

(Anniversary special)

Russia National Day

Bilateral relationship steadily moving to a new level

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Russia-Japan relations play an important role not only in terms of ensuring the national interests of our countries in a bilateral context, but they also serve as one of the key factors for ensuring the security, stability and steady development of the entire Asia-Pacific region. Russia's foreign policy in the East is built on the understanding that Japan is our close Far Eastern neighbor and an essential partner in the region and the world. Reinforcing mutually beneficial, friendly and good-neighborly relations with Japan is one of the priorities of Russian diplomacy.

The road map for bilateral cooperation was shown in the joint statement made at the highest level and was adopted after the talks between our leaders in Moscow in April 2013. The document comprehensively outlines the main direction of bilateral relations covering the widest range of areas. These important practical relations entail cooperation in the eight areas that were proposed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Sochi in May 2016. This initiative is intended to improve the quality of life of Russian people, covering the fields of medicine, energy, the urban environment, industrial cooperation, humanitarian relations and so forth. Concentrated work is underway to elaborate on the plan and see its consistent implementation.

Russia-Japan relations have recently demonstrated positive dynamics. As is widely known, Russia, despite all the complexities of the current international situation, has never refused dialogue with Japan in both intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary formats,



President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shake hands at the Japan-Russia Business Dialogue on Dec. 16 in Tokyo. KREMLIN PRESS SERVICE

and the Russian market has always been open to Japanese businesses. We don't place any artificial obstacles to the development of mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

It is now obvious that there is a significant intensification of bilateral political contacts between the leaders and high-level officials, especially since 2016. Both sides succeeded in coming to a mutual understanding of the true value of Russia-Japan relations and the need to consistently strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation in the economy and other areas, including the areas of Abe's previously mentioned plan and the list of agreed priority projects.

The crucial part is energetic dialogue between our leaders who set the main vector for subsequent tasks in all directions. In 2016, four top-level meetings were held, including Putin's visits to Yamaguchi Prefecture and Tokyo in December. In April, Abe visited Russia and, together with Putin, reviewed the conditions and prospects of the relations. Additionally, Abe plans to participate in the Eastern Economic Forum in

September in Vladivostok, where top-level talks will also take place. Other meetings of our leaders are also possible during major international events.

The outcome of the December visit of our president to Japan deserves separate comment. Undoubtedly, it was the main highlight of the Russia-Japan political dialogue last year. The visit took place was the first of its kind after an 11-year hiatus. As a result of negotiations at the highest level, important agreements on the development of cooperation in diverse fields were reached. In practical terms, this was reflected in the 80 documents signed based on the result of the visit. Among them were an intergovernmental memorandum on the Year of Russia in Japan and the Year of Japan in Russia in 2018, 11 interagency and 68 commercial agreements. The results of the visit gave a powerful impetus to the development of bilateral relations in a wide range of areas, creating the conditions to bring Russia-Japan relations to a whole new level.

Nevertheless, some negative trends

still persist, including a decline in trade between Russia and Japan, primarily due to a sharp drop in energy supply prices. However, the parties are determined to solve these problems. In the first quarter of 2017, there was an increase in bilateral trade of 25 percent. We expect that the second half of the year will be fruitful in terms of agreements on new major economic projects. We are certain that for the long-term development of bilateral relations, it is important to have a strong economic basis.

We support regular high-level dialogue with Japan. The heads of foreign ministries, as well as other ministries and bodies of the two countries, are in close contact. This year, foreign ministers Sergey Lavrov and Fumio Kishida met twice. They first met on Feb. 17 on the sidelines of the G-20 ministerial meeting in Bonn and again on March 20 in Tokyo, when Lavrov visited Japan together with the Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu to participate in the second round of the two-plus-two consultations through the ministries of foreign affairs and the ministries of defense of Russia and Japan. This format proved its necessity and usefulness as the ministers had direct and candid dialogues on urgent issues, including security concerns in the Asia-Pacific region.

The intergovernmental committee for trade and economic cooperation and new formats of trade, economic and investment relations are steadily working.

The peace treaty issue remains an important component of the bilateral agenda. Following the results of the summit talks in Japan in December, the leaders of our two countries expressed their determination to resolve this issue and search for a solution that would meet the strategic interests of Russia and Japan that could be accepted by the peoples of both countries. The decision to start negotiations for establishing joint economic activities in the Southern Kuril Islands was a fundamentally new step in this direction. At present, the list of priorities

in bilateral economic projects is being prepared; the implementation of which would meet the interests of residents in the border regions, contributing to their economic development. We are also taking measures to simplify humanitarian trips. These are important steps toward deepening mutual trust, which is crucial for achieving progress in resolving the peace treaty issues.

A major development this year will be Russia-Japan culture exchanges. Programs with rich content have been prepared in the framework of the "Russian Seasons" project. Japan is the first country to pick up this baton and within a year there will be about 200 events, covering 42 cities. The idea is to restore the tradition of the world-famous "Russian Seasons" that was launched in the 20th century by Sergei Diaghilev.

The grand opening of the "Russian Seasons" in Japan took place on June 4 at the prestigious venue, Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, where the audience admired the Bolshoi Theatre's ballet performance of "Giselle," featuring prima ballerina Svetlana Zakharova. Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Olga Golodets, Abe and key Japanese ministers were also present.

Together with these unprecedented

events, the program of the 12th annual Russian Culture Festival, which has become popular among Japanese, has been planned. We expect that the synergistic effect of numerous cultural events will help Russians and Japanese to get to know each other better, as well as strengthen the trust that is in high demand for the active development of Russia-Japan relations.

The development of inter-parliamentary dialogue is consistent, as last year saw the visits of the chairmen of both chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation to Japan. In January, representatives of Japan's Upper House, headed by Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Hiroshige Seko and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Nobuo Kishi visited Moscow. Regular dialogue in the inter-parliamentary sphere has a positive effect on deepening mutual understanding and strengthening confidence in bilateral relations as a whole.

It is also important to bring Russia and Japan's approaches together on urgent international issues, including the subjects of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and on a global scale. This will benefit the peoples of our two countries, as well as the general situation in the world.



The Bolshoi Theatre ballet company performs "Giselle" on June 4 at Tokyo Bunka Kaikan. RUSSIAN SEASONS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE



A sign introducing the "Russian Seasons" event in Japan. RUSSIAN SEASONS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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

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