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Speech by the President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, Jean-Marie Heydt, at the Round Table: "Developments in Legislation on Non-commercial Organisations: International Experience", Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 31 October 2013

---- Greetings to the authorities and representatives present and all the participants in this Round Table who have agreed to join us. ----

I am extremely glad to be opening this Round Table because it constitutes practical follow-up to my meeting with some twenty NGOs here in Moscow last April.

During our meeting, all the participants noted that this 21/11/12 Law unfairly and randomly stigmatised and penalised the NGOs. Nevertheless, they agreed to acknowledge the need for supervision and genuine transparency. The conclusion was that we should organise a meeting on this subject with the NGOs and the authorities, here in Moscow.

In preparing this meeting we naturally worked with the other Council of Europe bodies responsible for promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. After the encounter between the Council of Europe Secretary General, Mr Jagland, and President Putin, and the visit by the Commissioner on Human Rights, our meeting continues on from our long-standing process with the Russian Federation embodied in the triennial co-operation programme "Reinforcing civil society and civic participation in the Russian Federation" (2008-2011). All of us, including the Secretary General, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Venice Commission and the Expert Council on NGO Law of the Conference of INGOs, each from their own specific angle, share views which enable us to produce proposals and provide assistance for the authorities of the member states of the Council of Europe.

Our experience as international NGOs has reinforced our competences and enables us to dialogue with NGOs and the authorities in order to develop good governance in all member states. This is why we were invited by the member States to produce a "Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process". This tool has now been endorsed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, it is operational and enables not only the authorities but also the NGOs to work together more efficiently. Implementation of this facility also demonstrates that the role of organised civil society should not be confused with political engagement. This brings us to the heart of the subject of our Round Table; what exactly is the "political" dimension of an NGO's activities?

I would also like to welcome the decision to set up a special independent fund, which you, Ms Pamfilova, will be responsible for managing. I hope, nonetheless, that such funding will not stand in the way of additional financial contributions from the outside, as necessitated by our grassroots actions.

I am sure that this Round Table will help us identify the necessary pointers towards improving the NGO mechanism, and that we will have the opportunity and pleasure of continuing our co-operation with the Russian authorities over the coming months.

Thank you for your attention.