



## **RUSSIANS DO NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES EUROPEANS, CONFUSED ABOUT DEMOCRACY, SEEK GREATER PROTECTION BY THE LAW AND ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Senior European politicians become founding members of EU-Russia Centre**

**Brussels, 6 February 2007** – Research published by the EU-Russia Centre today reveals Russians' widely varying perceptions of democracy and their place in Europe.

The EU-Russia Centre, an independent information and expertise resource for those interested in modern Russia and the future of EU Russia relations, also announced the appointment of a founding board of four highly experienced European political figures: **Lord Paddy Ashdown, Pat Cox, Günter Burghardt and Heidi Hautala.**

### **New Russian Opinion Study on Democracy and Europe**

The Centre's research project – **Voices from Russia: Society, Democracy and Europe**, conducted by leading Russian research organisation, The Levada Center - asked 1,600 Russians for their views on democracy and Europe in the context of modern Russia. Its findings include:

#### **Russians and Europe**

- Most Russians (71%) do not regard themselves as Europeans
- Almost half think that the EU is a potential threat to Russia and its financial and industrial independence
- A third see Europe as a neighbour and partner with whom a long-term relationship should be developed and enhanced - and half that number think that Europe sees Russia in the same way.
- Nearly half believe that there are many useful things to be taken from Western democracy and culture
- Nearly one third think that Western-style democracy does not suit Russia.

### **Democracy and Responsibility**

- 65% of Russians find it hard to describe what democracy means
- 27% say that Russia has never been a democracy
- One in three prefer the Soviet system of government
- Just over a quarter of respondents consider democracy to be a fair governance system
- A third say that Russia currently is a democratic state, a quarter like its current system
- 94% feel that they have little or no influence over what happens in Russia
- The overwhelming majority of Russians (82%) feel little or no responsibility for what goes on in their country.

### **Rule of Law & Human Rights**

- A third of Russians are worried about serious human rights abuses
- Only 8% believe the judicial system to be completely independent from governmental control or corruption (31% gave no response)
- A majority do not feel protected by the law (68%)
- Nearly two thirds think that the authorities and state officials are above the law (60%)
- Only 4% believe that private property is secure
- Over half (56%) believe that the judiciary should be wholly or partly controlled by the executive arm of the Government.

### **European Political Heavyweights to Lead EU-Russia Centre**

Four senior European politicians become founding members of the EU-Russia Centre:

- **President: Lord Ashdown** (Paddy Ashdown), former leader of the UK's Liberal Democrat party, and most recently the EU's special representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- **Dr Günter Burghardt**, former EU ambassador to the United States following a 30-year career at senior levels of the European Commission, latterly as director general for external relations from 1993 to 2000
- **Pat Cox**, a former MEP, past president of the European Parliament and group president of the European Liberal Democrat Group, the third largest political grouping in the European Parliament, and President of the European Movement
- **Heidi Hautala**, a Finnish MP (Green Party) and former MEP until 2003 with a particular interest in EU and Russian affairs.

As founding members of the EU-Russia Centre, they provide strategic advice and insights into EU-Russia relations, speak on behalf of the Centre and represent its priorities to EU, European and Russian governments, the media and other policy makers. Centre director, Dr Fraser Cameron, a former EU diplomat and adviser, continues to lead the Centre's day-to-day activities.

Newly appointed President of the EU-Russia Centre Lord Ashdown said: 'I am very pleased to be joining the EU-Russia Centre at a time when relations between the EU and Russia are at such an interesting and vital stage. This valuable research demonstrates the differences and the similarities between our societies and underlines the need for the EU to do more to stress the importance of democracy.'

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**NOTE TO EDITORS:**

**Rapid Progress for EU-Russia Centre**

Launched in May 2006, the EU-Russia Centre has rapidly established itself as a unique forum for discussing EU-Russia relations, as well as an independent information and expertise resource.

The Centre strives for a consistent approach to upholding common commitments and developing a 'good neighbourly' relationship that is guided by coherent EU policy, rather than by individual bilateral agreements.

Its activities have included staging round table discussions across Europe, co-hosting events and initiatives by policy think tanks, attending and participating in a wide range of conferences and seminars, developing original research, and publishing expert opinion and analysis.