



# THE BORIS NEMTSOV FORUM

EUROPE - RUSSIA

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE SUMMIT

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINAL REPORT

16-17 NOVEMBER 2016, BRUSSELS

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STIFTUNG FÜR DIE FREIHEIT



EUROPEAN  
ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY



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*Disclaimer: The recommendations of this report do not represent any position on the part of the organizers or partners of the event. They are a summary of views expressed by different participants of the working groups during their sessions as well as the opinions of speakers presented during the plenary sessions.*

The Boris Nemtsov Forum, which took place in the European Parliament in Brussels on November 16 - 17, 2016, looked at ways to strengthen EU-Russia people-to-people relations. Over 100 representatives of Russian and EU civil society organisations, experts, politicians, EU officials and MEPs took part in the meetings of the working groups. More than 200 participants attended the two plenary sessions.



During the two-day event, participants discussed the current state of relations between Europe and Russia and ways to improve them in future. The discussions touched on the subjects of sanctions and their effectiveness, visa liberalisation, the economic crisis in Russia, and the need to maintain dialogue with representatives of Russia outside the current regime.

European Parliament President Martin Schulz, Open Russia founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky, founder of Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom Zhanna Nemtsova and Luc Devigne, Managing Director (Russia) of the EEAS, gave welcoming remarks in a conversation moderated by ALDE President Guy Verhofstadt.

Member of the Executive Board of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, Zhanna Nemtsova, European Endowment for Democracy Executive Director Jerzy Pomianowski, publisher and activist Irina Prokhorova as well as politician and journalist Lev Schlosberg took part in an opening panel discussion entitled "Getting back on track: policy and priorities for a new relationship," moderated by ALDE Vice-chair Petras Austrevicius.



Four working groups then focused on detail, key aspects of the Europe-Russia relationship. The Forum concluded with a plenary session to summarise participants' contributions, and consider ideas for the future.

Coming just two months after the Duma elections in Russia, the Boris Nemtsov Forum also showcased a new generation of progressive, open-minded Russians who aspire to political and intellectual leadership.

The Boris Nemtsov Forum thanks its partners in this event, including the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Open Russia, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, the European Endowment for Democracy, the Group of the European People's Party, the Group of the Greens and the Institute of Modern Russia.



For more information and materials from the event, please visit:  
<http://nemtsovforum.org/brussels-november-16-17/>



## Summary recommendations for the Europe – Russia relationship

voiced by participants of working groups and plenary sessions speakers

- **Russia and Europe should work together to face the challenges of our time**
  - There are major challenges that can only be addressed effectively by Europe and Russia together: solving conflicts in the shared neighbourhood, the fight against terrorism, limiting nuclear proliferation, reducing climate change
  - In both Europe and Russia, democratic rhetoric is now in crisis. It is important to reformulate democratic and liberal ideas
- **Europe and the Russian opposition must prepare for a transitional period after the current regime falls**
  - It is important for Europe to build a relationship with Russia (at a people to people level) beyond Putin, before the regime leaves power
  - The Russian opposition should present a united front and work in between elections to build well organised structures
  - Work must focus on regional and municipal institutions, as part of an effort to build civil society in different parts of Russia
  - There is a need for positive messages and success stories from the opposition
  - Russian civil society and Western stakeholders should create together a road map with a plan to repair relations between Russia and Europe. Regime propaganda has done enormous damage to mutual relations
- **Supporting civil society in Russia is a way of supporting Europe's own future**
  - Europe should talk to democratic Russia, not to the regime





- Europe should support the Russian middle class, which is able to compete in a globalised world and wants different leadership in Russia
- Cultural initiatives, which are not affected by the “foreign agents” law, can be used to develop civil society in Russia
- A visa-free regime could be offered to people under 25-years-old, for a few days, if they want to enter the EU
- Russian civil society and Europe should work to rebuild trust in their mutual relations, destroyed by regime propaganda



- **Europe should react strongly to abuses of international law and human rights standards by Russia**
  - Europe should discuss the effectiveness of sanctions and decide on the next steps related to sanctions policy
  - For personal sanctions against the regime to be effective, they need to be made more difficult to circumvent



- There is a need to come up with new tools to root out corrupt Western business practices in Russia – these strengthen the regime and reduce the moral authority of Western countries
  - Europe should do more to help Ukraine become a success
  - Europe should move on from a “sanctions only” policy
- **Communication is the key to constructive Europe - Russia relationship and effective work of Russian opposition**
    - Channels of communication between Russia and the EU need to remain open despite EU sanctions
    - The Russian opposition should communicate more effectively with society and convince citizens that their vote in elections matters
    - Russian society needs to become aware that there is an alternative to the current regime
- **Russia should seek real, political reform, rather than wait for the economic crisis to go away**
    - Russian authorities should not implement import substitution, as this strategy has very little chance of being effective in the modern world
    - The way for Russia to overcome the economic crisis is to develop a closer relationship with Europe.
    - Russia should take into account the changes taking place in global energy policy related to climate change





## Recommendations for the future of platforms facilitating people to people contacts

- A community of experts should develop a mechanism for the intensification of contacts between formal and informal civil society organizations in Russia, and European partners.
- It will be important to have a broader set of participants. From Russia, this should include representatives of the “creative class” - filmmakers, lawyers, social entrepreneurs, historians etc. On the EU side, it should include a wider range of Russia experts and professionals interested in Russia from all over the EU.
- It will be important to invite as many representatives as possible of EU institutions and NATO in Brussels, dealing with relations with Russia, and also representatives of business with investments in Russia.







## Appendix

I

# Welcome remarks from the opening plenary session



*ALDE President*

[Guy Verhofstadt](#)

Good afternoon, dear colleagues, dear friends,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Brussels meeting of the Boris Nemtsov Forum.

This forum, established by Open Russia, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the Boris Nemtsov Foundation earlier this year is a much-needed platform, to engage civil society representatives, businessmen and academics from both the EU and Russia. It is a platform with a simple but vital goal: to facilitate mutual

understanding and to ensure a European future for Russia.

Boris Nemtsov fought tirelessly for this goal. He worked for a Russia, which respects the human rights of everyone. A Russia whose government is accountable to the people. And a Russia, which is at peace with its neighbours.

Sadly, today's Russia is not developing along Boris Nemtsov's vision.

Sadly, it is a Russia where human rights are violated, where opposition leaders and journalists risk getting killed. And it is also a Russia, which uses hybrid means to occupy a neighbouring country and to undermine democratic authorities in Europe.



Let me be clear. It would be wrong to abandon or isolate Russia. What we must do is to differentiate between the Russian leadership and Russian citizens, academics, businessmen.

We must be firm with the Kremlin and make clear that violations of international law, and of borders, comes with costs. At the same time, however, we must engage Russian civil society in a continuous dialogue and open up the EU to ordinary Russians



This is why I accepted with pleasure when Mikhail Khodorkovsky approached me with the proposal to host the Forum in the European Parliament premises. And I am very pleased to welcome Mikhail Borisovitch here today!

The importance of this EU-Russia Civil Society Forum for the European Parliament is underscored by the fact that Martin Schulz, President of this House, has accepted our invitation to open the Forum - I will give you the floor in short, Martin.

I also welcome Zhanna Nemtsova, the daughter of Boris, who carries on his work and with whom we are honoured to cooperate.



Furthermore, let me welcome also Luc Devigne, a Deputy Managing Director of the EEAS who is here on behalf of High Representative / Vice President of the Commission Federica Mogherini.



And I welcome all the other speakers and participants, including 60 friends from Russia who will participate in the working groups which start later today.

The working groups will look at perspectives for EU-Russia cooperation in:

- Trade, economy and energy
- Governance and politics
- Values and people
- EU and Russia in the world

These are all areas in which we need to prepare constructive cooperation with our Russian neighbours.

But first of all, Martin, the floor is yours.



Then I will give the floor to Mikhail (Borisovitch) Khodorkovsky, founder of Open Russia, for opening remarks.

Luc Devigne, Deputy Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia, will read a message from Federica Mogherini.

In closing the panel, I would like to thank all speakers for their opening remarks and wish the Forum fruitful discussions – and hand over the moderation to Petras Austrevicius.

[Martin Schulz](#) *MEP,*  
*President of the European*  
*Parliament*

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Ms Nemtsova,  
Dear Mr Khodorkovsky,  
Dear colleagues,  
Cher Guy,  
Dear friends,

Almost two years ago, on the 27th of February 2015, Boris Nemtsov was brutally murdered in the centre of Moscow, on a bridge right next to the Kremlin.

Boris Nemtsov was not only a former Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. He was one of the leaders of Russia's liberal and democratic opposition, a reformer, supported and admired by many in Russia. In 2015 he was investigating Russia's participation in the Donbas conflict. His courage, his commitment to a democratic Russia, stand as an example of civic engagement for the whole country.





His death was a shock to the whole world and it reminded us of too many other tragedies, among which I would mention journalist Anna Politkovskaya and lawyer Sergei Magnitsky. Yet again, almost two years later, the investigation has not brought the main instigators to justice.



Shortly before his death, Boris Nemtsov was concentrating on Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. He was determined to reveal the facts about this conflict, which are kept hidden from Russian citizens, a task of high importance. Because the conflict in Ukraine is the main cause for EU-Russia relations to be at their lowest since the Cold War.

Sanctions have been imposed and are regularly renewed as a result of the illegal annexation of Crimea and because of the unfulfilled commitments by Russia regarding the 2015 Minsk agreement. We still expect full respect of the ceasefire in force since 31 August, disarmament of all illegal groups and a restoration of control of the state border to the Ukrainian government. Russia's air support to the Syrian regime's indiscriminate targeting of civilian areas have caused further dismay. And I also hear from other leaders in our Member States and partners in the Balkans and in our Eastern neighbourhood – many are worried about hostile actions orchestrated by the Russian leadership.



These are difficult times for our relations with Russia.

Our official inter-parliamentary relations with, and missions to, Russia are frozen because of our counterparts' involvement in the conflict in Ukraine and the respective visa bans. Contacts with civil society in Russia are also hampered due to the authorities targeting independent NGOs through the so-called "foreign agents law."

However, dialogue will continue and must continue. Channels of communication need to remain open whilst respecting the EU sanctions' policy. Only through dialogue will we maintain the slim chance to solve our differences.

It would be an enormous achievement to re-establish deep cooperation with Russia. Europe and Russia, Europeans and Russians share a common history. Russia needs the EU and the EU needs Russia. Together we are stronger.



There are major challenges that we can only tackle together: solving conflicts in our shared neighbourhood, the fight against terrorism, limiting nuclear proliferation, and reducing climate



change. Landmark agreements such as Iran's nuclear program and at the Paris COP21 conference on climate change show what is possible when we cooperate – and indeed we expect all the signatories to fully implement these landmark deals. I want the EU and Russia to work closer together in the future but first we need to uphold the international legal order on which we base our common peace and security.

Today's forum can be a first step. It has ambitious, forward-looking objectives. It offers a platform for meaningful dialogue between civil society representatives, academics, the business community, politicians and officials coming from Russia and the European Union. I will be very interested to hear about your discussions and recommendations on essential issues such as our values, our governance, the economy and our relations with the rest of the world.

I sincerely congratulate Ms Nemtsova's Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom, Mr Khodorkovsky's Open Russia, the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit and the Members of this European Parliament (Guy Verhofstadt and Rebecca Harms) – for the organisation and the cross-party support to this important event, and would like to thank you once more for my invitation.



This Forum is called the Boris Nemtsov Forum. I am sure it will live up to be one of Boris Nemtsov's main legacies, for the benefit of Russia and of EU-Russia relations.

I wish a very successful event to all of you. Thank you very much.



*Zhanna Nemtsova, founder,  
Boris Nemtsov Foundation  
for Freedom*

I would like to thank Mr. Verhofstadt and Mr. Schulz for their presentations. I'm very happy to be in this forum in the European Parliament representing the Boris Nemtsov Foundation. This is the third event run under the name of my father, the second in the European Parliament and the third in Europe, because on the day of my father's birthday we had an event in Berlin. The people who help to organise this Forum are very important and I'm very thankful to ALDE, to EED, to Open Russia and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

Our efforts would be less important if we were not united in the name of Boris Nemtsov, so I would like to tell you about my father, the politician.

As you well know, he was a liberal politician in Russia and he made his liberal views very clear. In Russia anyone who speaks critically of Putin is described as a liberal. Members of parliament or the government working against monopolisation or violations of human rights are branded as liberals. But my father was a very balanced politician who adhered to the Russian constitution. Liberalism is currently rather out of fashion, and this is perhaps not only in Russia. My father was, of course, concerned with that, but for him convictions and principles were much more important than popularity. He was very popular in the 90s as governor of Novgorod Region, and as a man who contributed to stopping the war in Chechnya. He actually spoke out against Mr Yeltsin at the time, risking his career. He was the first Prime Minister in Russia to fight against the power of the oligarchs. He headed a faction in the Duma that voted for laws extending business relations, and he also initiated negotiations with people in the Dubrovka theatre during the Nord-Ost terrorist attack. He was in opposition but he was never in favour of the annexation of Crimea. He knew that more than 80% of people in Russia were in favour of this annexation, but he never





wanted to follow the majority because he appreciated its consequences and as result he became a symbol of democratic Russia. He in fact unites all of us and I'm sure his name will unite us in the future.



In conclusion, Mr Schultz spoke about the investigation of my father's assassination. It's ongoing, but encountering great difficulties. The only thing we can do is to ask the European Parliament to appoint a special rapporteur to help expedite this investigation. I asked about this in the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, but nothing has happened so far. So I should like to repeat my appeal, to step up the pressure to appoint a rapporteur, because the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly's mandate is to defend human rights. I hope that, jointly with the European Parliament, we will achieve this. I understand that being so low profile may be a mistake, but I hope that in future the situation will be rectified.

Thank you.



*Mikhail Khodorkovsky*, *Founder,*  
*Open Russia movement*

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
President Schulz,

I am pleased to welcome to this forum participants from many regions of Russia and countries of Europe. They are representatives of civil society, politicians and experts.

In inviting participants here, we wanted to create an opportunity for dialogue between EU parliamentarians, people working in the European Commission, well-known public figures from Russia, and new political players. Players who will have to construct a future Russia; a European country, since no other Russia exists, no matter what the current government – and the small section of society it has deceived – might think.

Over the two years since our Open Russia organisation was reincarnated, we have seen that our country, with its population of 140 million people, boasts more than enough young and up-and-coming politicians capable of dragging it out of the systemic crisis into which it has been plunged by the current regime.

During the previous elections, we reorganised Open Russia into a movement. At the founding conference, we decided to continue preparing a programme of reforms and assembling a team to implement them; and we decided that we would continue furthering the development of civil society.

We set ourselves the challenge of collaborating with already-existing self-organised citizens' associations doing their best to resist encroachments on their rights on the part of the regime and its monopolies.





Many of them require legal, organisational and informational assistance. With support from Open Russia's backers, we can go some way to offering this assistance.

I also hope that further opportunities will present themselves over the course of this forum.

People in Russia are tired of confrontation; they are tired of militaristic hysteria, tired of being told that they are surrounded by enemies.



The vast majority of Russia's citizens want neither to fight nor to fence themselves off from the world.

Independent studies, including some that we ourselves have carried out, show that 70% of Russians believe it is important to restore friendly and equal relations with the world – and especially Europe – as quickly as possible.

Likewise, the majority of Russians believe that authority on the world stage should be achieved by economic, cultural and scientific means, and not by means of intimidation.



But the current regime is not capable of performing this kind of U-turn. It is therefore crucially important to transfer the bulk of contacts and partnership projects to the level of ordinary people.

Over the past 25 years, millions of my fellow citizens have left Russia to live and work in Europe. They do not lose their ties to Russia. Hundreds of thousands of people come from Europe to Russia.

This means hundreds of thousands, millions of communication lines. It represents a foundation for new approaches, for a consolidation of good-neighbourly relations.

Russia cannot and must not be isolated, yet it would be highly imprudent not to keep the Kremlin in check; for the Kremlin is imposing on Europe a set of its own so-called values: contempt for and distrust of people, systemic corruption, a brazen disregard for rules and agreements.

It is crucially important that we do not just sit around and wait for the regime to “come to its

senses,” or to collapse under the weight of its own inefficiency.

And it is imperative to recognise that strategic cooperation with the current regime on any issue is impossible. It is impossible because of the regime’s highly personalistic nature, and because of a lack of institutional guarantees,



whether in business or in politics or in the humanitarian sphere.

This does not change the fact of existing trade, specific one-off agreements, and even high-risk investments.

But we must shift our strategic focus towards direct interaction with citizens and civil society. They cannot sign any decrees, of course, but it is on *them* that the shape of the future depends, and it is *they* who will determine what decrees will actually be implemented.



I am confident that the Boris Nemtsov Forum, inaugurated in Berlin last month, will become a permanent platform for dialogue.

I would like to thank all our partners – partners without whom the forum would not have been able to convene here in the European Parliament: the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom; the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom; the European Foundation for Democracy; and various political groups in the European Parliament, specifically ALDE, the European People’s Party (EPP), and the Greens Group. I would also like to express particular thanks to Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament, for his support, and also to the European External Action Service (EEAS) for their support and participation. I wish you every success in your work.

*Message from HRVP Federica Mogherini (delivered by Luc Devigne,  
Managing Director Russia, European Union External Action Service)*



Mr President, Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini would have very much liked personally to address the Forum. However, due to other engagements she could not be here today. She sends her sincere regrets and has asked me to deliver a few remarks on her behalf:

“The strongest tie between the European Union and Russia is built upon our own peoples. Our cultures are bound to one another, the connections between our societies transcend the political circumstances of the day. This gathering in Brussels of politicians, activists,



experts and business people from our countries makes for a great opportunity to refresh and renew such a deep relationship.

You gather in the name of Boris Nemtsov, a symbol in the quest for a more modern, prosperous and democratic Russian Federation, open to the world. And the world truly needs an open and cooperative Russia.



Deeper cooperation between the peoples of the European Union and Russia is essential in the current global environment. We face many of the same challenges, from instability in the Middle East to the threat posed by terrorist groups. Yet it is no mystery that the European Union and the Russian authorities have fundamental disagreements on several crucial issues, starting from Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, that have violated international law and challenged the European security order. They have also damaged trust between us, which is necessary if we want to build and maintain a partnership.



At the same time, there are many issues of common concern where our cooperation has delivered important results. The nuclear deal with Iran – successfully negotiated and implemented – and the recent Report by the Middle East Quartet on the situation in Israel and Palestine represent the most outstanding outcomes of our cooperation. They show that the

world truly needs the European Union and Russia to play on the same side when our interests converge.

Whether our relationship will evolve towards greater cooperation or greater disagreement is one of the key strategic issues we both face for the years ahead.

In March this year, the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union agreed on five principles

that guide our policy towards Russia and provide a clear framework for getting the EU-Russia relationship working in the right direction.

As reiterated in the Global Strategy, substantial changes in our relations are premised upon full respect for international law and the principles underpinning the European security order.

First and foremost, we need to resolve the immediate crisis, particularly in eastern Ukraine. The EU has a clear position on the illegal annexation of Crimea, which it does not recognise; as well as on the need for a complete implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Second, the EU works for strengthening relations with its Eastern neighbours and calls on Russia to do the same in a complementary manner. We reject the notion that there must be a binary choice of good relations with one or the other. Cooperation is not only possible, but often necessary.

Third, our approach to Russia is clearly framed and made effective by efforts to reinforce the European Union's own resilience, for instance in seeking our energy security through a stronger





Energy Union; by undertaking efforts to counter hybrid threats; and in our work on strategic communications.

Fourth, with the EU's interest as the determining factor, we do engage selectively with Russia in areas of foreign and global policy, such as counterterrorism, migration and climate change. Engaging with Russia on Syria or on other key regional crises is clearly essential. We are ready to cooperate with Russia, where we can constructively find peaceful and collective solutions.

Last but certainly not least, the EU maintains its strong support for Russian civil society and for people-to-people contacts as an indispensable element of our relations with Russia, particularly

with an eye to the future of the next generations, in both Russia and in the European Union.

This is all the more necessary today. In particular, we remain fully dedicated to maintain our long-term commitment towards the Russian human rights defenders and advocacy groups in civil society with whom we have been cooperating for a long time.

In spite of all difficulties, Russia's

society is strong and lively. The country is home to one of the great cultures of our continent, and has contributed immensely to our shared European civilisation. It is only natural to invest as much as we can in exchanges among our peoples. And this is exactly what the European Union is doing, and is willing to do more.

Cooperation on research, culture, science, social issues or mobility, to name just a few, is having a positive impact on Russian citizens in their everyday lives. We have supported projects related to the orphanage system, improving the lives of disabled people and promoting a sustainable socio-economic development of rural communities.

Russia is the biggest beneficiary of our Erasmus+ programme. In 2016 alone, we will put over 12 million euro in projects for the mobility of Russian students and teachers. Investing in our youth is investing in the present and the future of our relationship.





We need to keep engaging not only with Russia's authorities, but with its citizens and its society.

So let me thank the organisers for this opportunity to deepen our cooperation and mutual understanding. I look forward to keep working together with you all, as we have done so far.”

Thank you.

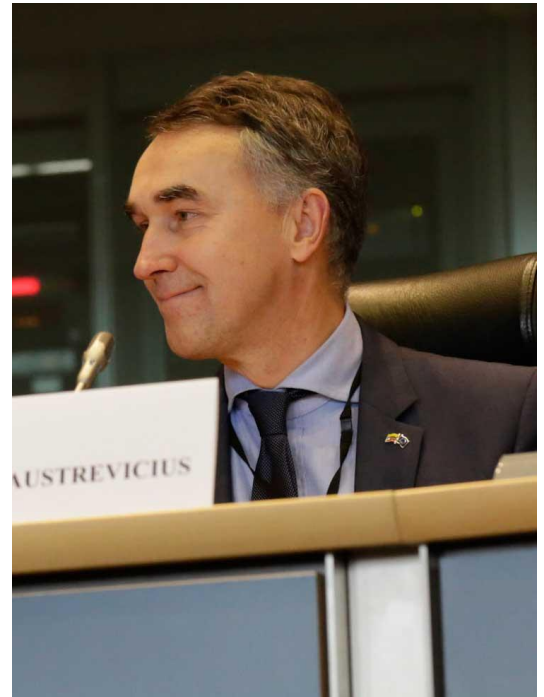


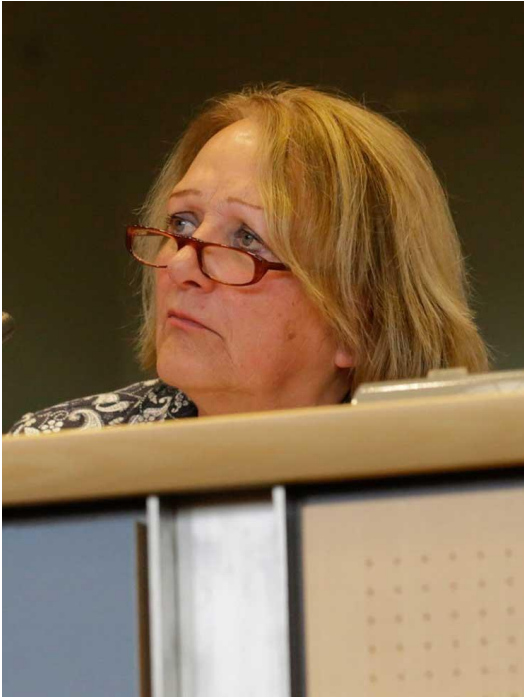
## II

## Abstracts from the opening panel discussion “Getting back on track: policy and priorities for a new relationship”

[Petras Austrevicius](#) *MEP,*  
*ALDE Vice-chair:*

“I am more than convinced that everyone in this room and in the European Parliament wishes and is interested in having Russia and the European Union as true and effective partners. (...). Since the title of this plenary says: ‘Getting back on track,’ the question here is getting back with whom. Putin’s Kremlin has another strategy than partnership and sincere dialogue, opened partnership and effective exchange. (...). Russian society has to become a new strategic partner to the European Union. Let’s use all our vision, energy and creativity to make it happen step by step and I believe we will build up a good result.”





*Sabine Leutheusser-  
Schnarrenberger* *Member of the  
Executive Board of the Friedrich  
Naumann Foundation for Freedom,  
Federal Minister (ret.):*

“I believe we need a policy of embracing containment towards Russia guided by liberal values and principles. These principles have been perfectly presented in the three baskets of the Helsinki process. First: security and trust-building measures; secondly, the cooperation in

areas where possible – namely economic and scientific cooperation; and third, a humanitarian dimension dealing with civil society and human rights. The conditions of the Cold War were completely different from today, sure. But I think that the answer to the new challenges needs to follow the same three lines of action as outlined in Helsinki.”

*Jerzy Pomianowski*

*Executive Director, European  
Endowment for Democracy:*

“Good cooperation if we want to engage in good cooperation actually requires only one element to flourish. It is trust, can we have again trust with each other when propaganda is increasing hate and artificial fear? When Europe is all the time portrayed as the one aiming to kill and destroy, removing Russia from the map of the world? When the leadership is all the time feeding people with lies and false debates? That is not a good ground for trust. Can international media, independent journalists





work freely and have their chance inside Russia? Of course, not. There is not an equal partnership in any sense and to restore trust it will take a lot of effort and a lot of time. But there are people in Russia and there are Russian activists whom we can trust, because they do share same values. And one politician said: 'No fundamental social changes occur merely because of government acts, it is because of society, of civil society, the conscience of the country, which begins to rise up and demand change. This is the only way.' And I have met many Russian people who share the values of democracy, good governance, honoured relations and partnership with international partners. They need to be given more of a voice and they need to be given support. (...) So, this summit, this meeting could be called a People-to-people Summit, because this is exactly what we are looking for: new openings, new changes or better dialogue between Europe and Russia. And I strongly believe there is room, there is a willingness of both sides, so we just need to do a little more in order to achieve it."

*Irina Prokhorova cultural  
historian, editor, publisher,  
activist:*



"Whether we like it or not, Russia is a part of Europe and in many respects if we look at the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century, in a way my country is a kind of transit for many processes that are going on. So, what we can see now in Europe and Russia and the USA, this is a strange infatuation with authoritarian ideas, with nationalism and xenophobia. Of course as other speakers have said, you can partly explain as an aggressive propaganda. But I am afraid when we speak about the crisis of democratic ideas, it's not the

ideas themselves, but I think the discourse, the rhetoric. (...). So, I think in that respect, we're all in the same boat. So what is really needed? We must reformulate democratic and liberal ideas. But this is very difficult, but quite a rewarding intellectual task. And we are at the beginning of the process. But I think, it is very important to realise that. There are quite a lot of people that



compare the present situation with the 1930s, when democratic development was strangled by authoritarian ideas. So, but we have this historical memory and, probably, we will be more creative than our opponents.”

### [Lev Schlosberg](#)

*politician, activist and journalist:*

“The Russian and European dialogue today is at an impasse. This is not an accident; this is not a result of some strange circumstance. It is a result of fundamental differences in values, which are prevailing today in the Russian Federation, in contrast to the European Union, and forming foreign and domestic policies. The subject of dialogue today is not cooperation, is not a joint development, but rather conflict. (...) We have to involve a new agenda, an agenda for tomorrow for Russian – European dialogue and cooperation and joint development. If this agenda is not going to be involved today, we will be too late tomorrow. And this agenda can be build by European institutions in direct contact with European politicians and Russian politicians. This will address all political issues including human rights, economic institutions, conflicts, military operations in Ukraine, Georgia and Syria. It is time to do it today.”



To watch the opening  
plenary session in full please  
visit:

[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=bTVN50OnUBE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTVN50OnUBE)



III

## Summaries of discussions of four working groups

### Working group: Economy, trade and energy

Co-chairs: [Christian Egenhofer](#)/[Hrant Kostanyan](#) and [Boris Grozovsky](#)

*The group discussed trade relationship between Russia and EU, energy relationship in the context of climate change discussions, the current economic crisis in Russia, the impact of sanctions on Russian economy and the likely future developments in bilateral relations.*



The Russian economy is currently undergoing a systemic crisis caused by several factors, including the low oil price, decreases in foreign investments and exports, and corruption. This



crisis started before Russia annexed Crimea and the global geopolitical situation began to deteriorate. In other words, the crisis was not triggered by Western sanctions, but rather by more fundamental issues, such as the distorted structure of the Russian state and the qualities of the ruling elite. The state plays an outsized role in the economy; and the ruling elite is only concerned with its own self-interest.

Since Russia has a commodities-based economy whose GDP depends on oil prices, these must constantly increase to keep the Russian economy growing. Given the current forecasts of the energy markets predicting that oil prices will continue to decline for the next decade, Russia's need for a long-term strategy to reform its economy could not be more urgent.



One of the measures introduced by the Russian government to overcome the crisis and the constraints imposed on the economy by sanctions, is the policy of import substitution. However, the working group concluded that this policy is failing in Russia; historically, it has also proved to be ineffective in a number of countries around the world, such as Brazil and South Korea. (Although this policy was somewhat successful in the late 1990s in Russia itself, today the conditions for economic growth differ greatly from that period).

The group observed that in reality, instead of addressing structural issues in the economy brought to the fore by the crisis, the Russian government is neither looking for ways to solve the crisis, nor is it interested in developing a long-term strategy for the country's development. Rather, it is waiting for the crisis to go away.

The issue of sanctions on the Russian economy is another widely discussed topic. The question of whether sanctions are having any real impact on Russia or not, is quite debatable. On the one hand, sanctions imposed by both the United States and the European Union created a level of uncertainty in the Russian economy, exacerbating the existing economic problems and



undermining the country's business climate. The working group agreed that sanctions on the financial and the military sectors are likely to be the most sensitive for the economy (the latter may impede Russia's military modernization). Personal sanctions are crucial, but, according to the group, they are ineffective as well, as individuals under these sanctions still find ways to transfer money to the EU and the U.S. through third parties.

On the other hand, experts argue that sanctions are not efficient as they do not have the anticipated impact on Russia's economy. In a sense, sanctions failed because they did not force the regime to change its policy toward Ukraine. Moreover, the working group pointed out that today it would not be realistic to expect any sanctions-related concessions from the Kremlin, because the Russian public will not accept them.

The group contended that for sanctions to have an impact on the economy, they would have to target Russia's energy trade - something that constitutes the core of the Russian economy. Europe is, however, not willing to go in that direction. Many members of the working group pointed out that European countries are too dependent on Russian commodities, and would never agree to undermine their trade with Russia.



The group concluded that the EU has three options when it comes to the future of sanctions: 1) keep sanctions as they are and continue to pretend they work; 2) extend sanctions to genuinely hurt the Russian economy, while accepting that such measures may create revanchist attitudes in Russia; 3) seek compromise with Moscow, which would mean admitting that sanctions were unsuccessful.

Tying together the issue of sanctions against Russia with that of the EU-Russia relationship, the working group suggested that Europe should help Ukraine become a success story. Ukraine is crucial to European security and plays a key role in dealing with the Putin regime. Regardless of





the current chill in the relationship, the EU is still Russia's biggest investment partner. Energy and trade are the two pillars of the relationship and potential areas where tensions can be eased and differences can be bridged. As Russia faces further economic stagnation, closer ties with Europe would benefit Moscow. But this is not a direction Russia is heading in today.

As a way forward, the working group suggested that Europe continue its efforts to build a relationship with Russia beyond the official frameworks and channels, keeping in mind that the regime will fall sooner or later. One of the ways to do so is through the support of student and scientific exchanges, development of civil society contacts, education of Russian citizens about issues, such as self-organizing or running small businesses. In addition, Europe should encourage Russian citizens to travel abroad, so they can overcome the stereotypes created by Kremlin propaganda about Europe.

Finally, one of the issues discussed by the working group was climate change. The Russian government continues to believe that the current commodities-

based model of the economy is sustainable, and ignores that fact that the developed world is moving closer towards green energy. The working group noted that the Russian public cares about environmental issues and climate change, more so than the government does. In recent years, Russia has witnessed a number of environmental protests in different regions. Social entrepreneurship with regard to environmental issues is on the rise. However, given the wide income gap between Russian regions, in too many cases local governments are too poor to really care about green energy.

The group concluded that in the mid-term Russia would remain Europe's main oil and gas supplier, as the shift toward green energy in the West will take many years, while production of oil and gas in Europe itself will be decreasing in the meantime.





## Working group: Governance and politics

Co-chairs: [Marie Mendras](#) and [Vladimir Kara-Murza](#)

*The group discussed lessons learned in the 2016 electoral cycle in Russia, and using this experience in the future. Russia's relations with Europe and cooperation between European institutions and civil society in Russia were also raised.*



The political situation in Russia is deteriorating: the Constitution has been hijacked and does not function properly; democratic institutions have been undermined in every aspect and barely exist even on paper; the regime has been focused on searching for enemies instead of developing the country; rifts are growing between Russian regions. Despite their proclaimed patriotism, the Russian elites prefer to keep and spend their money in Europe and the U.S. At the same time, the elites are not interested in adhering to European values, thus, consumerism constitutes their main attachment to the West, which highlights one of their key weaknesses.



Against this political background, the work of the opposition is increasingly challenging. Russia's democratic opposition has recently been struggling due to internal divisions, constraints created by the regime, and targeted repressions. One of the biggest failures of the opposition was the low turnout at the 2016 parliamentary elections, especially in large cities where support for the opposition is usually high. Part of the problem has been the general public's disappointment in the very institution of elections, which has led people to stop voting. However, low turnout creates a legitimacy problem for the Kremlin ahead of the 2018 presidential campaign.

The working group outlined a number of strategies for the opposition to increase public trust

and garner support. First, the opposition needs to continue its work to inform the Russian public of the abuses of power and use all available channels to draw public attention to the democratic choices provided by the Constitution. Russian people are growing more aware of their rights, and the opposition should work to provide people with the means to defend those rights.



Second, the opposition needs to educate the public about the significance of participating in the elections, explaining why they should be casting a vote and how this simple act can facilitate political change.

Third, working with voters at the regional level should be one of the opposition's priorities. Local grassroots initiatives (e.g. supporting causes such as women's rights or environment) are vital to the development of civil society.

Fourth, as part of these efforts, the opposition needs to show there is an alternative to the current regime. Therefore, with the 2018 presidential elections approaching, the opposition should agree upon and endorse a strong, independent candidate.

Fifth, the opposition groups should spend less time arguing and criticizing each other, and more time investing in "success stories" that would serve as a positive motivator for the people who may be willing to support the opposition but are currently discouraged by its divisions. In other



words, the opposition must work together now to prepare for the transition period that will come after the current regime falls.

Finally, cooperation between Russian democratic forces and Europe should be expanded. Despite the current tensions, Russia is still part of Europe, even though debates about the universal nature of European values continue. The ongoing confrontation between Russia and the West is instigated by the Kremlin that needs a foreign enemy to blame for Russia's domestic problems. Europe's tepid reaction to the Kremlin's aggression left the latter with a growing sense that it could continue its policies with impunity. However, as recent developments have shown, what happens in Russia has a direct impact on European countries, therefore the EU can no longer ignore the political situation in Russia. The



working group suggested that Europe should be talking more to the democratic part of Russian society rather than the regime. European participants in the working group stressed that in that sense communication is crucially important: European leaders and interested parties need to gain more information on what Russian civil society needs from their European counterparts.

The working group concluded that as part of larger cooperation efforts, Western leaders and Russian activists also need to work together on a road map of measures to repair the relationship between Europe and Russia. This road map should address existing problems, propose possible solutions, and clearly state that there is no place for the spheres of influence in modern Europe.

The working group concluded that no reforms in Russia are possible without political reform, for which constitutional reform and establishing a strong federal system should be the key priorities. Transition to democracy in Russia is achievable, though it will not be easy, the group members agreed. One should not forget that as history has shown in many countries (e.g. Spain, Italy, France), tradition does not determine a country's political choice



## Working group: Values and People

Co-chairs: [Zhanna Nemtsova](#) and [Rostislav Valvoda](#)

*This working group looked at the importance of shared values and mutual contacts in the context of the evolving relationship between EU and Russia as well as ways to ensure a European future for Russia. The instruments of cooperation between European institutions and civil society in Russia were broadly discussed.*



The space for dialogue between Russia and the EU is narrowing, and today it is crucial for Russian and European activists to find common ground to maintain cooperation and make sure that this space does not disappear completely. The current regime has been relentlessly pushing for a democratic rollback in Russia, though, as this working group noted, it is not just a Russian



problem—many Western countries are facing similar challenges as the ultra-right and ultra-left forces are gaining momentum across the globe.

Among some of the issues obstructing the EU-Russia civil dialogue are the numerous controversial laws passed by the Russian parliament, e.g. the so-called Yarovaya law and the “foreign agents” law. The former requires all companies working in Russia to keep their data inside the country, thus potentially undermining the privacy and security of their business operations. The latter requires that nonprofit organizations receiving foreign funding for what can be viewed as political activity (and the definition of such an activity is too vague, according to many legal experts) should be registered as “foreign agents” by the Ministry of Justice. The “foreign agents” law is especially damaging for Russia’s already fragile civil society, as many of

the NGOs labeled as “foreign agents” risk losing their funding, which will eventually lead to their extinction.

Another obstruction for the dialogue mentioned by the working group is the corruption issue facing many Western companies working in Russia. One of the costs of doing business in Russia is constant exposure to the Kremlin’s corruption networks that pollute business standards and procedures forcing these companies to become enmeshed in the country’s corrupt system.



At the moment, one of the most promising areas for dialogue might be culture, however, the Russian state has been intervening in this sphere as well in its effort to take control over the remaining freedoms of expression in the country. These efforts have become more persistent as political protest has been increasingly taking an artistic form. Despite these challenges, cultural initiatives are still widespread in Russia, offering an outlet for civil society development via cultural exchange with Europe.

According to the working group, the EU’s support for Russian civil society is crucial. Moreover, by providing support, the EU strengthens its own democratic values and invests in a better future. Therefore, the group argued that the EU should open all possible channels of cooperation



to foster dialogue in areas that truly matter to people, such as science, culture, sports, and youth exchanges - albeit, without political undertones.

For example, scientific cooperation could be facilitated by holding international conferences to which Russian scientists would be invited to collaborate with their Western counterparts. A suggestion was put forward that scientists from Crimea should not be banned from the global scientific community, because their isolation is extremely harmful for scientific development in the region.

In terms of cultural cooperation, some participants suggested that the EU should offer support to art projects in Russia as art is currently facing difficulties because it often takes a form of political protest and thus becomes subject to government control. However, others cautioned that such a shift from supporting traditional civil society organizations to supporting art, may endanger the latter, especially given the growing domestic pressure from the state.



As for youth exchanges, the working group observed that the currently suspended dialogue on visa facilitation could eventually progress to ensure greater people-to-people engagement, especially for those aged 25 and younger. An argument was made that young Russians should be able to travel to the EU countries without a visa. Currently, the EU visa application process is a time-consuming and expensive process, which makes foreign travel impossible for many young people in Russia. Short-term visits (for several days only) could provide an opportunity for them to see how Europe lives and works and overcome myths and falsehoods promoted by the Kremlin propaganda.



Discussing a different set of initiatives that could stimulate the EU-Russia dialogue, the working group argued that there are many people in Russia who adhere to European values and work tirelessly to defend their rights, including by bringing their cases to court. It was suggested that the Russian opposition would benefit from participating in court hearings held by both European and non-European organizations since this will help members of the opposition become better informed and more experienced in terms of legal procedures and defences. Publishing and distributing court speeches in the media would be helpful as well.



In the same vein, a discussion was held on how the EU member states should leverage Russia's membership in values-based organizations, such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE to ensure that the Russian government respects human rights and democratic values.

The group concluded that genuine and lasting cooperation between the EU and Russia could only be based on trust. Given the damage caused by the Kremlin propaganda campaign, restoration of trust will be a challenging and, likely, lengthy process. But it is the only way forward. The participants agreed that there are enough active people on both sides willing to restore mutual trust, foster people-to-people dialogue, and build a better, more genuine relationship together.





## Working group: EU and Russia in the world

Co-chairs: [John Lough](#) and [Nikolai Petrov](#)

*The group discussed the common challenges facing the EU and Russia, how the two sides can prevent further alienation, and what is needed to transform EU-Russia relations.*



Today, Russia's relationship with Europe can be described as a "stable non-partnership." The Kremlin openly opposes Europe and the Western model of liberalism, though it does not completely rule out dialogue. The working group argued that the Putin regime is currently leading in terms of two global trends— rising authoritarianism and the shrinking civic space. One of the reasons authoritarian regimes are gaining momentum throughout the world is because their leaders offer what looks like simple and fast solutions to a number of complex issues facing many countries today, while the workings of a democracy appear too slow and too sophisticated in the modern fast-paced world. Besides, as recent developments have shown, democratic institutions can fail in addressing and resolving some of the most acute issues of the present time, e.g. securing stability and sovereignty.



The group also stated that Russia's democratic rollback and slide into authoritarianism are caused by the constraints of its short transition period following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian public did not have enough time to adjust to the change. With Vladimir Putin's rise to power, Russia has grown to become the key driver of global authoritarianism, leading in terms of legal and judicial suppression inside the country, while using hybrid warfare and waging disinformation both in Russia and abroad.

The global authoritarian challenge is further aggravated by the fact that in today's globalized world, Western interests are deeply intertwined with the interests of corrupt, authoritarian regimes, such as Russia, which prevents the West from protecting its own democratic values and supporting human rights. Still, according to the members of this working group, the EU remains

the last truly "open space" in the world, regardless of all these tensions.

From the Kremlin's prospective, the key stumbling block in terms of the EU-Russia dialogue is the European sanctions policy imposed for Russia's annexation of Crimea and its aggression in eastern Ukraine. As the efficiency of these sanctions has become a matter of a heated



debate inside the EU, an argument was made by some participants in the working group that Europe needs to shift its approach from sanctioning industries to targeting individuals—corrupt Russian officials and human rights violators—as part of a broader policy of deterring certain types of behaviour by the Russian leadership. At the moment, it seems that the EU's approach toward Russia has been reduced to a 'sanctions only' policy. Sanctions are not a substitute for a policy, argued the group members.

Several solutions to resolve the current stifling relationship between Russia and the EU were discussed.

First, Europe needs to engage with those Russians who disagree with the regime, it should offer support to the Russian activists and help them build a sustainable opposition movement.



Second, NGOs working inside the European Union need to lobby their respective governments and donors to ramp up efforts to support civil society in Russia. Investing in building a strong civil society is important: when change comes to Russia, civil society will be the key driver of peaceful social development.

Third, people-to-people contacts can lay the groundwork for the most meaningful avenues of EU-Russia cooperation on countering common challenges together. Intellectual cooperation and fostering a cross-border “community of experts” can create additional opportunities to deal with these challenges on a global scale.



Fourth, an argument can be made that, given the right approach, working with the Russian diaspora in the EU countries can help Europe bridge some of its differences with the Russian-speaking world. However, this option remains debatable: some participants described the Russian diaspora as a major problem because it often serves as the Kremlin's

Trojan horse in Europe. The majority of the diaspora supports Putin; these people are often not well-integrated into European society; they largely consume Russian state media and therefore are difficult for the West to influence. Still, some members of the group believed that the diaspora should be seen as a potential agent of change.

Finally, the EU must work on increasing transparency at home as one of the tools to prevent the export of corrupt practices from Russia and other authoritarian regimes. One concrete proposal that was put forward was granting free public access to all EU real estate and land registers. In its turn, all registers should also enable a free, nationwide name search into whether foreign individuals holding official positions own any property in the EU (at the moment, only few EU registers offer name searches free of charge). This would help many anti-corruption journalists and activists in their efforts to investigate and expose corruption.



As a general recommendation, the group agreed that EU leaders should stop trying to return to “business as usual” with Putin and avoid equating Russia with the Putin regime. Doing so undermines the efforts of those Russians who oppose the current authoritarian government and hope for a brighter future for their country.

The group concluded that Russia remains key to the development of the whole former Soviet region. It is important for the EU to try and stop the current social “de-globalization” and degradation that Russia is experiencing under the Putin’s regime.



## IV

## Boris Nemtsov Forum Brussels in international media:

Press release: [Boris Nemtsov Forum: an opportunity for Russia and the EU to exchange discord for dialogue](#)

Politico: [Mikhail Khodorkovsky: Treat Putin as a bandit](#)

Euronews: [Connect with ordinary Russians, exiled dissident Khordorkovsky tells EU](#)

France 24: [Trump-Putin honeymoon will soon end, says key Kremlin critic](#)

Ведомости (in Russian only): [Михаил Ходорковский собрал оппозиционеров](#)

Kommersant (in Russian only) [В Европарламенте поговорили о диалоге с Россией](#)

Nezavisimaya Gazeta (in Russian only) [В Брюсселе собралась вся Болотная площадь](#)

Liberale.de (in German only): [Wir stehen der russischen Zivilgesellschaft zur Seite](#)

DRA (in German only): [Boris-Nemtsov-Forum](#)

Eurozpravy.cz (in Czech only): [Čeho se Západ bojí? Ruský politik má pro EU hodně rázný vzkaz](#)

### Boris Nemtsow Forum Brussels on twitter:



**Ex EP President** ✓  
@EP\_PresSchulz

Today, almost two years after the brutal murder of Boris [#Nemtsov](#), I spoke at the Boris Nemtsov Forum. My speech here:



**Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament - Ope...**

Almost two years ago, on the 27th of February 2015, Boris Nemtsov was brutally murdered in the centre of Moscow, on a bridge right next to the Kremlin. Boris Nemtsov was not only a f...

[europarl.europa.eu](http://europarl.europa.eu)



**Hans van Baalen MEP** ✓

@hansvanbaalen

Addressing lack of civil liberties in Putin-Russia with Mikhail Khodorkovsky and @ALDEgroup colleague @petras\_petras at Nemtsov Forum in EP.



**Laima Andrikiene**

@Andrikiene

Now in the @Europarl\_EN\_Boris Nemtsov Forum\_EU-Russia relations in focus\_Mikhail Khodorkovsky\_@EPP

🌐 Translate from Romanian





**Rebecca Harms** ✓  
@RebHarms

Opening Boris Nemtsov Forum in @Europarl\_EN  
with @ZhannaNemtsova M.Khodorkovsky  
@mbk\_center @MartinSchulz Full house!



**European Endowment**  
@EEDemocracy

This week #EED partook in dynamic discussion  
on the future of #EU-#Russia relations at  
#NemtsovForum. Read more: [bit.ly/2fLZ8fv](https://bit.ly/2fLZ8fv)





**Guy Verhofstadt** ✓

@GuyVerhofstadt

Honoured to open #NemtsovForum today.  
Building bridges between the EU & Russian civil  
society is crucial.



**ALDE Party** ✓

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@ALDEParty

Boris #Nemtsov Forum brings together EU &  
Russian civil society actors. Read summary w  
[@GuyVerhofstadt](#) [@LevShlosberg](#)  
[goo.gl/KIn8Vm](https://goo.gl/KIn8Vm)







## More materials from the Forum:

Marieluise Beck, MP addresses Europe and Russia in the world working group: [here](#)

For videos from the plenary sessions go [here](#)

For photos from the event go [here](#)

For more information about working groups go [here](#)

For more information about the Boris Nemtsov Forum platform please visit the [website of the program](#).