

Dmitry Medvedev's conversation with President of the Czech Republic Milos Zeman

They discussed bilateral trade and economic cooperation, implementation of joint projects in energy and industrial production, and development of cultural ties.



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Excerpts from the transcript:

Dmitry Medvedev: Mr President, I am glad to have this opportunity to meet you again. We met during the ASEM summit in Ulaanbaatar, where we discussed the development of economic and investment relations between Russia and the Czech Republic. I cannot but recall my trip to Prague in 2011. I know that your visit is also being accompanied by a series of cultural events, including the opening of an exhibition on Prague Castle Treasures, and we are happy about this.

Yesterday you had talks with President Putin. I believe you discussed major political, foreign policy and economic matters. Nevertheless, my colleagues and I, as the Prime Minister, will be ready to focus once again on the subjects that our Government is dealing with, notably, the development of economic ties with your country.

Let's face it, these relations have been damaged recently by the current complications between Russia and the EU but there are some positive moments as well. We have started gradually restoring our bilateral trade although the level of our best year of 2013 is still far off. I hope we will facilitate the invigoration of economic ties by joint efforts because this will benefit everyone – our citizens, the business community, those who create jobs plus

those who invest in our economies. To sum up, we are ready for the most productive dialogue on these topics. I know you have other questions as well. Go ahead please, Mr President.

Milos Zeman: Thank you. Mr Prime Minister, unfortunately, I have a “present” for you which is not as pleasant as presents usually are. It is a copy of an article from the website of the Zvezda TV channel. It was written by some lunatic, and I wouldn’t have even looked at it, if it were not published during my visit here. The gist of the article is that, in 1968, so-called democratic socialism was not democratic and not socialism, that the Soviet occupation was not an occupation, and that during World War II we provided Germany with weapons, even though we were occupied by Germany. This was written by someone who is not a historian, and it is complete nonsense.

Mr Prime Minister, at all times and in all my roles – as Prime Minister and as President – I’ve been trying to develop mutually beneficial relations, both economic and beyond. However, now some people, some politicians in Prague are suggesting that I interrupt my visit to Russia and, because of this article, return home. I don’t think this would make sense. When you read this article, you will see that it is worse than what Prime Minister Yatsenyuk told the German television channel ARD, if you remember. “In 1943, the Soviet Union attacked Germany and occupied Ukraine on its way there” – that is a quote from the former Ukrainian prime minister. This is the same kind of nonsense. This is an insult to my homeland. I want you, Mr Prime Minister, to publicly state that this take has nothing in common with the official position of your Government.

Dmitry Medvedev: Mr President, you brought up this article. First, you were absolutely right when you said that this article was authored by an individual. This piece has a note to the effect that the opinion expressed in the article is that of the author and does not reflect the opinion of the TV channel’s editorial staff. I can confirm this. The Russian Federation has a variety of media just like your country, and we have proclaimed and try to do our best to follow the principle of non-interference in the activities of the media, be they private or state-owned. This article does not reflect the official position of our country. As you know, this position was formulated as early as 1993, when our countries drafted and signed the treaty. This position has been repeatedly affirmed by the leaders of countries, including President Putin in 2006, with respect to our assessment of the events of 1968, and by all other officials, including the one you are talking with at this moment.

The publication of this article clearly does not serve to improve the atmosphere during your visit. With regard to the visit, I want to note once again that we know you as a consistent supporter of promoting relations between our countries, and we appreciate you as a political leader precisely for your position, realising that this is not the easiest position, especially in the context of our current difficult relations with the European Union. We are counting on the fact that your example will contribute to strengthening mutual understanding between our countries, states, and peoples, bearing in mind the complicated chapters of our common history, including the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968. So, Mr President, I would ask

you to keep foremost in your mind the official position of the Russian Federation, its President, the Prime Minister and our other colleagues.

Milos Zeman: Excellent. Mr Prime Minister, I am pleased to accept your official and public statement to the effect that you share none of the opinions of the author of this article.

Dmitry Medvedev: Rest assured. We share none of the author's opinions. You have heard our official position.

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