinion makers was discovered whom the Kremlin is said to have planned to assassinate in Ukraine.

One more example of an international crime perpetrated by Russia is the shooting down of the Boeing 777 carrying 298 passengers in July 2014 in Donetsk oblast. The crime was directed against Ukraine; however, its victims were the citizens of European countries including above all the Netherlands. According to the results of the Joint Investigation Team investigation and the report of the Security Council of the Netherlands, the airplane was shot down by the Russian Buk missile system from the territory controlled by the fighters sponsored by the Russian Federation.

The participation of the Russian Federation in the Syrian civil war and the attempt to poison Sergei Skripal, a former Russian spy, and his daughter in the United Kingdom in March 2018, in which the UK has concluded, Russia was presumably involved are additional examples from the list of international crimes that have been committed by Russia with the President Vladimir Putin as its leader.

Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum