

Joint news conference with President of South Africa Jacob Zuma

August 5, 2010 15:00The Kremlin, Moscow

President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev: Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my satisfaction with the visit of the President of South Africa Mr Jacob Zuma and with the negotiations that took place between our two delegations. We have just signed a number of important documents, but I hope it is only the first stage of the great work that we are embarking on: the work towards building special, strategic, relations between our two countries, which is why the efforts in this direction will continue. We have in reserve a number of documents that are very important even in terms of building our bilateral relations. Mr President and I have agreed to instruct our Intergovernmental Commission and other agencies to continue this work in order to conclude these documents as soon as possible.

I would like to mention one symbolic aspect: the current visit of President of South Africa is taking place on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries. Let me remind you that this document was adopted by the UN General Assembly on our country's initiative. And now Russia's position is to cooperate with our African partners, actively assisting them in reaching their development goals. We will continue this work and our contacts with all countries of the African continent.

South Africa is our leading trade partner in Africa. Indeed, the turnover has grown over the recent years. It currently amounts to about a billion dollars. At the same time we noted during our talks that more than 500 million dollars that had been achieved last year are not the limit, but are rather a starting point because our countries have every opportunity to increase the turnover, as well as investment cooperation. Therefore, we must diversify our ties. There are some promising projects, including in such areas as high technology and space exploration, we have just signed a document on cooperation in nuclear energy and mineral resources. We will, of course, promote such projects.

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Not so long ago South African communications satellite was launched, as Mr President said during the talks. Since late 2008, we have been implementing an earth remote sensing project. These are good examples of high-tech projects.

In recent years, a number of investment projects have been successfully implemented in South Africa with the participation of Russian companies. They are mainly related to mining and metals. In turn, the South African business community has a strong presence in our country. We can mention such major Russian companies as Renova Group, Norilsk Nickel and Evraz Group, and on South African side there is SABMiller, Naspers, a media company, Bateman Engineering and a number of banking institutions, which have made investments. Once again I would like to note that, in our opinion, this is still an early stage in our cooperation. I hope that tomorrow's meeting and the business forum will help promote contacts in this area, and I am very glad that it will be held with the participation of my partner, the President of South Africa Mr Jacob Zuma.

Energy is an important area of our cooperation. We are ready to develop ties in this area by implementing projects in energy infrastructure, generation capacity and transmission capacity. During the talks we discussed the possibility of building nuclear power plants, of joint exploration and development of uranium deposits. We signed an agreement on the supply of uranium to South African nuclear power plants. I think we will continue this work in the future, maintaining contacts between Russian and South African profile agencies and businesses.

Our plans include the expansion of cultural ties, tourism, scientific and sports exchanges. I just told Mr President how much I admired the excellent organisation of the FIFA World Cup, which was recently held in South Africa. This was an outstanding football event and we all followed it with great interest. Unfortunately, the Russian team had not made it there, but many other excellent teams showed us some great football. Our goal is for Russia to host the World Cup. I hope that this will happen, including with the active assistance of our South African friends.

Ties are developing between various provinces, organisations, cities and regions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa. Agreements have been concluded by St Petersburg, Cape Town and Johannesburg, Moscow and Pretoria, and a number of other provinces and regions of the Russian Federation. That is good, because it allows us to build up human relationships as well as develop trade and economic ties.

During the talks Mr President and I discussed key international issues. Our approaches to tackling today's complex global challenges are close or sometimes they fully coincide. Both Russia and South Africa are strong advocates of establishing a new international order based on equitable distribution of opportunities, the use of all international development institutions that exist today, the formation of modern global security architecture based on the rule of international law, values and interests of all parties and, of course, respect for sovereignty.

We have discussed several current issues, including those relating to sustainable development in Africa and peacekeeping. In general, we talked about everything that is today the scope of our common concerns and our possible cooperation.

Mr Zuma and I meet regularly as participants in international forums and summits, which is also good. But we agreed to boost our bilateral contacts, despite the fact that they are already highly developed, but working meetings between presidents are vital. This official visit of the South African President to the Russian Federation also has special importance to us.

In conclusion, I would again like to thank the South African President Mr Jacob Zuma, for the constructive and friendly exchange of views. I am sure that this will continue. I would like to wish the people of South Africa every success and prosperity in the future.

President of South Africa Jacob Zuma:

His Excellency President Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen of the media;

We have just concluded successful official talks between our two delegations.

We are satisfied and pleased with the cordial and fruitful manner in which the talks have been conducted. This has confirmed that this was a meeting between two historical friends.

The relations between South Africa and Russia date back to the solidarity and friendship during our struggle for liberation.

South Africans and indeed many Africans will always fondly remember that selfless support by the people of this country and surroundings during the moment of great need when many of our countries in the African continent were fighting for their freedom and independence.

We have noted the tragedy that has befallen Russia. Running fires have tragically claimed the lives of many citizens, and continue to affect many others.

On behalf of the Government and the people of South Africa, I wish to convey our deep-felt condolences during this difficult period.

Mr President,

Our delegation on this visit comprises eleven Ministers and a business delegation of more than 100 people.

The business delegation represents sectors such as agro-processing, Aviation, Banking and Finance, Defence and Aerospace, Energy, Engineering, information and communications technology, Infrastructure, Logistics, Medical and Health Services and Tourism.

The size of the government and business delegation emphasises our commitment to consolidate and further deepen bilateral relations with this country, within the context of the Treaty of Friendship and Partnership that was signed in 2006.

This Treaty affirmed the South Africa-Russia strategic partnership.

After our successful talks, we are convinced that this visit will afford us an opportunity to further consolidate and enhance relations at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

We seek to strengthen economic and trade relations, by focusing on the implementation of existing projects piloted through the Inter-Governmental Committee on Trade and Economic Development.

We also want to identify new opportunities that can further enhance the shared development and modernization agenda of our two countries.

We are confident that the visit will also stimulate and enhance people-to-people ties and cultural exchanges, which are the bedrock upon which the friendship between the two countries and their respective peoples is based.

We are delighted at the success of the Ministerial meetings during this visit. These culminated in the signing of the Final Protocol of the 9th ITEC yesterday here in Moscow.

We are also pleased with recent joint successes between our two countries, such as the launch of South African satellite Sumbandila, by Russia in September 2009.

This has increased co-operation in the fields of science and technology and space research.

There is a shared recognition that there is considerable room for further enhanced co-operation in all sectors.

At a multilateral level, our two countries share a commitment to the promotion of a more equitable distribution of power and influence in the global political and economic systems.

We also uphold the primacy of international law and the centrality of the United Nations.

We are therefore natural partners who can contribute towards the progressive development of an equitable global governance system, in partnership with other like-minded countries.

During this visit, we are delighted to have signed, among others, two main agreements and a Memorandum of Understanding.

We look forward to the effective implementation of the agreements on cooperation in the Field of Plant Quarantine and one relating to the Waiver of Visa Requirements for Holders of Diplomatic or Service or Official Passports.

The Memorandum of Understanding between our respective space agencies will take our collaboration to greater heights in this field.

We are generally satisfied with the substantial progress made thus far during this visit.

We would like to see more interaction between the two governments going forward.

We will also encourage continuous and fruitful interaction between members of the South Africa-Russia Business Council to grow our trade relations.

Most importantly, we look forward to hosting the President of the Russian Federation in South Africa for an official visit in 2012.

Dmitry Medvedev: Thank you.

Question: Given that cooperation between Russia and South Africa has been very good at various levels, perhaps Russia and President Medvedev will support South Africa in the BRIC group. Will you support South Africa in BRIC?

Dmitry Medvedev: Today Mr Zuma and I reviewed this issue. We are open to the discussion on all forms of cooperation with our South African partners, including cooperation through BRIC, especially since this kind of interaction already exists.

Naturally, the BRIC group consists of other countries apart from the Russian Federation. But at the same time, we realise that South Africa's participation in discussions on a number of issues that are currently addressed in the BRIC format, would be very productive indeed, given that this is a new format. The group is a venue for rapidly developing economies, which includes the South African economy. Therefore, we are ready to develop various forms of cooperation with our South African partners, including non-standard ones. Interaction within the BRIC format is also one of the possibilities, of course, taking into account the views and approaches that exist in other states that now make up this forum.

Question: Mr Zuma, President Medvedev said earlier that the trade turnover between our countries exceeded half a billion dollars last year. What could be the future of relations between our two countries?

Mr Medvedev, the second anniversary of the events in the Caucasus is approaching. Can we now say how the decisions made at that time affected Russia's relations with other countries?

President of the Republic of South Africa Jacob Zuma: Thank you very much for the question.

Certainly, our ministers – in particular in high tech – this has been discussed quite extensively, in relation to how do we deepen our trade between the two countries. It's an issue also we discussed with his Excellency, the President: the need to do more. And I'm sure that after this visit, there's going to be a lot that is going to be done, particularly because we came with a very big business delegation – the people who are relevant in this regard, who are discussing with their counterparts what are possible things that need to be done.

And I'm certain that this will be taken care of. And of course, as you talk about the financial crisis, what has been interesting is the observation that during this time of the crisis, the relations in terms of trade did not stop. They actually grew during that time, which means that we have more possibilities now, since we are almost getting out of the crisis. And also, our focus on the two countries is certainly going to answer that question, or satisfy that desire that we need to deepen our relations.

Thank you.

Dmitry Medvedev: If we reassess the events of two years ago, I would first like to say that I believe all the decisions taken at that time were absolutely justified and have proved their effectiveness. At that time, our country came to the aid of the peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; we came to their defence in a critical situation, when their very identity and existence as a nation was under threat. And I think these two years did not pass in vain.

Since then the world has realised that the assessments that emerged in August 2008, as expressed by individual states or the media, were very controversial. Time has shown that our peace efforts at that time were entirely justified. And despite Georgia's past and present position, I'm confident that the world has found out the truth, which emerged as a result of international activities, including the publication of the so-called Tagliavini Report and other materials that were made available to the international community.

That is why I think that our relations with other states have not undergone any significant changes. I believe that the countries that showed their concern realised in the end that Russia's actions were motivated by one thing only: the desire to save the lives of the people against whom an aggression was being perpetrated – and nothing else. That is the reason why our relations with European countries and with other countries, even those that initially voiced their doubts or concerns, were restored very quickly. And now our relations with the EU and with other nations are excellent on all issues. Among other things, we discuss the Caucasus crisis.

Our approaches may remain different in some ways, but in any case, when we talk openly and frankly, in a discussion without the press, in a small group, almost everyone with whom I have ever talked about this recognise both the act of aggression and the validity of our response.

Unfortunately, some of our partners cannot give this assessment publicly for a number of reasons. We are ready to continue the discussion on the lessons of the 2008 crisis in those formats that are working today, including in the format of consultations. Russia never avoided such consultations; on the contrary, we encouraged the conflicting parties, namely Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to continue communicating.

I hope that the parties will exercise good faith and will try to hear each other out. What I believe would be extremely important is if an agreement on the non-use of force is concluded. Russia insisted on such an agreement from the start. Unfortunately, the Georgian leadership did not consent to signing such a document, but I am confident that an agreement on this issue would significantly defuse the situation in the Caucasus.

Finally, the last issue I would like to mention, though certainly not the least important one, is our relationship with Georgia. Unfortunately, our diplomatic relations with Georgia were destroyed by those events. That was not the fault of the Russian Federation. I have repeatedly said that the responsibility for everything that happened, including the cessation of bilateral relations, of our political relations, rests entirely with the Georgian leadership and President Saakashvili personally.

I have also repeatedly said that our relations cannot be resumed as long as Georgia's incumbent president remains in office. But this does not mean that our relations cannot recover fully when other people will come to power in Georgia. I am confident that it will happen. The Georgian people will sooner or later make their choice, and those age-old friendly relations which link the Russian and Georgian nations will be restored in full, and we will be able to develop the entire range of contacts between our countries, including in the economy, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and in all other areas.

I am absolutely confident that it will not depend on the will of individual politicians who tried to impose a different scenario for our relationship, no matter how much they talk about the fact that as a result of what happened, the Russian language is disappearing in Georgia, and so on. We know who committed this crime and who must be held responsible for it. But I am confident that the Russian-Georgian relations have better times ahead. Thank you.

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/8578>