## Ambassador Fernando M. Valenzuela

### Head of European Union Delegation to Russia

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address this distinguished audience at the opening of this first EU-Russia International Workshop today.

I would like to use this opportunity to emphasise that culture has become increasingly important in the relations between the two sides in recent years.

This workshop is a very much expected moment of our cultural cooperation with Russia since October 2007, when the first Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) adopted a joint statement between the EU and Russia, which called for “the organisation of a high level conference to promote contacts between EU and the Russian Federation cultural operators”. This initiative was confirmed on the meetings of the EU–Russia Joint Working Group in the course 2008 and 2009. We are happy to see that these plans are being realized.

Let me mention some of our remarkable actions aimed at promoting the European dimension of our cultural cooperation with Russia, and that have been managed by the EU Delegation.

Many of you remember our good impressions of the “Europe-Russia-Europe” exhibition that was held in summer 2007 at the State Tretyakov Gallery. This event is to be considered as an excellent example of art without borders, since Russia and all 27 EU members states took part in it, sending objects of art from 49 national museums and galleries.

Another relevant initiative is a festival of contemporary dance launched this year in spring. In this project we work side by side with cultural centres of the EU member states. We hope that the project attracts major European and Russian choreographers and dance groups, including those from the Russian regions.

At the beginning of September 2009 the Museum-Estate of Leo Tolstoy and their German colleagues from ”Stiftung Schloss Neuhardenberg” presented in Yasnaya Polyana a contemporary adaptation of Leo Tolstoy’s drama «The Light That Shines in the Darkness». The play was directed by the Oscar price winner Volker Schloendorff, renowned German and Russian artists were engaged in the production. Those who had the privilege to attend the Russian première still remember the magic of that unique evening.

Only recently - few days ago – we welcomed the “27 plus one” Short Film Festival with 30 short films from eleven EU countries and Russia (like most of well organized international film festivals), which provided a great opportunity for the broad audience, in particular for young people, to meet with new visual ideas, new artistic formats, and Russian and European talents.

We really appreciate the added value of these concrete initiatives that – we believe - contribute to a more efficient exchange of ideas and networking between artists, cultural operators, academia and the public in Russia and in the EU.

I strongly believe that culture is that universal language that should be used for communications between the different countries and peoples. Culture certainly unites us.

I wish you a successful seminar.

Thank you for your attention.