

Russia National Day

Steady pursuit of shared goals

Evgeny Afanasiev
AMBASSADOR OF RUSSIA

On the occasion of the Russian National Holiday — Day of Russia — I would like, first of all, to welcome the readers of The Japan Times and express my appreciation for your attention and interest in my country. This date, June 12, marks a very significant and memorable event in the modern history of the Russian Federation. On this day in 1990, when the USSR existed and contemporary Russia was its integral part, the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Russia was adopted. Later, in 1992, June 12 was declared a state holiday and in 2002 the day was finally given its current official title — Day of Russia.

Nearly three decades have passed since then. Even though this period seems short in terms of history, it was quite enough for the world and international relations to have changed drastically. The system of international relations is in transition as a

new polycentric world order is taking root. We are witnessing the creation of a fundamentally new global order marked by growing competition in all fields, including social and economic development and moral values. Evidently, Russia is well placed to consolidate its role as one of the centers of the new multipolar system and actively impact the global situation with a view to ameliorating it, strengthening common security and stability.

Independent foreign policy pursued by Russia in accordance with modern trends and longstanding traditions is in increasingly high demand in the world, attracting a wide range of partners from all continents. Our country has consistently advocated an inclusive and constructive agenda aimed not at restricting, but rather amplifying ties between states. Russia stands ready to join efforts with all those willing to cooperate in line with the principles of equality, mutual respect and benefit, norms of international law, as well as recognition of the central role of the U.N. in global affairs. The work of the U.N. Security Council, the Group of 20, BRICS, SCO and CSTO clearly demonstrates

the efficiency of joint efforts.

Needless to say, consistent pursuit of common goals in international cooperation not only results in strengthening global security, but also boosts domestic development providing for sustainable growth and people's well-being. Although there is a lot of work to be done within Russia we have managed to achieve a number of remarkable results in spite of constantly emerging challenges. First, the structure of income sources has gradually changed as non-resource-based exports are currently 60 percent of Russia's revenue as decreasing oil and gas revenues mark the transition of our economy to a completely new model. Second, Russia maintains its sovereign external debt notably low (around 13 percent of GDP), while the state budget deficit in 2015 was contained at only 2.4 percent. Despite an overall GDP slowdown in 2015, some important industries and agriculture show substantial growth, while the capital outflow has been gradually reduced, allowing Russia to rise to being one of the global leading holders of international reserves. Most importantly, our people

have started feeling the results of the reforms and are gaining confidence in the security of our state. This has resulted in the growth of the fertility rate, with the birth rate exceeding mortality in almost half of the regions of Russia for the first time in decades. All of this makes us think the goal of being among the top-five countries in the world in terms of GDP by 2020 that was set by President Vladimir Putin, is quite achievable. Not only do we possess all the necessary resources, but we also enjoy high-level public support of the government, as well as the consolidation of society.

Our economic agenda is firmly tied to foreign relations. Russia has always welcomed the development of mutually beneficial economic cooperation, especially with our neighbors such as Japan. The outcome of recent talks between Putin and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on May 6 in Sochi, in southern Russia, clearly proves it. The two leaders paid special attention to economic cooperation, trade and investment matters. Clearly, for various mostly objective reasons, Russia-Japan trade turnover in 2015 has been on a downward trend, but during the talks both leaders stressed their commitment to search for new areas of cooperation. Although energy still accounts for the lion's share of our trade and economic ties, nevertheless, cooperation in other areas has been growing successfully and exponentially, including in agriculture, medicine and what is known as the "smart urban environment." The plan known as the eight-point agenda is being put into action.

Of course, matters regarding a peace treaty were also among topics discussed. As a reliable and responsible power and the successor to the Soviet Union, Russia has confirmed all its ob-

ligations previously assumed by the Soviet Union. Those include the Soviet-Japanese Declaration of 1956 that was signed and ratified by the governments of the Soviet Union and Japan. This October marks the 60th anniversary of the document's signing. We are going to continue peace treaty consultations aimed at finding mutually acceptable solutions to this sensitive subject closely linked to the outcome of World War II.

It goes without saying that in order to address such a problem we have to develop our relations in different spheres to gradually step up our partnership. Besides economic ties and people-to-people exchanges, it is largely related to cooperation in the fields of security, strategic stability and international affairs.

Our goal is to further boost cooperation with Japan — our important neighbor and a natural partner. This corresponds not only to the genuine need of the Russian and Japanese people, but to the prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world.

In one week the 11th Russian Cultural Festival will open in



President Vladimir Putin (left) and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Sochi in May EMBASSY OF RUSSIA

Tokyo with the participation of outstanding Russian musicians and ballet dancers. This is another important area where we have huge potential for cooperation. Japanese arts and culture also enjoy popularity in Russia, as well as sports and educational exchanges, people-to-people contacts and more. All of these areas can be further developed through high-level meetings planned for this year.

Education, sports enhance ties

Hiroshi Hase
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, CULTURE,
SPORTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to the citizens of Russia on this year's Day of Russia. Using the occasion of an unofficial visit to Sochi, Russia, on May 6, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a summit meeting with President Vladimir Putin. Close Japan-Russia ties are indispensable for ensuring the peace and stability of the Asian region. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is promoting exchanges with Russia in a wide range of areas, including education, science and technology, culture and sports.

In the field of higher education, Japan in 2013 designated Russia as one of the key countries for overseas student exchanges. Under a newly initiated Project for Promoting Japan-Russia Academic Exchange, five Japanese universities have been approved and over a five-year period from 2014, 560 Russian stu-

dents are to be accepted at those universities while 570 Japanese students are expected to study at Russian universities.

In the area of science and technology, Japan has been working hard to strengthen cooperation with Russia through our participation in the Japan-Russia Science and Technology Cooperation Committee, which was established under an agreement between the governments of the Russian Federation and Japan on scientific and technological cooperation. Under this agreement, we are promoting various projects such as the Arctic Challenge for Sustainability Project (ArCS).

Regarding sports, many exchange programs were held in 2014, the Japan-Russia Martial Arts Exchange Year. At the RIZIN Fighting World Grand-Prix held last December, I personally presented the champion's belt to Fedor Emelianenko as proof of our friendship and with deep gratitude for his contribution to Japan-Russia friendship and the promotion of sports that he has demonstrated through martial arts.

In the area of culture, Japan is supporting the visits of Japanese artists, art and cultural groups to Russia and their ac-



Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Hiroshi Hase (left) presents the champion's belt to Fedor Emelianenko at the RIZIN Fighting World Grand-Prix in December. MEXT

tivities there. I am also very pleased that many Japanese visitors have the opportunity to enjoy encounters with Russian culture at the annual Festival of Russian Culture in Japan.

I am fully prepared to continue our efforts to further expand these kinds of exchanges between Japan and Russia, deepen the friendly ties as good neighbors we have built up and overcome the difficult problems that remain between our two countries.

I again wish to congratulate the Russian people on this auspicious day and express my sincere hope for the peace and prosperity of Russia.



Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (left) and his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida in Tokyo in April EMBASSY OF RUSSIA

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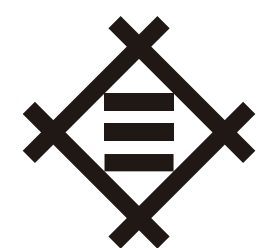
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