

К 30-ЛЕТНЕЙ ГОДОВЩИНЕ УСТАНОВЛЕНИЯ ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ МЕЖДУ РОССИЕЙ И РЕСПУБЛИКОЙ КОРЕЯ

Russia and the Republic of Korea: Past, present, and future

Thirty years ago, Moscow and Seoul took a decision of historic significance to open up diplomatic relations, thereby putting an end to one of the most intractable confrontations of the Cold War era. In the late 1940s, when the country split up and two states emerged on the Korean Peninsula, the Soviet Union gave its full backing to DPRK, while the Republic of Korea became a US ally. Thus, Russia and the Republic of Korea found themselves in opposing camps, facing each other off fiercely in almost every sphere. Series of propaganda campaigns designed to create the specter of an enemy followed one after another. So, it was only in the late 80s that the policies of both countries began to see some changes. Conducive to that were the Seoul Olympic Games of 1988, creating just the right atmosphere. What followed were contacts not only among athletes but also between politicians and diplomats. As a result of those, diplomatic relations were opened up, the first summits were held, and in 1992, the 'Treaty on Basic Relations' was signed. Those developments marked off the end of the Cold War period between our countries, paving the way for cooperation.

Over the past thirty years, relations between Russia and the Republic of Korea have witnessed qualitative changes virtually in every sphere. Our countries have managed to establish political dialogue at all levels. Of principle value were the meetings between the political leaders of our countries. Quite consequential were the visits of President Vladimir Putin to Seoul in 2013 and of President Moon Jae-in to Moscow in 2018. The Presidents also met on the sidelines of major international forums on a number of occasions. Consultations on various matters of international agenda are held on a regular basis between the Foreign Offices and other Ministries and Agencies of the two countries. The opening of Embassies and later Consulates General played an equally crucial part in starting and, consequently, widening and strengthening their contacts. An integral part of those were professional contacts not only among members of the executive powers but also the legislative and judicial branches. Russian and Korean parliamentary delegations have come repeatedly on visits at invitation of their counterparts. In the course of the meetings between representatives of the judicial powers as well as of law enforcement agencies,

there were numerous exchanges of expertise regarding various aspects of cooperation. As of now, it can be stated that Russia and the Republic of Korea have a comprehensive legal framework for collaborative action established between them — over 50 agreements on cooperation across multiple fields have been concluded.

Of increasing importance for Russia and the Republic of Korea are their economic ties. Russia is well aware that the global economic and political power balance has been gradually shifting towards the Pacific region. The so-called 'Eastward Turn' proclaimed by Russia has less to do with its emerging confrontation with the United States and the European Union as much as with its desire to become part of integration processes that are underway in one of the most dynamic regions of the globe. Over a short period, trade between our countries has risen dramatically — currently, the Republic of Korea is one of Russia's main economic partners in Asia. Entrepreneurs from the Republic of Korea are active participants at the International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg, the East Economic Forum and other forums that have become important platforms for dialogue among business leaders, politicians, government officials, and public figures. Likewise, there has been some gradual increase of Korean investment in Russia's economy, albeit not to the extent that initially had been expected. Regarding economic relations, Russia attaches much significance to large-scale projects aimed at developing its Far East. This includes the extraction of natural resources and construction of new industrial enterprises. Some of the most promising large-scale projects in the pipeline are certainly those that focus on exports of energy from Russia to the Republic of Korea, cooperation in automotive and shipbuilding industries, peaceful use of nuclear energy, finance, exploration of the outer space, etc. Furthermore, inviting other countries of the region to participate, thereby turning those bilateral projects into multilateral ones, appears in some cases particularly sensible. Most remarkable is the growing military-technical cooperation, which clearly demonstrates the high quality level of relations between our countries.

Humanitarian cooperation has intensified manifold — exchanges in such fields as culture, education and science, tourism and youth travel, etc., something that thirty years ago was virtually nonexistent, are now quite extensive. One can hardly overestimate the positive effect of the decision by the leaders of Russia and the Republic of Korea to introduce visa-free travel. It is an important indicator of the high level of trust attained by our countries. As a result, thousands of Russian and Korean nationals have been able to travel to their partner country, visit tourist attractions, and expand personal and business contacts.

Naturally, a focal point of relations between our countries is the issue of North Korea's missile-nuclear program. A few years ago, the situation around the Korean Peninsula was quite incendiary, as judged by the alarming news reports received at the time about war-like preparations. Since then, the tensions have eased off, while the situation still remains suspended. Currently, Russia and the Republic of Korea are parties to both bilateral and multilateral talks and consultations, attempting to resolve the existing problem. In future, Russia would like to see not just a mere lessening of tensions but the start of a multilateral cooperation across a multitude of areas in North-East Asia.

Having noted the positive trends in the development of relations between our countries, one cannot help recognizing the fact that their upward dynamics have lost momentum. The main reasons behind it, most likely, are the confrontational politics of some western countries towards Russia and some negative trends in global economy. Lately, the

views of Russia and the Republic of Korea on a number of developments have lacked congruency. Those include Crimea's accession to Russia, the crises in Ukraine and Syria, and a few others. Nonetheless, the Republic of Korea did not join the American and European sanctions against Russia, therefore our bilateral relations have been affected by the diverging views on international developments to a much lesser degree. The modern world has been getting more turbulent and increasingly less predictable. In these circumstances, persistence and stability of relations between Russia and the Republic of Korea along the lines of partnership and cooperation could contribute to peace and security in North-East Asia and beyond.

Nowadays, nations around the world are facing an entirely new threat, namely the coronavirus (COVID-19). Having been among the first few countries to encounter this danger, the Republic of Korea has largely been able to stabilize the situation domestically. Its valuable experience is of much interest to other countries, including Russia. No doubt, it would be much easier to tackle this outbreak through joint action of the international community. The coronavirus, along with other challenges, has delivered yet another serious blow to the world economy. The latter's future in large part will depend on how well the international community, particularly the world's major economies, will be able to coordinate their efforts. Russia and the Republic of Korea could certainly contribute to that too. And of course much else could be done to advance our bilateral relations, for instance, by enhancing them across a board spectrum of areas and thus raising them to a qualitatively new level.

Relations between Russia and the Republic of Korea are significantly affected by an extensive network connecting our civil societies, which fosters dialogue among politicians, businessmen, academics, artists, scholars, educators, youths and students. A great contributor to that is the Korea-Russia Dialogue (KRD). Its input was highly commended by President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea. Among the milestones of the Dialogue, one should highlight a series of forums held in Seoul (2010, 2013), in St. Petersburg (2011), and in Moscow (2018). Such working groups as 'Politics and International Relations', 'Economy, Trade, Ecology and Resources', 'Mass Media and Civil Society', 'Education and Science', 'Culture and Art', and 'Youth Dialogue' are also making good progress. To name a few other key events hosted under the Dialogue's banner, one should recall the two politico-economic conferences, several forums that brought together Rectors of some leading universities of Russia and the Republic of Korea, seminars dedicated to the creative work of an outstanding XX century Korean writer Pak Kyongni, resulting in the first ever opening of a monument to the classic of Korean literature abroad, specifically in St. Petersburg, Russian-Korean friendship concerts in St. Petersburg and Russian documentary and fiction film festivals in Seoul, as well as good many forums, conferences, and roundtables with Russian and Korean journalists, youth Dialogues and seminars for experts in youth policy, and cultural events such as the Korean culture festivals 'Hangul'.

Today, the Korea-Russia Dialogue is about:

- working together to produce recommendations on the future cooperation between state bodies such as Governments, Ministries, and Agencies of the two countries;
- interacting in the field of humanities, natural and engineering sciences;
- facilitating learning exchanges among parliamentarians of the two countries;

- strengthening bilateral relations between civil societies and non-governmental organizations;
- improving public image of the two countries through media coverage of Russian-Korean events;
- engaging young adults from both countries in future projects of mutual cooperation;
- getting people acquainted with culture and the way of life in the other country;
- promoting friendly ties and business contacts among common citizens.

St. Petersburg State University has been doing its fair share to help connect people in Russia and Korea. Thus, in 1897, St. Petersburg Imperial University became the first academic institution in Russia to offer a Korean language course. The first instructor to teach it was Kim Byeong-ok, an employee at the Korean Diplomatic Mission. In 1899, the University published the world's first professional Korean textbook. Unfortunately, following the Russian October revolution of 1917, teaching of Korean ceased. It was restored only in 1947 with the opening of the Korean Philology program. In 2017, 120 years after the launch of the first Korean language course, an independent Department of Korean Studies was set up at St. Petersburg University, offering two bachelor programs — one in history and the other in philology. Research has also been carried out at the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies of Korea with support from the Academy of Korean Studies. Postgraduate international relations majors take courses in foreign policy of Korea and international relations in North-East Asia as part of the Pacific Studies program, while sociology majors learn about contemporary society of the two countries and about social changes there as part of a grant project of the Academy of Korean Studies. St. Petersburg State University partners with 18 universities and academic institutions in the Republic of Korea, covering a broad range of areas of concentration from natural sciences to humanities.

Despite all the challenges and problems, we are looking ahead with confidence to the future of relations between our countries.

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For citation: Kropachev N. Russia and the Republic of Korea: Past, present, and future. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. International Relations*, 2020, vol. 13, issue 2, pp. 146–149. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu06.2020.201> (In Russian)