

Offizielles Statement des Russischen Präsidenten Dmitri Medwedew anlässlich eines Wirtschaftsgesprächs mit Mitgliedern des Ost- Ausschusses am 8. November 2011 in Berlin

Meeting with German business community leaders

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In Berlin Dmitry Medvedev met with German business community leaders, including executives of Siemens, Deutsche Bank, E.ON, Ruhrgas, Metro, Knauf and others.

PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA DMITRY MEDVEDEV: Good afternoon,

It was a comfortable trip here because today is special in every way, starting from the event that you just spoke of and ending with the excellent weather.

I want to start by saying what a pleasure it is to have this chance to meet again with German business community members. I know from our past meetings that you always take a very reasonable and pragmatic and non-ideological approach to our various cooperation ties. Those who have been working on our market have an adequate understanding of Russia today and know its strong points and opportunities, and its problems too, which, speaking frankly, we have never hidden and on which we are working together with you to resolve.

But Russia is changing. The strategic choice that we made, the choice of modernisation as an instrument for changing our country, is a subject I think of great importance for our discussions.

Our goal is simple – to build a competitive modern economy based not only on raw materials potential, for all its importance, and we are happy with the big event that took place today, but we want our economy to be based on knowledge too, on advanced technology, because I think this is the kind of economy that Russia needs in order to play its part in the modern world.

Mr Cordes [Chairman of the German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations and moderator of the meeting] said a few kind words just before about my role with regard to Russia's accession to the WTO. There are two things here: first, we have not actually joined the organisation yet, and I can hardly quite believe that the process is actually over, because we managed to take longer about it than did some of our big partners, China for example.

Second, a huge number of people worked hard to make this happen. This includes my colleagues in the Government, those working now, and those who worked earlier. We have always felt the business community's energetic support, and not only among Russian businesspeople, but also among our friends and colleagues from other countries, including our German partners, who realised that the World Trade Organisation was not some carrot dangled before Russia to encourage us to take this or that measure, but was an inevitable step for our country and for the WTO itself, because the world's sixth biggest economy in terms of purchasing power parity, a country as big as ours, simply cannot be outside the WTO.

We are making active efforts to give private capital a comfortable environment for operating in our country, passing new laws, including laws that fight corruption, simplify administrative procedures, and reduce red-tape.

You all have your own ideas on what is happening, and I would be grateful if you could share your views and thoughts.

People often say that capital is as easily frightened as a timid doe, but German capital is cut of bolder cloth, as we saw clearly during the very difficult crisis period, when not a single German project was halted, despite the difficult economic situation. The big projects continue to advance. Siemens has invested more than 1 billion euros in our economy, and Volkswagen produced the 300,000th car at its plant in Kaluga. Many other colleagues have done a great deal of work too, though I will not list each by name right now. Your companies have also shown much interest in taking part in the Skolkovo Innovation Centre, and I thank you for this too, because this is also a very important undertaking for our country.

Of course we are very happy with the way our traditional cooperation ties, including in the energy sector, are developing. Today's event really does have historic significance. Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, Dutch Prime Minister [Mark] Rutte, French Prime Minister [Francois] Fillon and I launched the first section of the Nord Stream gas pipeline today. This is a real European project with great potential ahead, a project in which five companies from four different countries are taking part. It is a vivid example of how logic and perseverance can break down stereotypes.

I said at the opening and say again now that when we began work on this project we realised just how complex an undertaking it was technically, after all, laying over 1,200 kilometres of pipeline along the sea bed is no easy task. And then there were all of the environmental issues that had to be resolved, and all of the doubts and resistance from various quarters to overcome.

But I think it is very valuable indeed that we have completed the project and given Europe a new independent supply route from Russia. This is a very pragmatic approach free of any ideology, politics, or any attempts to secure Russia's advantage at the expense of anyone else. We understand that gas is a good like any other. You have a seller and you have a buyer. I hope that there will be other projects of this sort in the future, projects that will be useful for our friends in Europe.

Our economic ties are developing rapidly. I want to name a few figures. From January to August this year our trade increased by almost 50 percent compared to the same period last year. If these trends continue we will reach a record bilateral

trade figure, breaking the \$70-billion mark for the first time. The European Union remains our major trading partner and on average our trade turnover comes to around \$250 billion.

We are carrying out large-scale high-technology projects as part of the modernisation partnership that I spoke about, and we consider Germany's active help in this area very important indeed. We place great value on Germany's famed engineering thinking, but also on Germany's corporate standards, which we are borrowing and introducing in our own business life. I say this not for the sake of mere praise. I say this because it was only quite recently that Russia became a market economy, and social and production infrastructure issues concerning labour relations and contractual relations and business agreements are very important for us, all the more so as we only started developing our corporate law and modern commercial practice not so long ago. I remind you that our countries use very similar private law systems.

We have important events up ahead in our humanitarian ties too. In 2012-2013, our countries will hold reciprocal cultural years. This has already been decided with Federal President [Christian] Wulff. I hope that these events will give us the chance to discuss not just humanitarian issues but also investment, economic innovation, scientific and technological development, and youth exchanges. I hope that the business community will play an active part in these events.

One other subject that I mention often: I was looking on the internet just before and noticed that it said that the German authorities oppose the idea of giving Russia visa-free travel. I think these comments are inappropriate because nobody has ever actually made such a statement. The business community is usually one of the most active advocates of visa-free travel because businesspeople are among those who suffer from excessive rules and formalities regarding visas, employment issues, and other matters in this area. We hope to settle all of these subjects rapidly and as a common package. I expect the German business community will share our approach and will work together with us on making these ideas reality.

I hope today's meeting will be interesting.

Thank you very much.