

Russia national day

Prospects for relationship development

Evgeny Afanasiev
AMBASSADOR OF RUSSIA

First of all, I would like to welcome all the readers of The Japan Times and express my appreciation for your attention on our national holiday — Russia Day. The Declaration on State Sovereignty of the Russian Federation was adopted on June 12, 1990. This day became a holiday in 1992, and in 2002 was officially named Russia Day.



One of the most significant events in the life of our country this year was the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). Dubbed the "Holiday with Tears in Eyes," the name accurately reflects the feelings experienced by every citizen of Russia on May 9th. On the one hand it is pride and joy that owing to the heroism of our fathers and grandfathers, who made the decisive contribution to the defeat of fascist Germany, we were able to defend the freedom and independence of our country, to save from Nazi

slavery the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. On the other, it is sorrow for the 27 million Soviet people who gave their lives for the great victory. People of all nationalities living in the Soviet Union were among those heroes: Russians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Georgians, peoples of Central Asia and many others. This holiday is primarily a tribute to war veterans, many of whom are unfortunately already gone.

Regarding relations between our countries, I would like to note that noticeable progress has been achieved in recent years, as they were filled with new content. Both countries demonstrated mutual interest in developing cooperation in different areas, including political dialogue, trade, the economy and investment, cultural and humanitarian exchanges and cooperation in the international arena. As Russian President Vladimir Putin stated "Japan is our neighbor and natural partner."

Just a few days ago, to celebrate the anniversary, the 10th Festival of Russian Culture in Japan was held in Tokyo with Sergey Naryshkin, the chair-

man of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, co-chair of the organizing committee of the festival attending the opening. A warm congratulatory message was sent to the festival by Putin and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pointed out in his address to participants and guests of the festival that the annual festivals of Russian culture significantly contribute to the strengthening of mutual understanding between the peoples of our countries, creating good conditions for the development of the whole complex of bilateral relations.

There were more than 40 events successfully held in 2014 within the framework of the Year of Russian-Japanese exchanges in the field of martial arts. Abe and his wife Akie paid personal attention to Russian athletes, who arrived in October in Tokyo to hold a demonstration of traditional Russian martial arts. In turn, Putin attended performances by Japanese masters from the All Japan Martial Arts Center Nippon Budokan in Moscow in November. The events not only brought positive emotions to participants and spectators, but also contributed to the

popularization of martial arts in particular and sports in general in Russia and Japan, as well as further strengthening friendly relations between the peoples of our countries.

Successful development of Russian-Japanese economic and trade relations is underway. Turnover between Russia and Japan in 2014 almost remained at the record levels of 2013 and amounted to \$34.2 billion. Japan accounts for about 3.6 percent of Russia's foreign trade and ranks ninth among Russia's top trading partners. Russia, in turn, is Japan's 14th-largest trading partner. In my view, these figures are an eloquent testament to what has been achieved so far, as well as the impressive untapped potential for cooperation between the two countries.

Tourist exchanges are expanding, with the number of Japanese tourists visiting Russia in 2014 reaching about 55,000. The number of Russians who visited Japan remained at about the same level of 50,000. I believe that in terms of geographical proximity, mutual cultural heritage, unique recreational opportunities in both Russia and Japan, there is a considerable potential for fur-

ther development of bilateral tourist exchanges.

Russian-Japanese relations in general have great potential for development. We believe that all planned political contacts must be implemented. Russian-Japanese cooperation is a two-way street as it is equally necessary for both countries. These relations are important on their own and they should not be dependent on the situations in one or another third country. As for the differences in the approaches to domestic, bilateral or international issues, they should be resolved through dialogue and not through refusal to communicate or use of sanctions.

The future of our country is inextricably linked with the Asia Pacific region. Our foreign policy in the Asia Pacific proceeds from the recognition of the crucial importance of creating a modern configuration of interstate relations in the region corresponding to current-day realities. Such a system must simultaneously provide broad opportunities for the promotion of multilateral trade, economic and investment cooperation, resolution of existing multidimensional security challeng-



Over 500,000 Russians and foreigners marched in central Moscow on May 9 in commemoration of those who perished and survived World War II during an event called "March of the Immortal Regiment," which was led by Russian President Vladimir Putin (center). EMBASSY OF RUSSIA

Bilateral cooperation increasing in wide variety of sectors

Yoshiro Mori
FORMER PRIME MINISTER

I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to the people of Russia on the occasion of Russia Day this year, which marks the 160th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Russia.



Since the birth of the new Russia following the declaration of state sovereignty on June 12, 1990, Russian people have made efforts to build the present prosperity and the country is further developing, to which I would like to pay my respect.

For the past quarter century, Japan and Russia have deepened their relations in a wide range of areas as important neighboring states. Especially, since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's official visit to Russia in April 2013, the prime minister and Russian President Vladimir Putin have held talks on seven occasions. The close ties

between the two countries are indispensable to ensure stability and peace in this region.

On the economic front, in addition to cooperation in the energy and automobile sectors, bilateral cooperation has been steadily broadening in various fields such as medicine, urban environment, agriculture and energy conservation.

In 2014, based on an agreement between Abe and Putin, the two countries celebrated a year of Russian-Japanese exchanges in martial arts. Numerous exchange programs were organized in the field of Japanese traditional *budo* such as judo and kendo, as well as Russian traditional *sambo* and Cossack martial arts.

In addition, Sergey Naryshkin, the chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly attended the third Japan-Russia Forum, as well as the opening of the 10th Festival of Russian Culture in Japan. I believe that these cooperative relations and mutual understanding at the private level will further strengthen bilateral ties.

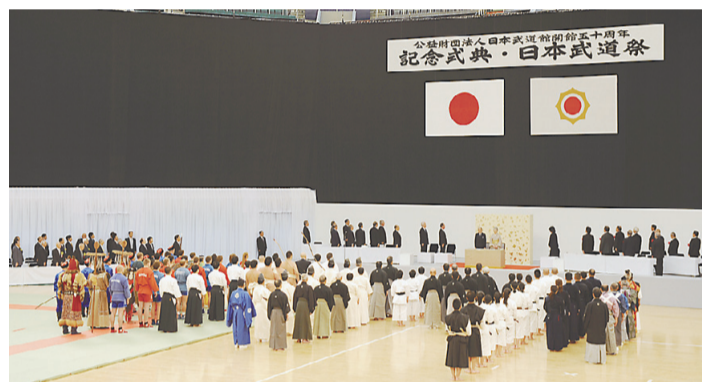
The relations between Japan and Russia, who are major

players in the Asia-Pacific region and the world, promise to develop further. In order to elevate the bilateral ties to a new level, we must resolve the issue of the Northern Territories, which has remained up in the air for the 70 years since the end of World War II, and also sign a bilateral peace treaty.

Last November, Abe and Putin held a summit meeting on the sidelines of the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Beijing, and agreed that the two countries should start preparing to realize Putin's visit to Japan sometime this year. I sincerely expect that the president's visit will become a reality and peace treaty negotiations will make headway.

From my side, I am determined to continue my efforts so that I could be of help to further develop the good neighbors' relations that have been built, while overcoming the difficult challenges between Japan and Russia.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to express again my congratulations to the Russian people and sincerely pray for the peace and prosperity of Russia.



Russian athletes participate in a Budo ceremony, which was attended by Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, marking the 50th anniversary of Nippon Budokan in Tokyo on Oct. 5, 2014. EMBASSY OF RUSSIA

Congratulations
to the People
of
the Russian Federation
on the Occasion
of
Their National Day



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