

Beat: Politics

VLADIMIR PUTIN & VIKTOR ORBAN FOLLOWING RUSSIAN-HUNGARIAN TALKS

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Hereafter follows the conference :

PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA VLADIMIR PUTIN : Ladies and gentlemen, let me brief you on the results of our work.

First of all, the talks with Mr Orban were constructive and business-like in spirit. We discussed the key aspects of our bilateral cooperation, reviewed the results of our work together over the year since our last meeting in Budapest, and outlined future cooperation plans.

Russia sees Hungary as an important and reliable partner in Europe. We sincerely value the Hungarian government's consistent efforts to develop our friendly and multifaceted bilateral relations.

Our countries have regular political contacts, including with our parliaments' participation. We have contacts through our foreign ministries and other agencies, and we also have the Intergovernmental Economic Commission. Our trade ties are traditionally close and mutually advantageous. Russia is one of Hungary's three biggest export markets outside the European Union.

As is known, our bilateral trade dropped considerably last year "" by 40 %. This noticeable decrease is due above all to the current circumstances, of course: exchange rate instability, volatile energy prices, and, it must be noted, the sanctions the EU has imposed against Russia. I am sure that with time, we will set our trade back on a steady growth track, which is in our common interest.

Let me note too that Russia and Hungary have built up considerable experience in investment cooperation. Russian companies' capital investment in the Hungarian economy exceeds \$1.5 billion, and Hungarian investment in Russia's economy comes to more than \$2 billion.

We are developing our cooperation in industrial production and transport machinery, construction, and mining. We have carried out large-scale projects in high-tech sectors, including the pharmaceuticals sector. The Hungarian company Gedeon Richter has begun producing medicines in Russia, in the Moscow Region.

Energy is another priority for our bilateral cooperation. Russia supplies more than two thirds of Hungary's hydrocarbon energy needs: 75 % of oil needs and 65 percent of demand for natural gas. Last December, Gazprom extended a gas supply contract with our Hungarian partners to the end of 2019.

A substantial amount of Hungary's electricity, up to 40 % , is produced with Russian specialists' help at the Paks Nuclear Power Plant. Rosatom is preparing for implementation a comprehensive programme for modernising the power plant and building two new power units using the latest Russian technology. Bringing these two new units on line will double electricity production and bolster substantially Hungary's energy independence.

It will also create thousands of new jobs and give a boost to the country's overall economic development.

Our countries want to intensify bilateral scientific, education and humanitarian contacts. The Russian-Hungarian Commission for Science and Technology Cooperation will resume work. We plan to expand student exchanges. During the last academic year, 120

scholarships were given to Hungarian students for free study in Russian universities.

Russia continues to assist Hungary in training qualified teachers specialised in Russian, and thus helps to maintain the traditionally high level of interest in studying the Russian language.

Last year, our countries held successful reciprocal culture days, during which several dozen exhibitions, concerts and other events took place. We will continue doing all we can to encourage our peoples' mutual interest in studying each other's history, culture and traditions.

Interregional contacts and ties play a big part in developing our bilateral relations. Delegations from big Russian regions will make a series of visits to Hungary in the near future. Mr Orban and I took the initiative of setting up a special intergovernmental commission that will soon start work and will provide practical support to regions in carrying out their projects and initiatives.

During today's talks, we exchanged views on current issues on the international agenda, including the situation in the Middle East and North Africa and the related immigrant crisis.

We think that to solve the refugee problem, we first need to achieve political settlement of the conflicts in Syria, Libya and other countries where war and chaos have forced people to flee their homes. We need to work together to fight terrorism and help the entire Middle East region return to normal life.

We discussed the prospects for renewing full-fledged dialogue between Russia and the European Union. We value the efforts the Hungarian government and Mr Orban have made in this direction.

In conclusion, I want to thank once more the Hungarian Prime Minister and all of our Hungarian colleagues and friends for these substantial and useful talks. I am sure that will help to boost our bilateral cooperation in all areas.

Thank you for your attention.

PRIME MINISTER OF HUNGARY VIKTOR ORBAN:

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

We held lengthy and very valuable talks. Russia and Hungary have already established the political tradition of holding a summit meeting every year to discuss the most topical issues for our countries. This is what we did today.

As you heard, President Putin just listed the matters we discussed. My assessment is that our contacts are developing well, and this is really quite amazing. I say this because we see clearly that the international situation is far from favourable. In this situation, we must improve our contacts. It is our responsibility to achieve results in this work.

I see my responsibility very clearly. President Putin said just now that Russia's energy exports are closely interlinked with the international situation. This is a question of vital importance for Hungary. There can be no separating these two issues one from the other.

Hungarian industry would simply not survive without the good economic ties we have with Russia. We are both aware of our responsibility here and we want to maintain these good relations in the interests of Hungary's people.

We said today, and I am convinced that Russia is not Hungary's enemy, but is Hungary's partner. Russia is not a threat to our country, but offers us a good partnership relation.

We agreed too that Hungary and Russia both want to strengthen Europe's security and normalise relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation. We can say too that there can be no bypassing Russia on international issues.

Thank you too for all of the thoughts you shared on resolving the problems in the Middle East. We value this greatly. The refugee problem is affecting Hungary too. We value greatly the efforts made to resolve this problem, including Russia's efforts to settle this issue and stem the flow of migrants. We wish you great success in your international initiatives.

Regarding our bilateral relations, we have achieved results and progress in all areas, despite the drop in trade. It is not we who are to blame for this drop, but the unfavourable international situation. We see clearly that the Hungarian economy has gained some big new opportunities over these last years.

Hungary has maintained and even increased its pharmaceuticals industry's possibilities in Russia. President Putin mentioned our company Gedeon Richter. We are glad that Hungary can make a contribution to developing the pharmaceuticals sector in Russia.

I want to say too that Hungary continues to see the agreement on expanding the Paks Nuclear Power Plant as the deal of the century. We have been working together in this area since the 1960s. All we have done now is to continue this cooperation. The units that are coming to the end of their service life will be replaced, and we are very grateful to Russia for agreeing to continue this agreement that we concluded back in the 1960s.

We hope too to develop a partnership and build up our cooperation in the machine-building sector. I note too that Hungary offers 200 Hungarian government scholarships to Russian students. Thank you for making the effort to send us students.

I believe that if we want to continue developing our bilateral ties, we need to educate our youth. This is the only way to ensure a stable base for continued cooperation. We need students for this, student exchanges, and so these kinds of steps are exceptionally important for the future.

QUESTION : President Putin talked about investment in infrastructure. There was talk earlier of the possibility of Hungarian companies taking part in infrastructure development for the World Cup. Did you discuss this today ?

VLADIMIR PUTIN : The Prime Minister raised this matter. Two Hungarian companies made bids for contracts in this area. One company later withdrew its bid, and the second is taking part in the preparations. I think that not just this but also other Hungarian subcontractors could take part in this work.

We have made the decision not to break off contracts that were concluded earlier, but there is a lot of work on preparing infrastructure facilities, and in this area, we would be happy to welcome any of our partners who are ready to accept the competition and take part in this work on market conditions. As I just said, one Hungarian company is already taking part in the preparation work.

QUESTION : I have a question for the President and the Prime Minister. You said that you spoke about the situation with refugees from the Middle East coming to Europe. We know that Hungary has its view on this issue. Do Russia and Hungary share the same view on the causes of this crisis and possible solutions?

VLADIMIR PUTIN : We expressed our views on the causes of this crisis. I think that our views do largely coincide. But the refugee issue is the EU's internal affair. We do not interfere in such matters.

We know that discussion on this issue is taking place inside the European Union. Our people has sympathy for the position taken by the Hungarian government and Prime Minister, the desire to defend European identity and Hungary's national identity.

Regarding many other aspects related to political settlement in the Middle East, carrying out military operations and so on, the Prime Minister follows the line formulated by the European Union, and we understand this.

VIKTOR ORBAN : The nature of modern politics is such that the minority becomes the majority and opposition becomes the ruling government. So we in the European Union do not lose hope. At present, only a minority of the European Union members share our view, but we think that events, above all events that lead to worsening security situation in Europe, will win over to our side more and more people who understand and are starting to share our point of view.

The Hungarian border is a long way away from here, and Brussels is also far away. I would therefore like to say a few words about the issues Europe is discussing right now.

The first question is whether these uncontrolled crowds of migrants arriving in Europe are a good or a bad thing. Europe's biggest countries think today that it is a good thing overall. Maybe this might surprise you, but they, at any rate, think it is a good thing, will not harm Europe overall, and will bring benefits.

We think this is a bad thing. We let hundreds of thousands of refugees in without any kind of control, and we do not know what they are coming for. This always increases the security and terrorism threat. This is not a good thing.

The second issue Europe is discussing now is whether or not it is a value that Europe is home to nations with their own national identity and with common Christian and democratic roots and values that we want to preserve. Some people think this is a value, and we belong to this group.

But the majority in Europe think that the world has already left this stage behind, think us a voice from the ignorant Middle Ages, and think that the modern world is a place without religious and national identities.

The third issue under discussion is whether we need to abide by signed agreements. We feel that if we signed the Schengen Agreement, everyone should abide by it. In other words, we, the Hungarians, must protect our borders, because our border is an external Schengen border.

Second. Naturally, we can give up these agreements; that is our opposition's opinion. And there is a fourth difference. If a nation lets millions of unknown foreigners uncontrollably enter its territory, does it have the right to demand that these people be distributed among the nations that did not participate in this and do not want to participate? There is a huge discussion on this topic today.

A meeting between European prime ministers will be held tomorrow to address these issues. There, we will need to make a decision on whether anyone can make the decision instead of the Hungarians as to whom we want to let into our nation. In other words, these are the issues that go beyond the framework of politics and are above politics.

Hungary holds a stable point of view that all agreements must be adhered to; nobody can be forced to live with people they do not want to live with. And Christian national values will be just as important in the future as they were in the past. And uncontrolled migration will cause more harm than good. These are our cards: we are putting them on the table in front of everyone and entering this discussion.

VLADIMIR PUTIN : If you allow, I will talk about our position and add a couple words.

The reason for today's problem with migrants lies in the destabilisation of states and whole regions of the world "" North Africa, Afghanistan and other nations. And in order to resolve the migration problem, we need to eliminate the root cause of this "" we need to restore statehood, the economy and the social sphere in these states, so that people can live in their own nation or return home. We need to create all the necessary conditions for this. But to do this, we need, first and foremost, to eliminate terrorists. This is our number one challenge.

VIKTOR ORBAN : I would like to make one remark. Because Russia's economic potential is incomparable with that of Hungary. But I want to say that Hungary has taken on the obligation to build a hospital in Syria using its own funds. And this way, we can help stabilise the situation in that country.

QUESTION : Hello. During the talks, you spoke of the European Union's economic sanctions against Russia. Do you expect the situation to improve in the near future ? If so, what form will this improvement take ?

VLADIMIR PUTIN : This is probably more a question to the Prime Minister and other European leaders. As you know, we have only implemented retaliatory measures responding to the sanctions that were unilaterally imposed by the EU against Russia, and their removal depends on the EU, not us. We heard today and in the past that all this depends, first and foremost, on the fulfilment of the Minsk Agreements between the conflicting sides in Ukraine, that were supported by Russia, France and Germany in the Normandy Format, but it seems to me that any objective observer will see today that the ball is in the court of the Ukrainian authorities. It is they who must, first and foremost, fulfil the provisions of the Minsk Agreements.

As you recall, the key here is political settlement, creating the political conditions, the most important of which is amending the Ukrainian Constitution, which is clearly set in the Minsk Agreements: it states in black and white that the Ukrainian side must make amendments to its Constitution by the end of 2015. As we can see, this has not been done.

There are other considerations related to preparing and holding local elections, with implementation of the already adopted law on

special status for corresponding regions in Ukraine. Unfortunately, all of this remains unresolved. But this does not depend on Russia alone, and depends less on Russia right now than our partners in Kiev. We will hope that the turbulent political processes there will be overcome and the political forces in Ukraine that truly favour settling this problem will be able to find the strength, to find allies to bring this process to an end.

Today, it is pointless to associate the elimination of sanctions against EU nations with the final decision to bring the Minsk process to a logical conclusion, because, again, this ball is not in Russia's court. We regard this process calmly. We are confident that the relations between Russia and the European Union will sooner or later normalise.

VIKTOR ORBAN : Hungary is a loyal member of the European Union. I want to express my opinion on this issue very carefully. According to our understanding of the world, today, the global economy is not only seeing an economic battle between nations, but there is also the issue of who can cooperate with whom.

And those who can establish more regional associations will move forward. So there are more and more suggestions, including from the United States, on creating free trade zones.

Thus, I feel that if Russia and the European Union cannot establish regional economic cooperation, then we will all lose in this global economic competition. Everyone wants Europe and Russia to find an opportunity to cooperate as soon as possible, so that we are successful in the regional cooperation competition.

If we look at this issue from the point of view of the European Union, I must say that the EU's economic growth is exceedingly slow, and this region cannot allow itself the luxury of not cooperating with everyone who could be a driving force for the development of its economy. In other words, common sense shows that we must cooperate. I think these are entirely clear political concepts.

Does everyone understand this ? Up until now, we automatically extended the sanctions. I think that period is behind us; more and more people in Europe understand what I am talking about. I think that this year, in the middle of the year, there will be no opportunity for the European Union to automatically extend the sanctions, because there are more and more nations that hold the same opinion that I have expressed.

I have just shared the Hungarian position, but others are also asking what should be done with these sanctions. In other words, everyone is starting to understand that we must cooperate and I feel that there is a chance that we will cooperate.

QUESTION : If I may, I also have a question for both leaders. During Vladimir Putin's visit to Hungary last year, Viktor Orban stated that in spite of the sanctions and countersanctions, it is very important to develop economic cooperation between Russia and Hungary. What, aside from words, has already been done specifically ?

Are there any examples, especially taking into account the EU's pressure on the implementation of the Paks project or Vnesheconombank's legal proceedings with regard to the bankruptcy of Malev Airlines?

VLADIMIR PUTIN : If you allow, I will begin.

Mr Prime Minister said that he adheres to the EU's general policy on several key issues, including in relation to Russia. This is natural. I want to once again state our position: we treat this with understanding. At the same time, we are developing bilateral ties and in spite of the 40% drop that was caused primarily by the drop in oil and petrochemical prices "" this is an obvious fact, by the way, the physical volume of oil, petrochemicals and gas supplies increased.

In addition, we began developing our relations in other areas as well. Today we discussed possible new steps not only in the metallurgic industry but also in engineering and transport machinery. We agreed to continue work in several other areas, and not just in pharmaceuticals, as was said here already, but in transport as well. Overall, our intergovernmental commission is constantly keeping a finger on the pulse of our mutual capabilities. And I would like to thank Hungary's Foreign Minister and our Healthcare Minister, who head this intergovernmental commission from both sides.

As you noted, in order to develop economic relations in a whole range of areas, as Mr Prime Minister said today, we need to enhance trust toward each other. And I believe this trust is growing. Developing our humanitarian ties in education, culture and other areas, as well as our interregional ties, contributes to this. In other words, the movement toward developing bilateral ties is entirely obvious. We

see our Hungarian partners' interest in this cooperation and are grateful to them for this approach.

VIKTOR ORBAN : I can respond to your question with 14 points. Among last year's plans, we held reciprocal Days of Culture with great success. We talked about how we will re-examine the agreement on gas supplies; it happened. We talked about broadening cooperation in pharmaceuticals sector; it happened. We agreed on the participation of Hungarian construction companies in the construction of stadiums; steps were taken. We talked about agro-industrial cooperation. To do this, we had to conduct an audit of Hungarian enterprises; this was done. Our old debate concerned the financial settlement with regard to Malev Airlines; we agreed on the framework.

We talked about opening a consulate general in Kazan, and we opened it. We agreed that we would accept 200 students, and we did. We spoke about cooperating in production of transport vehicles and joint entry to a third market, and we came to an agreement. We talked about increasing exports, and we have some results there as well. We talked about regional cooperation, and we already have agreements that are ready to be signed. We agreed to support the Paks projects, and are continuing that cooperation in spite of all the problems. And we also talked about creating conditions for joint gas storage on Hungary's territory; this is also about to happen.

Vladimir Putin: As you know, the overall volume of financing for the Paks Nuclear Power Plant is 12 billion euro, with 80% of the amount to be provided through a Russian loan. I confirmed to Mr Prime Minister today that the Russian side is fully prepared to meet all the commitments it has undertaken.

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