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RUSSIA AND ASEAN CAN ACHIEVE A GREAT DEAL TOGETHER

On October 30, in Hanoi, President Dmitry Medvedev is going to meet the leaders of Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – Brunei-Darussalam, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. The Heads of State/Government of our countries are to assess the Russia-ASEAN partnership, map out the prospects for its further development, and discuss the ways of building a better security and cooperation architecture in the Asia-Pacific Region. In other words, this will be a full-fledged summit meeting, a truly strategic dialogue at the highest level. And it comes quite natural, because it involves major participants in global and regional politics, two powerful centers of economic growth, partners that mean a lot to one another and can and should do much together.



The forthcoming Russia-ASEAN summit is important not just because it will take place five years after the first top-level Russia-ASEAN meeting. Apart from that, the point is that the world and the region have undergone major changes within the last few years which have radically altered the geopolitical landscape and make the current converging between Russia and ASEAN especially significant.

THE POLYCENTRIC WORLD AND THE ASIA-PACIFIC AGE

The global financial and economic crisis was a catalyst for these changes. It has accelerated a whole series of trends that can before long shift the balance of forces in global politics and economics, entailing a profound transformation of the entire system of international relations.

In fact, the process is already under way. The essence of what we face is the emergence of a polycentric world structure where the most important role belongs to regional cooperation. It is easy to see that centripetal tendencies are currently gaining momentum in many regions of the world. But the Asia-Pacific stands out in this respect.

The crisis has highlighted with the utmost clarity that now the Asia-Pacific is not only leading in terms of most economic indices, but is actually the generator of global growth. World economy has overcome the worst phase of recession and started to revive not least due to Asian countries, many of which succeeded in keeping up high rates of economic development.

Headed by economic interests, the gravity center of political activity is likewise shifting towards the Asia-Pacific. Powerful resources, financial, industrial, and technological potential are concentrated here. At the same time the Asia-Pacific is an area which has serious geopolitical contradictions. In other words, the Asia-Pacific region is a crossroads of major world powers' interests that sometimes coincide and sometimes clash.

Many experts believe that the 21st century will be the Asia Age. Only time will tell if it is right. But this part of the world is undoubtedly important and promising, and plays a special role in our planet's future. It is perhaps here, in the Asia-Pacific, where the outline of a new world order is taking shape today, and a new image of the global management system is emerging.



The region itself is also undergoing major metamorphoses. These include, above all, an unprecedented growth of interdependence and interconnection between the countries of the region, and an acceleration of multi-level economic integration. Under the impact of global upheavals and the logic of intra-regional development a long outstanding process of reshaping the regional architecture has started in the Asia-Pacific.

The Asia-Pacific countries are increasingly aware that peace and stability in the region can only be ensured by combining their efforts and taking measures to consolidate security on a collective, non-bloc basis. The establishment of multi-polarity offers us a unique chance. Probably for the first time since the Cold War it has become possible that a stable, better balanced combination of centers of economic growth and political influence emerge in the Asia-Pacific.

Another mark of these times is that China, India, the Republic of Korea and other rapidly developing countries are moving to the foreground of regional politics. It also relates to ASEAN – an interstate association whose significance has been growing for many years. I would like to dwell in more detail on the role of this important participant of international relations and on Russia-ASEAN ties.

ASEAN AS A BACKBONE OF REGIONAL ORDER

ASEAN is in many ways a unique phenomenon. It was established in 1967 to incorporate Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. In 1984 it was joined by Brunei-Darussalam, and in 1995 the Association took a truly landmark decision to admit Vietnam, which was followed by Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. That made ASEAN a Group of Ten, and today it is one of the most authoritative regional organizations.

In more than four decades of its activities ASEAN has accumulated considerable experience of working out collective approaches towards the vital regional issues and has created a broad, well-balanced system of dialogue partnerships with the world's major powers, including Russia, the USA, China, India, Japan, Australia, and the EU. Nowadays the Association with the population of 580 million, total GDP of \$1.5 trillion, foreign trade of \$1.7 trillion and a developed system of free trade areas with key economic partners has actually established itself as a strong center of gravity for the region.

It is the ASEAN format that enables Southeast Asian countries to efficiently protect their common interests and conduct dialogue with



international partners on an equal footing. The Association acts as a core element for such influential mechanisms as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM), ASEAN plus 3 (China, Republic of Korea and Japan), and East Asia Summits (ASEAN plus China, the Republic of Korea, Japan, India, Australia and New Zealand).

Nowadays ASEAN is facing the task of searching for a new identity in the emerging multi-polar world and consolidating its role in regional integration processes as new power centers emerge in the Asia-Pacific. In this regard the entry into force of the ASEAN Charter in 2008 and the goal of building up a highly integrated ASEAN Community by 2015 turn up to be very significant for the Association.

Moving forward the Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership is a priority of our policy in the Asia-Pacific. This is our deliberate line free from situational fluctuations. We have made together a long way for almost 15 years since Russia established the relations of dialogue partnership with ASEAN. But it had all begun much earlier; links between our countries root deeply in history.

STRONG ROOTS MEAN FUTURE GROWTH

Russia-ASEAN relations rest on a solid historical foundation. At the close of World War II the Soviet Union made a decisive contribution to the defeat of militarist Japan. Our common victory at the Pacific theater of war brought long-awaited peace and freedom to the peoples of Asia. In the years that followed Moscow rendered consistent and substantial assistance to many states in the region in their national liberation struggle and achievement of independence. Our country enjoyed particularly close relations of friendship and mutual assistance with the countries of Indochina and Indonesia. Firm friendly relations with Thailand have never been discontinued. Ties with Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Brunei were established and successfully developed.

The new Russia is building its relations with the countries of Southeast Asia on a fundamentally different, ideology-free basis. As a vivid evidence of that Russia acquired official status of full-fledged Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1996.

We have every right to feel proud of the level of contacts we have managed to achieve over the past years. A solid legal basis of our interaction with the Association has been developed. The positive achievements in our relations



include the Joint Declaration on Partnership for Peace and Security, and Prosperity and Development in the Asia-Pacific, the Joint Declaration on Progressive and Comprehensive Partnership, the Comprehensive Program of Action to Promote Cooperation for 2005-2015, the Agreement on Economic and Development Cooperation, and other documents.

The structure of the Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership mechanisms has been actively expanding. At present it comprises annual Ministerial Conferences of Russia and ASEAN Member States, Senior Officials' Meetings (at the Deputy Foreign Ministers level), Senior Economic Officials' Meetings and Senior Officials' Meetings on Energy, Russia-ASEAN working groups on trade and economy cooperation, on science and technology cooperation, and on counter terrorism and transnational crime. The principal bodies coordinating practical interaction are the Joint Cooperation Committee and the Joint Planning and Management Committee.

The First Russia-ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur on 13 December 2005 was a landmark event in our relations with the Association. That meeting defined the priority areas of our interaction and kick-started practical work on a broad range of issues.

It should be acknowledged that for various objective and subjective reasons Russia's economic cooperation with the Association had been for a long time mostly skin deep, and even today it fails to keep up with the pace of our political dialogue. The volume of the Russia-ASEAN trade, for instance, remains quite modest - about \$10 billion. But things are starting to change. No wonder – the potential of our collaboration is so vast that it is attracting the attention of both governments and business communities.

A fundamentally important step in fostering practical interaction was the establishment of the Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership Financial Fund to which we contributed \$1.75 million in 2007-2009. The amount is not big, especially in comparison to the multi-million ASEAN cooperation funds set up by China, Japan, India and other dialogue partners. Still, it has allowed us to start cooperation projects at the governmental level. Joint activities in the spheres of renewable energy, small and medium enterprises, Russian language learning, tourism and health care have already been implemented. Project proposals in the area of disaster management and modern biotechnologies are on the way. One of our main tasks in the short term is to move on from single projects to larger-scale, long-term, and mutually beneficial cooperation in sectors of mutual interest.

The establishment of direct contacts between Russian agencies and relevant ASEAN structures is a crucially important aspect of expanding our



interaction with the Association. The Vietnamese city of Danang hosted the first Russia-ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting in August this year. It was decided to develop by the next such meeting a road map for Russia-ASEAN economic cooperation that would help to accelerate interaction in high-tech, energy, outer space, agriculture, transport, chemical industry and metallurgy.

Promotion of partnership relations with ASEAN goes perfectly in line with our policy in the Asia-Pacific with the main goal to provide favorable external conditions for modernizing Russia, to further friendly relations with the countries in the region, to take an active part in regional affairs, and to join integration processes. That, inter alia, was emphasized by President Dmitry Medvedev at the meeting on social and economic development of the Far East and consolidation of Russia's position in the Asia-Pacific in Khabarovsk on July 2.

Thus, the legal basis and the mechanisms of Russia-ASEAN cooperation have largely been formed. So what are we to strive for now?

HORIZONS OF COOPERATION

Statistics clearly show how we can benefit from developing mutually advantageous cooperation with ASEAN. For instance, the 2009 trade of the Association made \$178.2 billion with China, \$159 billion with Japan, \$74.7 billion with the Republic of Korea, \$58.7 billion with Australia, and \$20.2 billion with India. It was calculated that the aggregate cost of infrastructure projects alone that China, Japan and India intend to implement by 2020 in the ASEAN countries, may exceed \$200 billion.

Russia is not going to compete with anyone in that respect. Just like our ASEAN partners, we have our own interests. The most important thing is a mutual aspiration for cooperation, and it does exist as the enormous potential we need to put into practice by joint efforts.

The dynamics of global development bring issues of energy to the forefront of Russia-ASEAN cooperation. The first Russia-ASEAN consultations on energy held in Myanmar in February this year and Russia-ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Energy in Vietnam in July demonstrated the interest of ASEAN countries towards Russia's capability in this area. These meetings yielded the Russia-ASEAN Energy Cooperation Work Program for 2010-2015 that was duly approved. The Rosatom State Corporation organized a workshop for the ASEAN experts on peaceful use of atomic energy in Hanoi in



September. Next on the list is launching a Dialogue on Renewable Energy and Environmentally Friendly Technologies.

We consider participation of our country in the programs aimed at bridging the development gap between the “old” and “new” ASEAN Member States, including the Greater Mekong subregion development projects, as a promising sphere of cooperation. At present the issue of organizing relevant expert consultations with the Mekong River Commission is being studied.

Enhancement of economic ties and achievement of concrete results will help to put into practice the conclusion of a free trade agreement with ASEAN. This is certainly a long-term objective, but this is the way most countries of the region proceed. The fact that talks on Russia’s joining WTO are still in progress does not prevent us from making the first steps in this direction; we have reached agreement on setting up a relevant joint Russian-Vietnamese research group.

We are planning to consolidate efforts with ASEAN partners in the area of disaster relief. Singapore hosted the first Russia-ASEAN consultations on emergency response in March this year. We are confident that Russian best-practices and technologies of prevention and mitigation of disasters will be useful to our partners, and a framework document on cooperation in this sphere will lay the legal basis for implementation of joint projects.

Joint struggle against terrorism is one of our key goals. In 2004 our country initiated the launching of Russia-ASEAN Senior Officials Meetings on Transnational Crime; Russia-ASEAN Working Group on Countering Terrorism and Transnational Crime was organized and a relevant Work Plan was approved in 2009. Establishing direct contacts between the Russian special services and law-enforcement bodies and ASEAN counter-terrorism centers also appears to have good prospects.

Special attention is attached to enhancing humanitarian relations between Russia and the ASEAN countries. There are ample opportunities for that. There has always been strong interest to Southeast Asia in Russia, which is demonstrated by the steadily growing flow of Russian tourists to the region. We are aware that ASEAN partners as well would like to get better acquainted with our country. In order to facilitate cultural exchanges and fill existing information gap the ASEAN Center was opened at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) on June 15. It is to play a significant role in the dissemination of knowledge about one another in Russia and the countries of the Association.

The year 2011 will mark 15 years of our dialogue partnership. We think it is important to properly celebrate this anniversary. We have arranged



with ASEAN colleagues to jointly prepare a program of activities that will contribute to further rapprochement between our peoples. For instance, it is already agreed to hold the Days of the Russian Culture in ASEAN countries.

LIKE-MINDED ON GLOBAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Similar or identical positions on most issues of global and regional agenda are among the major factors of successful progress in Russia-ASEAN relations. It provides good opportunities for interaction in world affairs.

Since 1994 we have closely cooperated with the Association within the framework of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) that we see as one of the corner stones of the emerging regional security architecture. I take part in the Forum's annual ministerial conferences with invariable interest. It gives me pleasure to recall the famous ARF performances at gala dinners that for years had been an ornament of the region's political life while also consolidating the feelings of friendship and mutual trust so vital in politics.

Being closely involved in integration processes, ASEAN has subtle perception of the mood of the region, including an increasing need for additional measures to enhance security. Hence, e.g., the idea of setting up a new mechanism – ASEAN Defense Ministers Meetings with Dialogue Partners. The Russian side gives full support to this initiative and is going to take an active part in the first meeting in this format scheduled for this October in Vietnam.

Both Russia and ASEAN favours the establishment of a better regional architecture for the Asia-Pacific. We are convinced that such architecture should be transparent and based on the principles of equality, polycentricity, supremacy of law and mutual consideration of the interests of all states in the region. The framework of a future regional architecture already exists. This is the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), which Russia acceded in 2004, and the network of regional organizations and associations that has evolved over the last few years in Asia and the Pacific area, obviously including ASEAN. Advancing multilateral network diplomacy appears to be the most efficient way of building the new "Asia-Pacific Home." The Association sets a good example to other multilateral associations in this respect by establishing relations with a wide range of partners.

Our ASEAN colleagues highly appreciate Russia's role in the Asia-Pacific, as they regard our country as a factor of strategic stability and sustainable economic development. Russia offers the region its sincere determination to



contribute to the common cause of regional peace and prosperity. Here the basic goals of Russia and ASEAN coincide.

There is a perfect understanding in ASEAN that no mechanism of regional cooperation will be adequate without the participation of major powers, including our country. The assistance of the Association in endorsement of Russia's application to join the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM) at the 8th ASEM Summit in Brussels on October 4-5 this year, and also in taking decision to invite Russia to join the East Asia Summits was highly demonstrative. Russia, in its turn, supported the proposal for the ASEAN Chair to participate in G20 meetings. Close interaction in international affairs meets our common interests.

SECOND SUMMIT: ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW STAGE IN RELATIONS

Intensification of cooperation has put on the agenda the issue of holding the second meeting between the leaders of Russia and the ASEAN Member States. It is symbolic that the Summit will be hosted by our Vietnamese friends, Russia's faithful strategic partners currently chairing ASEAN. Hanoi is also preparing to welcome President Medvedev on an official visit to take place right after the Summit.

The Joint Statement reflecting the participants' common approaches to further development of Russia-ASEAN cooperation and topical international issues will be the main outcome document of the meeting. The Russia-ASEAN Agreement on Cultural Cooperation is to be signed. On the eve of the event, a meeting between businessmen of Russia and ASEAN is to take place within the framework of the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit.

Russia views the coming Summit as a landmark event designed to give a strong impetus to cooperation at the governmental level as well as between business communities, civil society, academicians and cultural figures. It will not be an overstatement to say that at present we are on the threshold of a new phase in interaction.

Given our increasingly dynamic relations, it would be reasonable to consider holding meetings between the leaders of Russia and ASEAN Member States on a regular basis. Whether or not the idea will come true depends largely on the success in implementing the decisions of the Hanoi Summit.

Here is yet another observation. Russia and ASEAN are natural partners. We equally need peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific. Russia does not aspire to



military superiority, it does not intend to ensure its eastern borders' security by corrupting the security of other states. We have no plans of deploying military bases in the Asia-Pacific, and are not forming closed defense alliances with countries of the region. We do not intend to compete with anyone in the struggle for spheres of influence. Our desire for strengthening cooperation with ASEAN, including the security issues, is not aimed against the third countries.

Russia is a free democratic country. At the same time, we oppose any ideologically based missionary agendas. We do not impose on anyone our vision of the world and are prepared to develop contacts with all countries of the Association, regardless of their political systems. We respect sovereign choice, stand for plurality of values and diversity of development models, for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. We state with satisfaction that the principles of our foreign policy based on the traditions of tolerance, interethnic and interfaith harmony are consonant with the ASEAN political philosophy.

We constructively interact with the countries of the region within the already existing multilateral structures, but we are also ready to put forward initiatives for creating new venues, e.g., establishing close contacts between ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership is confidently gaining momentum. We are determined to further consistently build it up. We have everything it takes – political will, old traditions of friendship, a solid foundation of cooperation and mutual interest of all sides. We therefore look into the future of Russia-ASEAN interaction with optimism. ■