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### Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on International Cultural Cooperation

Dear friends, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all who gathered in this hall for the international Russia – European Union: Signs on the Roadmap of Cultural Cooperation workshop. These seminars, along with the very act of creating a roadmap for simplifying and developing the cultural contacts between Russia and the European Union, is a noble venture of great importance. No matter the manifold ways in which the Russian Federation’s field of spiritual tradition and artistic creativity might be different, its culture remains an integral part of global and European culture, of Europe’s very life. But based on their many years of experience, many in this hall know how difficult the implementation of all our good intentions really is.

There are many problems, but I will only list a few among them. And I will begin with the mutual issue of visas. As you know, Russia and the European Union have an agreement that provides for (a free!) mechanism for issuing visas to workers in culture, science and education – something that unquestionably promotes the implementation of our various joint projects. But as we know, there is a difference between tourist and business visas. People who leave their countries to attend various cultural events – in Europe or in Russia – one way or another come to these places to work. And here is where we begin running into difficulties that have not been properly resolved yet. I would point out that this also concerns the European and world stars that come here to perform at various corporate evens. It is not my business to know whether they pay taxes on their Russian fees – but clearly, what is required here is not a tourist visa support. Tax issues also arise during the staging of joint academic research – it is apparent that what is important here is for these taxes to be the smallest possible on both sides.

We must use these seminars to consider these legal and financial problems, and to draw up a list of recommendation for subsequent intergovernmental solutions.

We all know that through the course of a new and democratic Russia – and it has been around for nearly 20 years now – we have developed good bilateral relations with the countries of Europe. Even today, when every field of activity is being affected by the global financial crisis, considerable funds are still being spent on Russia’s bilateral cultural ties with Europe. For example, their staging of cross years – the Year of Russia in France, and the Year of France in Russia – will see both countries spend a total of more than two and a half billion rubles, and over eighty million dollars. I would note that Russia has no spare cash for culture, and all such spending is being very strictly controlled. And yet, the implementation of a particular project – if it is indeed worthy of attention – can still draw fairly serious money from both patrons and the state. And for this very reason, I feel that we should think about simplifying the way the European Union issues financial grants for joint projects with Russia. I know that due to the difficulty of formally registering these relatively small sums, many Russian institutes prefer to simply go without them. In addition, we must also analyze which joint Russia – European Union projects are still vital to our partnership’s development, and which may be implemented without our involvement. Despite my great respect for European institutions, the Bolshoi Theater will still visit Paris and Milan whether these are involved or not – just like the Covent Garden and the Opéra au Palais Garnier will end up in Moscow or Saint Petersburg. So when drafting our roadmap, we must take all these circumstances into account.

Besides financial and legal issues, our conceptual and substantive problems in relations are a matter of no smaller importance. And in this respect, I would like to broach a subject as complicated as European identity. I will underscore again that we should not be pretending that Russia and Europe are, in essence, two different spiritual phenomena. This is not the case (or not quite the case). Of course, both Russia and Europe adhere to numerous different interpretations of this subject (and this includes quite speculative ones). This is primarily tied to the fact that Russia stretches over both Europe and Asia. But this geographic spread is very similar to that of Turkey – which joined NATO a long time ago, and which is now taking steps to join the European Union. Meanwhile Kazakhstan, which is entirely in Asia, began chairing the OSCE on January 1, 2010. Clearly, identity cannot be based on the nation’s geography alone. One can have different thoughts about Russia’s traditions and values – and these are unquestionably varied, even though one must not forget the fact that Russia’s current population is more than 80-percent ethnic Russian – but I tend to agree with the position of great Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, who believed that Russia was just as European a nation as Germany or France. So let us stop acting like Russia is not a part of Europe – this is a mistake.

Recently, we saw the publication of the Russian and Italian versions of a book by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI “Europe, Spiritual Homeland”, the work defends values that are of the greatest importance to all Christians, and which remain important to Europeans today. At the same time, Europe is treated not only as the spiritual homeland of Christianity, but also as a type of a synonym for Christianity itself – Europe and Christianity are identical. The idea is unquestionably both profound and important, but in my opinion – insufficient.

Today, Europe is not home to Christians alone. And this means that our search for ways to negotiate our crisis of values should focus less on the religious and confessional aspects of the problem, and engage the traditional humanistic approach – one that allows us to reconcile the interests of the various confessions on the basis of a common humanitarian and democratic platform.

Of course, this is not an easy task. It is easy to come out and say that European values provide for tolerance – but tolerance is no simple matter. It could also mean “I hate you, but will live properly at your side.” Is this sufficient for positive and productive European development? I do not think so. Tolerance is just the starting point for creating a set of common values that Europe has no future without.

Understandably, all these issues cannot be resolved within the frameworks of this workshop alone. But specific problems – the ones involving visas, financing, taxes and so on – can and must be resolved. And their solution does not depend on what church one attends.

And I am confident that meetings like ours here today can help to overcome the barriers that stand before Russia and the European Union to this day. I wish you good luck.