

NATO War Games and Russia-Japan Bilateral Relations

Interview with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin

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In an interview with the Japanese media, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin commented on NATO's war games in Georgia, situation in troubled Afghanistan, North Korean nuclear ambitions and other international thorny issues.

Interview of Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister of Russia, with the Japanese information agency Kiodo Cusin, TV and Radio Corporation NHK and the Nihon Keizai newspaper (Nikkei).

Question: Mr. Putin, thank you very much for sparing time for this interview. Your first visit to Japan as the Head of the Russian government is coming up. What is going to be on the agenda of your meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister and what results do you expect to see?

Putin: This visit has been planned for a while. I am grateful to the Japanese government for the invitation. I am always glad to visit Japan, first of all, because relations between our countries have been successfully developing in recent years. For example, trade has increased from \$7 to \$30 billion to, which is more than 4 fold in 5 five years, and it is a very good sign. We see that Japanese investments in the Russian economy are growing and our relations are diversifying. They are deepening and the trust is growing. And, undoubtedly, this trip will benefit our bilateral relations, will give a new life to these relations, will open up new opportunities. We plan to sign a number of intergovernmental agreements. I think that businessmen will also be able to conclude final contracts. I really hope that all these plans will be realized, and also that I will be able to meet with the people who have become my friends in recent years.

Q: Tell us please, will the Russian-Japanese intergovernmental treaty on the peaceful use of nuclear energy be signed during your visit to Tokyo? If so, what impetus will this agreement give to the further development of Japanese-Russian economic co-operation?

P: As you know, Russia has the objective of diversifying its economy and making it more innovative. Japan considers itself the world technology leader of the 21st century. I have to agree with that. We are all happy about the success of our Japanese friends and colleagues. We see how Japan is successfully developing technology. And of course, I think it is very important to combine Russia's and Japan's resources in this area. In this connection, we are looking to further develop our contacts in traditional spheres, such as energy, for example. We are talking, for instance, about hydrocarbon energy, as you know, we are creating successful projects in this area in the Far East, Sakhalin, building a gas liquefaction plant, for example, to some extent this is also a high technology sphere. As far as nuclear energy is

concerned, this might be another promising opportunity. Already today Russian nuclear fuel supplies 15% of the Japanese market. And contracts are being signed to increase this number to 25% in the upcoming years. I see it as a very good thing that we can and will definitely reach this mark. We also know about the research in this area, know that Japan is preparing for some large-scale international projects, where Russia will participate as well. We are talking about possible mutual research in the area of nuclear energy but, naturally, all these works have always been done strictly in accordance with IAEA requirements, and it will stay this way in the future.

Q: Tell us please, will the corresponding treaty on the peaceful use of nuclear energy be signed?

P: Our experts are finishing up the work. I think that this intergovernmental treaty will be signed.

Q: The Japanese government thinks that in order to fully develop their bilateral relations, Russia and Japan have to settle the territorial issues and sign a peace treaty. The Russian side thinks that relations between Russia and Japan are not limited by territorial problem. In this situation, how do you plan to continue to develop Russian-Japanese relations, considering the fact that the leaders of the two countries met in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in February and decided to apply new innovative approaches to find a solution to this problem and come up with specific suggestions for that? Is Russia ready to propose these specific things?

P: During my visit I plan to pay special attention to trade and economic ties. We know about the position of our Japanese colleagues, we know about the territorial problems and problems with the peace treaty. Russia has always said that it was ready for these talks. And considering the fact that there was the meeting between President Medvedev and the Japanese Prime Minister that you just mentioned, that there is a direct contact, a dialogue on this issue, we can expect it to develop in the positive manner that we've adopted in the last 2-3 years. Our stand on this is that if we want to solve problems, even the most difficult ones, then we need to create conditions for this and not bring the situation to a dead end by constant complaints and confrontation. On the contrary, as I already said, we need to create conditions, need to develop relations in all directions, in order to solve problems of such difficulty. We need to be patient, pay attention to each other, and respect each other's interests. Russia is ready for this kind of dialogue with Japan.

Q: I would like to ask one question on the territorial problem. Not too long ago there was an idea in the Japanese government to split the territory of the islands in half and solve the problem this way. However, the Japanese government did not express any exact position on the issue and still sees the solution of the problem as the solution on all 4 islands. What is going to be your reaction in this respect? Are you ready for any compromises in order to solve this problem?

P: It is the art of politics – to find acceptable compromises. As far as the 50-50 idea that you just mentioned, you yourself said that the Japanese government does not have a clear stand on it yet. How can you ask me to comment on the position that has not been clearly defined yet? Let's stay within the dialogue, let's give our experts, our foreign ministries, a chance to work on this. I repeat again – we think that solving issues on this level and this degree of difficulty requires attention and respect for each other's interests.

Q: One more question – I would like to clarify one thing. So far the President has been playing the most important role in this high level dialogue. You are now the Prime Minister – what role can you personally continue to play in the solution of this territorial issue?

P: I have already said that in order to solve such problems effectively, we need to create conditions – conditions of mutual trust, co-operation, and developing relations in all intergovernmental areas. This is the role that I would like to play, the role of a person who heads up the structure – the Russian government, which has an important objective – to develop intergovernmental ties in the areas of the economy, the social sphere, culture and humanitarian ties. This atmosphere of cooperation will increase trust and create conditions for solving problems of any level of difficulty, including the one you mentioned. But foreign policy issues, issues of dealing with foreign states are, of course, part of the Russian President's jurisdiction.

Q: Now I would like to ask you about economic cooperation. Russia is actively working on the Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean pipeline construction, as well as delivering gas from Sakhalin to Japan. What other projects are expected in the near future and how can Japan help in the development of Siberia and the Far East?

P: Under agreements with Japanese partners, our Ministry of Regional Development has prepared some regional projects in which Japanese companies could take part, in our view. Just today the Ministry of Regional Development has submitted the list of possible projects to our foreign ministry. And through the foreign ministry, this list will get to our Japanese friends soon. A lot of projects, and not just in the Far East or Eastern Siberia, but within the entire Russian Federation. Many Japanese companies have been working in Russia for a long time. You know that Toyota has its plant in Russia, very soon (the beginning of June) another large Japanese company is opening a plant. And, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that this is all happening in the midst of the world financial crisis. So our cooperation in this area is in high demand. No one can doubt that. But there are many other areas as well. I have just talked about energy, nuclear energy. There is also timber processing, engineering and space – we participate in the International Space Station program, and there is telecommunications – two fiber-optic cables between Russia and Japan have been put into operation. There is wood processing, as I already said, the chemical industry, the metallurgical industry. Basically, in every Russian region our Japanese partners and friends have opportunities to get involved. Assembly lines for example. We are ready to help organize auto assembly in the Far East. You mentioned large projects, Sakhalin, for example, the oil pipeline to the Pacific coast. These projects are under development, but we will complete them. Despite the economic and financial crisis, so far, we are meeting the deadline, these projects are financed from the federal budget and are not up for delay. In this connection, we can say that our Japanese partners can benefit from the results of this work. As far as the Sakhalin project is concerned, 60% of its energy resources go for the Japanese market, by the way. And when the oil pipe is brought to the Pacific Ocean, Japan will have more opportunities to use this resource. But we expect the Japanese companies to expand their investment activities in all the areas that I just mentioned.

Q: Mr. Putin, you already said that Russia is actively involved in the economic development of the Far East. And why is this cooperation with the Asia Pacific countries, including Japan, so important to Russia today?

P: A significant part of Russian territory is in Asia, but we know, and Japan knows as well, that it is not heavily populated but the resources there are huge. And if we are talking about

the speed at which the Asia Pacific region is developing then, of course, Russia should use its advantages, its advantages in Asia, its Asian roots, so to speak, in order to integrate into this economic space. At the first stage we, of course, can naturally complement each other, giving the Asian market what it lacks. But at the same time, we expect that our relations will gradually diversify, as I have already said, first of all through high technology. And here, of course, Japan is one of our main partners.

Q: As you already said, lately the relations between Russia and Japan have been actively developing in the area of energy, but Japan is keeping track of Russia's other energy relations, with Ukraine, in particular. What is your response to the concern that Russia could continue to use energy flow issues as a lever in its relations with other countries?

P: Russia does not use its energy flows in relations with other countries. Russia sells its resources, and we want to sell our resources on a market basis, at world market prices. There are certain international rules, the international formula of calculating the price of the product itself as well as the transit price. For a long time now, 15 years – Russia has been making concessions to the former Soviet republics, selling them energy at prices lower than everywhere else in the world. During this time we subsidized the economies of these countries with tens of billions of dollars. We think that this period is over. We need to switch to market relations. And after the sad events, well-known to you, of the end of the last year and beginning of this year – we have finally been able to reach agreements with Ukraine and stipulate these agreements in the contract obligations of both sides – we are switching to market relations in price and transit. And this is the main stability factor in our relations in this area. Our Ukrainian partners agreed with us and signed the contracts. Deliveries have not failed so far and our Ukrainian partners have made all their payments. We have an agreement, stipulated by the contract. If payments fail, our companies reserve the right to demand a 100% pre-pay. And if there is no pre-pay, we have the right to decrease deliveries. We are really hoping that this will not happen. We understand the difficulties that economies of consumer countries experience. But all countries make payments, we expect all our partners, with no exception, in Western Europe and Eastern Europe to do that. We expect it from our nearest neighbors as well. Also, the thing is – the price formula that I mentioned is closely connected with the world oil price. Oil prices go down, gas prices go down as well. And this is a fair approach. Moreover we are ready, along with our partners, to explore opportunities for assistance in finding financial resources for these payments, but will not pay for anyone any longer.

Q: Will Japan be able to receive stable deliveries of energy resources from Russia? Can you confirm that?

P: I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, even in the midst of very tense relations in the world, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union never stopped deliveries of energy resources to its consumers, wherever they might have been. All the problems with our nearby neighbors have only been connected with the fact that they refused to pay the market price for product and made prices lower than the market, the main term for transiting energy resources to our major consumers in Western Europe. As far as I understand, Japan has never given such terms to anyone. Japan always pays the fair market price. Japan is a solid partner and Russia will be just as solid a partner for Japan.

Q: I would like to ask another question. For about a year there has been a political configuration in Russia called the “power tandem”. And this year has brought some difficult

events, including the situation in Georgia and the economic crisis. How do you view the results and perspectives of the “political tandem” at the highest levels of Russian power?

P: Such tandems exist everywhere, where there are two posts – the head of the state being different from the leader of the executive power. You are supposed to have a tandem, if you have the head of the state and the head of the government. And if some country does not have this tandem, then you can only feel sorry for them. It is true, in our country the President and the head of the government have a very good relationship. And this is a very important factor in the internal political stability in Russia. I have a very good relationship with President Medvedev. Each one of us does his own work. Each one has his own venue. But, of course, at this level, there are often issues that overlap. But in more than 17 years of working together we have developed a consultation mechanism where we work out a common stand. Everything that we agreed upon in the beginning of our work together is now being realized and working effectively.

Q: Lately, Dmitry Medvedev has been saying things that make us uncomfortable, for example, the clear statement – “I am the country’s leader”. And in his interview to Novaya Gazeta he mentioned that he is not satisfied with some of the government’s actions, the government that you head up. How do you see future cooperation in this light?

P: It will be fine. First of all, the President always has meetings with representatives of all political structures and the mass media. And the fact that Mr. Medvedev, the President of the Russian Federation, decided to meet with the opposition newspaper is absolutely normal. This dialogue shows us that the head of the State is the President of all Russians, and not just some political parties or movements, and that he conducts a dialogue with representatives of all political forces. As far as the government’s actions are concerned, it is absolutely normal to have a critical view of the government. I myself am not always happy with what certain ministries and entities do. And in the midst of the crisis, the government’s activities have to be analyzed thoroughly. That’s the only way we can find the most effective and correct decision. That’s how it has been. I am sure it will continue to be this way in the future.

Q: President Dmitry Medvedev changed the Constitution, by changing the presidential term. There is an idea – if President Medvedev decides to run again in 2010, what will you do? Will you support his candidacy or maybe Mr. Medvedev will ask you again to serve as the Prime Minister? How do you view the perspectives in this area?

P: I don’t understand why you are talking about 2010. The President’s term is up in 2012. You just made a mistake. In 2012 we will have the presidential election. You know that we’re now living in a world financial and economic crisis. Authorities of all countries have urgent tasks that we have to perform effectively; we have to help people get through this difficult period of time, which involves cutting jobs and lowering incomes. We have to come up with solutions that people will trust. Or at least they will believe that we have done everything we could under these conditions. Depending on the effectiveness of our work, both I and Dmitry Medvedev will make decisions about the future, what each one of us should do in the future. If you want to know about his plans, you should ask him personally, but I want to repeat, I have known him for a long time and know that he is a person of dignity, he will base his political future on the interests of the country, on the results of our mutual work. We’ll see.

Q: One more question about the tandem. If you look at the poll results, you will see that the President is more popular than the Prime Minister. In these conditions, do you think it is

right that you became the Prime Minister after the presidency?

P: First of all, I have great respect for the Russian Constitution. I think this document is the basis for our political structure and the life of the state itself, and we have to be really careful with it. Secondly, we have to create traditions of a Constitutional transfer of power and we need to show the country and the whole world that it is not impossible in Russia, as well, and no catastrophe happens; on the contrary, our state is strengthened through it. As far as the dangers of holding one state post or another, they will always be there. Our objective is not to hold on to our post no matter what, with both hands. Our objective is to solve problems that our country experiences. In this opportunity to solve problems, there is the highest reward for any person who devotes his life to public politics.

Q: I would like to ask you about international problems. President Obama proposes a new START treaty. Russia also has its stand on the issue. Will this be connected with the AMD problem, which America still intends to build?

P: As far as we understand, the new US administration has not made any decisions on the future AMD system, at least in Europe. But it is obvious that offensive and defensive aspects of strategic forces are tightly connected. This is the way it has always been, and we have always based our judgment on this notion. That's why the Anti-missile defense treaty was signed at some point. When the United States broke off that treaty unilaterally and "buried" it, the natural threat of disproportion between offensive and defensive strategic systems arose. I don't think you need to be an expert to understand that if one country wants to or has an "umbrella", covering it from all threats, then it comes under the illusion that it can do anything, then its aggression will grow, and the threat of global confrontation will reach a very dangerous level. Russia, of course, will connect the anti-missile defense issues and everything else involved with strategic offensive forces. This is what President Obama and President Medvedev agreed upon at their last meeting in London – they agreed that they would have their foreign ministries analyze the situation in the light of a new day.

Q: Now a question about US-Russia relations. Recently you have been saying that you're engaged in resetting them. However, due to the military exercises held in Georgia and no apparent signs of the USA's stance on anti-missile defence in Europe, I have a question: Do you think the "reset" is basically possible?

P: We are not saying "reset". It's the US Administration who proposed "reset". We do agree about it, of course, and would like to add a positive momentum to the development of Russia-US relations. As for the NATO military exercise in Georgia, it is certainly a conflicting sign. It is clear though about what is actually happening in Georgia. We can all clearly see that. I believe that no matter how far away Japan is, people who are interested in politics do read and see on international channels what's going on in Georgia. And what's going on there? Demonstrators are violently dispersed, opposition activists get wounded by rubber bullets, there is bloodshed on the streets and the number of political prisoners is growing. We see a rebellion in the armed forces. So, it is decided to stage military exercises against this background, which cannot be considered as anything other than support of the current regime. What kind of a regime is backed like this? I believe I have given my assessment. What's the point of supporting it? I am not speaking about bloody events in August last year when the ruling regime in Georgia led the country to a war in the South Caucasus. Even from the point of view of the traditional approaches of our Western partners – the United States of America and Western Europe – in problems of democracy, Georgia is not complying with any standards. So why stage military exercises that give an obvious signal of

supporting the current regime? We believe it's a sign of moving backwards. At the same time we understand that the stopping distance is still rather long. We do hope that the current US leadership will properly deal with the process, and will stop the negative trends in developing our bilateral relations and take the necessary steps to fill them with new contents. There are positive signals, too – we can see them, including those of the disarmament agenda. The previous administration, for instance, would not deal with disarmament issues at all. Today we can see the interest of our American partners in returning to them. So, taking into account that the current Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty expires this year, we are most actively ready to come back to these issues and discuss them with our American partners in order to reach a new agreement. We are receiving positive signals towards Russia's ascension to the World Trade Organization and on other issues as well. We are hoping for the best, but will consider the reality.

Q: Prime Minister, how do you assess the growing American influence in the post-Soviet countries? I mean in Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and others. What's your take on that?

P: It's quite a natural process. I would like to remind you that Russia, in fact, initiated these countries' sovereignty. So, since we did so, and we backed their independence, we can only be glad they are becoming more and more fully fledged participants in international relations. It's their sovereign right to decide with who, in what field and at what level to keep their interstate relations. At the same time, we are all aware that there is a history of our bilateral relations. All those republics have many people who are one way or another linked with Russia. It would be improper to pretend this has nothing to do with us – it would be a mistake even, at least towards those people who live there and, let me say again, have rather close relations with Russia. Therefore we will fully respect the sovereignty of these states, their right to choose, but in our bilateral relations we'll count on always seeking new ways of developing our contacts that would respect mutual interests.

Q: Vladimir Vladimirovich, it seems to me that in the world community and in North-Eastern Asia in particular, the stances and the state interests of Russia and Japan often coincide. However, I have never heard such a word as “strategic partnership between Russia and Japan” as it is often used, say, in Russia-Chinese relations. Could you please say when and under what conditions we could use these words – “strategic partnership in Russia-Japanese relations”?

P: I would like to fully agree with you that the national interests of Japan and Russia do not only coincide on very many issues, but what seems even more important to me, that there will be more and more such coinciding interests in the short, medium and long-term historical perspective. And exactly due to these considerations, we must do all we can in our bilateral relations so we have nothing that is irritating. And as soon as Japan and Russia feel there are not such irritating factors, from that moment we'll proceed to a new terminology. I would love that to happen as soon as possible.

Q: I have one more question on nuclear disarmament. As you surely know, Japan is doing much to entirely give up nuclear weapons and, in particular, insist on the enforcement of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and that China should also take part in nuclear disarmament. What's your assessment of this activity?

P: It's positive. In general, I believe we must strive for comprehensive and full nuclear disarmament. This should be our common goal. And nobody should abuse this and use these terms in international philosophical thought aimed at their selfish agendas. If we are

to proceed to implementing this plan, it should be comprehensive. One or two sides cannot unilaterally disarm themselves and let other countries stockpile more and more nuclear armaments. It's a complex and lengthy process, but as they say in such cases, "Walk and you shall reach." We must start moving.

Q: Now I would like to ask you about North Korea. The People's Democratic Republic of Korea launched a missile and announced it has resumed its nuclear programme. Russia points out the importance of resuming the six-party talks. What initiatives could you put forward aimed at stabilising the situation on the Korean Peninsula and settling the North-Korean nuclear problem?

P: We regretted to learn that the People's Democratic Republic of Korea unilaterally withdrew from the six-party negotiations. We believe it is an acceptable format having proven itself practically. It is still with these six-party talks that we quite recently succeeded in achieving quite good solutions acceptable for the participants of the process. What's next to be done, in my opinion? It is necessary to fix the positive things achieved within the six-party negotiation process and to return to it, without any emotions and anything that might hinder its resumption. At the same time, I think it would be absolutely inappropriate for us to not only raise the emotional grade of perceiving what is going on today, but also use this in order to destabilise the situation in the region or start an arms race. It appears to me it would be the biggest mistake that would lead the situation to a deadlock, in general. So, my proposal is to try and return to the talks within the Group of Six.

Q: My next question concerns the domestic economic situation in Russia. As is known, Russia envisages an economic slowdown. The estimates of the IMF are very pessimistic. The estimates of the Russian Government are slightly more positive. What's your take on the situation?

P: As a whole, the estimates coincide generally. Indeed we are expecting a negative growth, but it will be negative in comparison with the previous year. We believe the circumstance in which Russia faced the world economic crisis with was quite a different type of economy than the one it had, say, during the crisis period of 1998, it being relatively rather positive now. Today the Russian economy is a lot more sound and stable. The economy has fundamentally changed. And if we add the reserves we have, it shows, at least, that we are capable of addressing acute social issues, which we are actually doing. It is not enough though. As you know, we are taking steps aiming at stirring up the economy, updating our institutions, backing the labour market and particular sectors of the economy – banking and the real economy. It took us a long time, unfortunately, but on the other hand it required attentive and thorough study and analysis to address and work out these measures. Not long ago we passed the budget. Now the budget money is going to the economy and we really feel certain improvements. It's obvious we will not be able to fundamentally change the situation by exclusively regional or national means. For our efforts to be efficient we should make them internationally coordinated. We need new incentives to restore demand on international markets. This is what the G20 countries are aiming at. We've had one conference and have another one scheduled for the nearest future. We do hope this will produce an effect we want – same as the measures taken at national levels. Russia is taking such measures.

Q: In your speech in Davos you said the Russian market should be open. After that, however, you introduced several protectionist measures, especially concerning cars. How could you explain this move?

P: If you followed my speech in Davos attentively, I was saying it was necessary to avoid protectionism “as far as possible”, which words you may have missed. The phrase meant it was not possible to avoid measures of protecting the markets. Let’s have a look at your main trade-and-economic partner, the United States of America, for instance. They have even a law passed saying “Buy only American goods”. As a practical matter, in all countries steps aimed at closing markets are taken. It is not the best measure, but often necessary when it is crucial to save this or that sector or branch of the domestic economy. I want to tell you, though, that along with restricting imports of automobile equipment, we are opening our borders for technology and lifting customs barriers for goods that can be used for the technological update of the Russian industry and economy. I would like to draw the attention of our Japanese partners to that – they can use these advantages in full measure that were formulated and are being introduced into the practice of the Government of the Russian Federation.

Q: Concerning the increased customs duties. As is known, there have been protests held in Vladivostok, with slogans even asking for your resignation. Did you think you would face such fierce resistance?

P: Yes, of course. The thing is that in previous years a whole business was created to deliver second-hand cars from Japan. It is not in my plans or the plans of the government to restrict any business. We would love to back this business, too. In this particular case, however, under the conditions of the crisis, we have to choose between the interests of those who sell and buy, on the one hand, and those of who manufacture in the country. We have hundreds of thousands employed in the car industry, or millions, with their families. So, we have to choose between the good and very good, but not very good and quite bad. Do you think the government would prefer a strike by the auto makers or of car traders? At the same time, let me say it again, we would hate it to infringe upon anyone’s interests. But in this particular case, there is no choice. That is, there is a choice, but it should be made in favour of manufacturing in the Russian Federation. Incidentally, after that, I mean, after the reaction in our Far East, we adopted a number of further decisions, also related to the fact that we annulled the railway transportation tariffs for equipment manufactured in the Russian Federation, to the Russian Far East. It enables delivery there with minimal, nearly zero, rates. This also fully applies to those car manufacturers, the companies of whom operate based upon 100-per-cent foreign investments. Here you are – nobody is barring our foreign investors from manufacturing cars that are in demand in certain regions of the Russian Federation, including the Far East. One can pay virtually nothing to have these goods supplied to the Far East, but it is also possible, as I mentioned in the beginning of our talk – and we will encourage this – to organise production right in the Far East. This fully applies to our Japanese partners. Now Toyota is working successfully. Nissan seems to be preparing to open a factory. Any company is welcome and we’re ready to lend our support. We hope to carry out one more project soon – related to manufacturing in the Far East. It will be one of our domestic companies, but let me emphasise that, any partner, including foreign, is welcome to take part.

Q: My next question is again about cars. Some shares of the German company, Opel, may be bought by the GAZ company. What’s your assessment of such deals by big companies?

P: It is not a German company, although it is located in Germany. In fact, it is owned by General Motors, an American company, and has been so for many decades. If I am not mistaken, the acquisition took place back before World War II. The relations between General Motors and Opel have been there and developing since 1926, I think. Under the

current conditions, it is a normal thing – the restructuring of the industry. If you decided to look at the German market, we have reports about the recent merger of Volkswagen and Porsche. There are other similar processes going on in the world. And the fact that, say, an Italian company is showing interest in purchasing Opel is quite normal and obvious. Another competitor is an Austrian-Canadian company, Magna, that turned to Russian financial institutions and our company, GAZ, to make a proposal to Opel. It's about purely commercial issues. It is necessary to calculate everything – the economy of the enterprise and the social load, and only after that to make decisions. The government is carefully monitoring what's going on, without direct interference.

Q: Last year you released a DVD about judo, a very popular martial art in Japan where, they say, and you mention that on the disc, you have to respect your enemy. Is there, according to you experience, such an enemy whom you ever could hardly respect – perhaps in diplomacy or another sphere? Anything like that?

P: If you stop respecting your enemy you are most likely going to lose, because it would mean you don't assess his capacity and strength with enough attention. It's my conviction that you should always have respect for all partners, even those whom you say can be called enemies. You should bear this in mind that someone is better than you in some respect, and that it is only in this case we are surely to be a success.

Q: Concerning the “swine flu”, do you think the situation with it can have an impact on the Russian economy? And what measures is the government taking to prevent infectious cases of this flu in Russia?

P: We have no infection cases in Russia, nor virus carriers so far, thank God. But we were quick to react to what was happening in Mexico, the United States and some countries in Europe and Asia. Our veterinary and public health services are taking preventive measures. We will surely be prepared for the autumn-and-winter period, because the fact that the wave of the disease in Mexico and other countries has begun to subside does not mean anything. We must not admit any panic, but we have to be prepared. To be prepared means to have enough supplies of vaccine required for anti-flu medications and to carry out preventive and administrative measures. This is what the work of the respective agencies will be aimed at.

Q: I would like to ask you one more question, about the economy. The eight years you worked as president have brought about prosperity for the Russian economy. Now that you are prime minister, this coincided with Russia's economy having gone down for the first time in 11 years. Can this affect the social component? Did you have to worry about this?

P: You know, I have already had an opportunity to answer this question during our conversation. It is certainly not the best thing to head the government during a crisis. It is the most responsible and most necessary job today, another test for me personally, for the government and the country. I have already mentioned how Russia faced the world crisis – it was not us who caused it. It is a fact, however, and it can't be ignored. We have to live with it. Our actions will be assessed by our citizens – I believe we have people who think – not only by its real state, but also by the effectiveness of our actions. Our task is to do everything we can to make our efforts of the utmost efficiency to a degree the circumstances and conditions allow. This is what I will proceed from. And if our people see we are doing all we can, I am sure the reaction will be in accordance with it. You know, however, that there are different forecasts about the world economy. Some experts say

coming out of the crisis will take place not earlier than in mid 2010. Others say there will be "light at the end of the tunnel" at the end of this year. Nobody says though that there will be no light at all. It will surely be there.

Q: Let me touch upon one more international problem – related to Afghanistan. Russia has cooperated with NATO countries on Afghanistan, and on training Afghanistani law-enforcement personnel in particular. Is it possible to expand such cooperation and send Russian servicemen to that country?

P: Sending Russian servicemen to Afghanistan is ruled out. Russian public opinion is negative even towards the discussion of this question. And I agree with the overwhelming majority of my country. As for assistance in combating extremism, we have been and are participants of this process. We are ready to lend assistance to all who are really helping reconstruct normal life in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the efficiency of the international forces is very low. The drug trafficking from this country has increased dozens of times, the production of heroin has grown likewise. Now we are seeing the rise of the Taliban. Unfortunately, the military operations have been rather ineffective, too. Is it not a tragedy when more than a hundred civilians die at once because of inaccurate operations by the military – bomb and missile attacks? For some reason, incidentally, the world media mention this only as if by the way, as if it does not concern anyone. It's not correct. We hope that if the armed forces are deployed in a country, even with a very noble mission, one has the right to demand that the work is somewhat professional. Russia, as you know, has already agreed with some European countries, the United States and NATO, on transiting civilian goods. It's our real contribution for the cause of normalising the situation in Afghanistan. We are working on the level of special services, by providing necessary information to coalition forces. We are going to continue our bilateral relations with Afghanistan by providing every assistance in restoring both the armed forces and the economy of the country. You have also just mentioned that it's a question of training specialists from Afghanistan and Central Asian republics on combating narcotics. Several dozen specialists from Afghanistan have been trained there. We are determined to continue this work.

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