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**Statement by Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on Ukrainian Political Prisoners on Territories Occupied by the Russian Federation and in Russian Prisons**

The Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership (EaP CSF) would like to draw your attention to the problem of Ukrainian political prisoners who are currently held in Russian prisons, as well as in territories occupied by the Russian Federation. Taking into consideration the ongoing war against Ukraine, waged by Russia – and other violations of the international law committed by Russia, we repeat our appeal contained in the EaP SCF Steering Committee’s statement dated September 14, 2018 to all members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) not to support any formula which would guarantee that the Russian delegation would not be sanctioned on their return to PACE.

Since February 2014, when the Russian Federation occupied Crimea, Russian aggression against Ukraine has led to serious violations of fundamental human rights, freedoms and numerous crimes against the civilian population. Primarily, these have consisted of abductions, illegal deprivations of liberty – often accompanied by torture and ill-treatment, violations of the right to a fair trial, as well as deportations and expulsions from Crimea.

Such Russian actions have been condemned by the international community with the introduction of sanctions against the Russian Federation, and the adoption of appropriate international legal documents, particularly United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 68/262 on the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine (March 2014), and the Observance of Human Rights in Occupied Crimea (71/205 from 20 December 2016 and 72/190 dated 19 December 2017). We are grateful to PACE for its constant attention to the issue of human rights violations and illegal detention of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and occupied Crimea.

Negotiations in the Minsk format, which began in February 2015, provide opportunities to discuss the conditions of detention and the release of only one of the listed groups of illegally detained persons: those on the territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts not controlled by Ukraine. The fate of those Ukrainian citizens illegally persecuted for political reasons in Crimea

and in Russia is not discussed within the framework of the Minsk negotiations. Even if the issue is raised, the negotiations are ineffective because any proposals and statements by the Ukrainian side produce no results. Thus, there is no platform for discussing the matter of Ukrainian citizens illegally detained in Crimea and the Russian Federation. These illegally detained persons have become hostages and an instrument of blackmail for the Russian Federation to wield during negotiations.

Today, more than 100 Ukrainians are still being held as hostages on the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. 68 Ukrainian citizens have been identified as being prosecuted for political reasons in Crimea and Russia. The health of several of them is raising serious concern or verges on the catastrophic, especially in the cases of Oleg Sentsov, Stanislav Klykh, Bekir Degermanjee, Pavlo Gryb and Asan Chapukh. There is considerable evidence of brutal violations by the Russian Federation as an occupying power of the provisions of the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949 that forms the basis of international humanitarian law and which Russia is obligated to adhere to as a Party to the Convention (especially Articles 47, 49, 51, 55, 70 et al).

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) appeals to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to use every legal means to force the Russian Federation to fulfil the demand made by Oleg Sentsov, and release all Ukrainian citizens held in Russian prisons on political charges, including Oleg Sentsov himself. Until the Russian Federation meets these demands, the restoration of full Russian participation in the work of the PACE is immoral and impermissible.

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