

3 March 2014

**Statement by Mr Henri Malosse,
President of the European Economic and Social Committee,
following the recent events in Ukraine**

"The entry of the Russian army in the Crimea can only be seen as a de facto annexation of this region. Thus, we strongly condemn such a military intervention in Ukraine, which is an act of international banditry.

European civil society remains committed to the necessity for Ukraine to conduct real reforms to establish a Rule of Law, fight against existing corruption and strengthen the role of organized civil society. It reiterates the importance of European values such as tolerance and the respect for the right of minorities to their cultural identity and their language. In this respect, the vote of the Ukrainian Parliament putting an end to the co-official status of other languages such as Hungarian, Polish or Russian is an unreasonable decision, which, in our opinion, should be revised.

We are asking for an immediate mobilisation of an extraordinary European Council, to which the Ukrainian Prime Minister would be invited, in order to formally mark the determination and commitment of Europe to stand beside the new government.

We call on the Russian civil society and government to accept to dialogue in order to peacefully resolve the current tensions. In the recent weeks, compatibility between the process of rapprochement with the European Union and the maintenance of historic, economic and cultural ties with the Russian Federation has proved possible. It would thus be possible to adapt the partnership agreements and provide a genuine European perspective to our neighbours. In this regard, civil society can play a fundamental role in building a peaceful and balanced dialogue.

To this end, we ask that observers from civil society be sent without delay to Ukraine, especially in the East and in the Crimea, to bring to fruition the commitment to dialogue. European civil society has indeed demonstrated in the past, as in Northern Ireland, its ability to play a key role in the outcome of the crisis."

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The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process. The Committee has 344 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union.

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