

Beat: Local

FOLLOWING RUSSIAN-BELARUSIAN TALKS OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENTS IN MOSCOW

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USPA NEWS - Official Press statements following Russian-Belarusian talks, on December 15, 2015 in Kremlin (Moscow). The statements from Russian President Vladimir Putin and President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko...

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PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA VLADIMIR PUTIN : Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Our talks with the President of Belarus during his first official visit to Russia after his re-election to the post of President were traditionally business-like and constructive. I would like to once again congratulate Mr Lukashenko on his convincing victory in the elections and wish him further success.

Relations between Russia and Belarus are of a strategic nature. They are based on a solid tradition of friendship, mutual respect and good neighbourly relations between two fraternal peoples. We are interested in the dynamic development of the multifaceted Russian-Belarusian alliance in every direction. This approach forms the basis of the joint declaration we have just signed.

In the course of a separate meeting today with Mr Lukashenko and during our talks with the participation of our delegations, we discussed pressing matters of bilateral cooperation and the international agenda, and in view of the OCSE summit to take place on December 21, we focussed on ways of ensuring security and stability on the external borders of our organisation and our joint fight against terrorism.

We gave special attention to the development of bilateral trade and economic cooperation. Russia ranks first among Belarusian foreign economic partners. Our market accounts for almost half of all Belarusian trade. This year our trade turnover in dollar terms has gone down due to sharp fluctuations on currency markets, while in ruble terms, it has gone up by 20.6 percent and reached 1.3 trillion rubles.

This was made possible, among other things, due the fact that Russian and Belarusian companies are more actively using national currencies in their settlements; this covers about 86 percent of the overall trade volumes.

Achieving stable growth in trade is also the target of the action plan to create additional conditions for the development of trade and economic relations, approved by our governments.

Among our priority goals is making our companies more competitive, enhancing cooperation in industry, conducting a coordinated policy in import replacement and stimulating mutual investment.

According to the Eurasian Development Bank, Belarus has already accumulated \$6.3 billion in Russian capital investment. This is 40 percent of our total investment in the CIS states. We have created more than 3,500 joint ventures in all sectors of the economy.

The construction of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant in Grodno Region is a major investment project. Construction is proceeding strictly on schedule. The first power unit will be commissioned in 2018, the second "" in 2020.

We have agreed to pay special attention to high technology cooperation, particularly in machine tool building, to promote joint projects in space industry, satellite navigation and geological exploration.

We see good prospects for the development of direct contacts between small and medium-sized businesses as part of cooperation between regions. The forum of Russian and Belarusian regions held in Sochi in September gave a powerful impetus to this kind of cooperation.

During our talks, we also touched upon matters pertaining to the functioning of the Union State. We have agreed to set the date for the next meeting of the Supreme State Council early next year. In our work on the Union State's budget for 2016, we proceed from this year's parameters. Most of the funds will be allocated to implement 40 union programmes in various areas: energy, construction and transport.

We, of course, discussed the prospects for the development of the Eurasian Economic Union. We highly assess the work done by Belarus as the chair of this integration association this year. We support the measures taken by Minsk to strengthen the contractual legal framework of our organisation in connection with new members joining it: Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

On the international arena, Russia and Belarus are following a coordinated foreign policy. This year we gave special attention to arranging events within the framework of the United Nations and other multilateral organisations dedicated to the 70th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

Another example of such close cooperation was Belarus receiving, with our active assistance, observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. We noted the proximity of our countries' views on such pressing matters as resolving the Ukrainian crisis and combatting international terrorism in Syria.

We agreed to develop our military and military-technical cooperation to strengthen regional stability and security.

I would like to note our mutual commitment to expanding our traditionally strong humanitarian ties. The Days of Minsk festival was recently held in St Petersburg. In July, Belarus hosted a festival of Russian spiritual culture. We will continue supporting such projects.

I would also like to draw your attention to an important initiative in the sphere of migration, of which I informed Mr Lukashenko. As you may know, as of January 1 of this year foreign citizens who want to work and live in Russia have to prove their knowledge of the Russian language, Russian history and the basic legislation.

At the same time, considering the special nature of Russian-Belarusian ties, we made the principled decision to exempt Belarus citizens from this requirement. This would require amending the acting legislation. An appropriate law has already been drafted and is being considered by the State Duma. I believe this document would fully coincide with the principles of allied cooperation between Russia and Belarus.

In conclusion, I would like to thank once again Mr Lukashenko and all our Belarusian friends and partners for this constructive discussion, looking forward to a further strengthening of our friendly ties.

Thank you for your attention.

PRESIDENT OF BELARUS ALEXANDER LUKASHENKO : Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank my good friend, the President of the Russian Federation, for the invitation to visit the Hero City of Moscow, for his hospitality and the excellent level of organisation in our meeting.

I will state directly that of the issues on today's agenda, not a single question remains where we have not come to an agreement, although we spent a long time preparing for this meeting.

As you recall, Mr Putin and I made a decision in Ufa not to hold in-depth talks, but to prepare for this day and conduct a very serious analysis of how things stand in Belarusian-Russian relations, and address the issues that have accumulated. I repeat, not a single issue remains that requires further, deeper work. There are a couple questions that will be addressed in the coming week, and our governments will make decisions on them.

Significant attention during the talks was given to developing integration relations. Economic challenges and the issues we face during this difficult time should not lead to disunity between the member states of the treaty on creating the Union State and on the Eurasian

Economic Union.

We are satisfied with the nature and results of the cooperation between Belarus and Russia in the international arena. I must say ““ and Mr Putin and I have long noted this within the framework of the Union State ““ that the relations between our foreign ministries and ministers could serve as an example of cooperation for other departments.

Of course, as Mr President said, in discussing the international agenda, we talked about Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East, and other tense spots on the planet. Belarus has a neighbourly interest in peace in Ukraine and the Middle East, and the President of Russia and I have no disagreements on these issues.

The earth shakes with strife and armed conflicts; there are millions of refugees and international terrorism is a threat to the entire world. In the last month alone, we have seen a series of heinous, barbaric terrorist attacks that are not and cannot be justified. You all know this for yourselves, and there is no need to say more about it.

Returning to the topic of our relations, we had a detailed discussion on issues of equal access to Belarusian goods in the Russian market and received the Russian President’s support in this regard. We know about the import substitution programme being implemented by the Russian Federation. Incidentally, we have already adopted a second import substitution programme in Belarus, having accumulated a certain amount of experience, and we support this programme in the Russian Federation.

I must say that from our point of view, you are moving in absolutely the right direction, and will see the result in the near future. But I asked Mr Putin, as well as Russian and Belarusian Government members who were present, to ensure this programme is not detrimental to the work of our joint enterprises, especially in the case of supplying Belarusian goods and services, so our goods and services are not considered foreign and are treated practically as though they were Russian, especially since they are reinforced through bilateral agreements and Eurasian Economic Union norms.

Belarusian producers have a good reputation in Russia and we are prepared to help ensure satisfaction among Russian consumers in the groups of products where we can be competitive in terms of price and quality.

Many of our key exported goods are produced from Russian components and Russian raw materials, so they are a true product of Belarusian-Russian cooperation.

Localisation was mentioned here; it is widely discussed in general. For example, our giants, Minsk Automobile Plant, Minsk Tractor Works and so on, have already localised at 55““60 percent in Belarus. We are buying components, raw materials and so on and producing a final product at the end. Whose is it? It’s Belarusian and Russian.

Today, Mr Putin and I signed a joint statement confirming the main principles of an all-encompassing strategic partnership between our nations, establishing priorities for developing Belarusian-Russian relations.

I want to once again stress the constructive nature of our talks. We do not have any topics in our discussions that are off-limits ““ absolutely none. We completely trust one another and talk openly, expressing our views at our talks. We also count on further cooperation with Russian, and I am confident that it will come to be.

I am grateful for what Mr Putin said about supporting our citizens. If it were not the case, the legislators would simply have put themselves to shame, because the Russian language is our language. Why should we take Russian language exams in Russia ?

Especially since ““ as I once told you and we confirmed this year in children’s competitions, at teachers’ competitions, at international instructors’ competitions ““ Belarus invariably wins these competitions in the Russian language. So this is our language, it is our native language, it is also the state language, so it is good that you took this into account and did not put us in an uncomfortable position of having to prove our knowledge of the Russian language.

As for history, one day, I will give you some history textbooks. Due to my little one’s age, I read these history lessons, although my educational background is also in history. Since Soviet times, we have been studying nearly the same history. And there is nothing there to be ashamed of; we were together everywhere then. So as you can see, in the 20 years of recent history, we have never deviated from the holy bond between our peoples.

Thank you.

Ruby BIRD

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