

Press statement and answers to journalists' questions following EU-Russia summit

December 15, 2011, 17:30 Brussels

PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA DMITRY MEDVEDEV: Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

We have completed the 28th summit. Our partnership is truly strategic and deserves the highest appraisal. We have analysed the full set of relations between our countries, between Russia and the European Union, including cooperation in four common spaces. We had a detailed discussion on coordinating our approaches, and naturally, we spoke about the crisis, both what has happened earlier and what is happening now in the euro zone and the European Union overall. We talked about measures that must be taken to stabilise the global economy in the context of the G20 decision in Cannes.

Economic relations between the EU and Russia were one of our central topics. My colleagues just stated that these relations have reached an unprecedented high level. I think that this year's aggregate results will for the first time show turnover between our nations at about 400 billion dollars. This is almost half of the Russian Federation's entire turnover. We have reached a good level of momentum in all areas. I think we have good prospects, which we believe will improve even more after Russia's accession to the World Trade Organisation tomorrow. I would like to once again thank my European partners for their help and support, for their constructive work over the course of this period, particularly the final part. I believe it will certainly be an asset. It was a job well done.

Another indisputable success this year was our energy cooperation, particularly the launch of the first phase of the Nord Stream pipeline. I am certain it will strengthen European energy security, although we still have some difficulties in this area as well. We are sincere individuals and are obligated to defend our interests, which is what I told my partners. I am referring to the implementation of the Third Energy Package, as well as certain plans to build interstate and transcontinental pipelines. But what's important is that we are exchanging information, and we are maintaining a dialogue. Hence I am certain that we will continue cooperating and sharing our views on these issues.

In any case, Russia remains a reliable and responsible exporter of hydrocarbons to Europe. And our successful experience of joint work, spanning many years, will be continued. We guarantee the investments made in this domain, but at the same time, we do not fear the diversification of corresponding gas cooperation between the European Union and other states.

In recent years, our partnership for modernisation has become key in the cooperation between our nations, between Russia and the European Union member-states. The results we reached are truly impressive: they include the completion of WTO talks, which I mentioned earlier, the launch of the Soyuz rocket carrier from the spaceport near Kourou, the programme to harmonise technical regulations, and many others. As you recall, we have already signed 23 declarations on this matter.

After the news conference, we will meet again with members of the EU-Russia Industrialists' Round Table. I would also like to note the real progress made concerning visas. We have completed work to create a list of joint steps and practical actions toward visa-free travel. We worked for a long time; we disagreed on some things, and agreed on others. What's most important is that we've reached agreement. It has become significantly easier to cross the borders between Russia and EU states for many of our citizens, though not all. We do expect to fully eliminate visas between Russia and the European Union in the not-too-distant future.

As my colleagues just said, one of the important areas of cooperation where we always exchange opinions and give one another assessments – sometimes, harsh ones – is human rights. For its part, Russia is also obligated to give such assessments, because we have our own problems in the Russian Federation. But there are problems in the European Union as well, there are problems with respecting the rights of Russian-speaking people in quite a number of countries, as well as the well-known facts about xenophobia, extremism, and neo-Nazism in many EU states. We cannot close our eyes to these things, and they are to be countered.

Following tradition, our agenda included current regional and international issues. We found the tone for discussing these issues. Discussions always occur in an interested, open atmosphere of absolute partnership. In my view, we are exchanging valuable information that helps us better know one another and understand the situation overall in many regions. We spoke about the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, as well as the global situation. We addressed Iran's nuclear programme, the situation in the Balkans, and frozen conflicts. As usual, we addressed the full spectrum.

Overall, I would like to once again thank my colleagues for our constant, sincere dialogue and their ability to compromise. All these years, we have worked in a highly candid and, in my view, quite constructive key. That is precisely what allows us to state today that relations between Russia and the European Union are at their highest level, and we count on them to continue developing in the same key.

QUESTION: Mr Medvedev, under what conditions would Russia help the Eurozone? There was talk of an aid package of 20 billion, can you confirm this? Another question: the European Parliament yesterday called on Russia to hold a new election. Is this a response to the talk of irregularities in the election campaign?

DMITRY MEDVEDEV: To answer your first question, Russia very much wants to see the European Union remain a powerful economic and political force. This is because we have deep-reaching ties with Europe, civilizational ties, and we both benefit from all of these relations. The European Union is therefore of huge importance for Russia. To be frank, it is very important to us that the European countries come to agreements and show restraint and courage in this difficult situation so as to preserve intact their achievements of these last decades, which are an inspiring example to us all. Finally, we want them to preserve the euro, one of major reserve currencies. This is in the European Union's interests, and it is in Russia's interests too, for, as you know, we have 41 percent of our currency reserves in euros or in euro-denominated securities. We are therefore ready to provide assistance.

The Russian Federation has its quota as a member of the International Monetary Fund. We will fulfil all of our obligations as a member of the IMF and are ready to invest the necessary funds in order to support the Eurozone and the European economy.

We are ready to examine other support measures too. But most important of all are the decisions the European countries themselves make regarding the issues that Mr Van Rompuy spoke about just now. Ultimately, only Europe can help itself, but other countries must ensure the conditions that will help Europe to extricate itself faster from these crisis developments and get over this peak in the difficulties. We will do our part to help.

Your second question was about the European Parliament's resolution regarding our election. I have no comment because this was Russia's election and the European Parliament has nothing to do with it. It can comment on anything it wants, but I will not comment on its call because it means nothing to me. As I far as I know from looking at the news in the Internet, the parties in our parliament – the party that holds the majority and the opposition parties – have firmly rejected the European Parliament's position on this particular matter, because the European Parliament should be busying itself with European affairs. Just look at the number of problems here in Europe. As for my position on the election, it remains unchanged.

QUESTION: Mr Medvedev, I have to ask you about domestic politics. You have said in the past that you think a return to direct elections of regional governors possible. Taking questions from the public today during his 'direct line' broadcast,

Prime Minister Putin described how this might work in practice. Does this follow the sense of your own thinking?

DMITRY MEDVEDEV: Yes, I have expressed my views on this issue before. I will not hide that my own position has changed over time on this matter. As far as I can see from the media reports, what Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said today during his live broadcast follows the sense of just the kind of legal setup that I discussed with him a few days ago. This idea represents one possible scheme for a return to direct elections of the regional governors, with the political parties, which represent the country's population, playing an intermediary role. This concerns all of the parties operating in the particular region. This scheme also sees the president play a part as guarantor of the Constitution, in order to serve as a balancing force. I think this could indeed be a good transitional option.

As for the future, let's wait and see. As the current president and as someone not indifferent to my country's future and the future of its political system – I have spent much time and effort during my term in office working to improve this system, no matter what others might think, no matter whether this process has been rapid or slow – I have my own vision of how our political system will look in the future and will continue taking concrete steps to make this vision reality.

QUESTION: Mr President, are the documents on Russia's accession to the WTO set to be signed tomorrow in the format agreed by the experts in Geneva on November 10, or will any new points and conditions be added?

DMITRY MEDVEDEV: I spoke just before with [Minister of Economic Development] Elvira Nabiullina, who will take part in all of these rituals tomorrow, at long last. I hope that nothing new will be sprung upon us at the last minute and we will not end up with a sudden new document after spending all these years and effort coming to the agreement we have. No one has waited so long in the queue to enter the WTO. Countries with bigger economies than ours and very small countries have all accomplished this journey in much quicker time. We fought for this result, as you know. The WTO has its pluses and minuses, but in the long term it will help our economy's development and facilitate greater cooperation with other economies, including the European Union economy. Overall then, this is a positive step and represents a victory. To be honest, I am very pleased that we achieved this victory during my time in office as president. I take this opportunity to thank once again everyone who helped us at the final stage of our accession, in particular, our friends from the European Union, President of the United States of America Barack Obama, the Swiss Confederation's leadership, and everyone else.

I also want to thank Russia's negotiation team and the Government officials who worked on this day and night. I hope that everything will go smoothly tomorrow.