

Russia-Bulgaria business forum on tourism

Dmitry Medvedev and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov took part in the forum.

[Remarks by Dmitry Medvedev](#)

[Remarks by Boyko Borissov](#)

Excerpts from the transcript:

Dmitry Medvedev speaking at the Russia-Bulgaria business forum on tourism

Dmitry Medvedev: Good afternoon, colleagues, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria Boyko Borissov. I am looking at the audience and thinking that if we were to hold, say, a forum on gas, the number of people sitting here would be quite different. Now, there are almost no empty seats to be seen. This means only one thing: there is tourism between Russia and Bulgaria, and its level is quite high. But, before we start discussing tourism, I want to once again thank my colleague for the warm welcome that was extended to the Russian delegation and, since we spent quite some time together discussing a variety of issues, for the high level of organisation that went into the meetings. Tour operators are well aware that the most important thing is to accommodate guests properly and organise their transport and offer them interesting ways to spend their time.

Also, this is not my first visit to Bulgaria. It is a great pleasure every time I come here. Last time was 11 years ago, and I feel the same today. I will skip the clichés about how close our peoples are, what kind of historical events determine the nature of relations between our peoples, and our mutual interest in each other's culture and traditions. Everyone is aware of that, and this is the common ground that underlies the lives of our countries. However, this hospitality is rooted in the history of cultural traditions. If it were not so, then, probably, our tourists would not be coming here in such large numbers. Indeed, the special atmosphere and friendliness that the guests from our country always find here is the trademark of the Bulgarian tourism industry.

I will give you several fast facts. About half a million Russian tourists come to Bulgaria each year. Everyone is aware of that. A significant number of these guests, citizens of our country, own real estate in the coastal areas (reportedly, up to 300,000). Tourists are attracted by the excellent climate, quality options for tourists at reasonable prices, and the hotels and beaches. Safety, too, as it is important in tourism. In short, everything is in place for enjoyable fun-filled holidays, including for families with children.

The Bulgarians, too, come to Russia on holiday. There are not so many of them, but they do come, and the total number of tourists visiting Russia from Bulgaria is on the rise. Over the past five years, it has increased by 1.5 times to just over 50,000.

Russia has things to offer, which we know from major sporting events that have been held, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. There are traditional places that attract tourists. I am talking not only about Moscow, St Petersburg or Sochi, but also a lot of wild nature destinations, where absolutely unforgettable experiences await. We are trying to work in this area in order to open our country to our Bulgarian friends and all those who want to know Russia better. I am not going to provide a full list of the regions. Each of them is special and interesting in its own way.

What matters now is to focus closely on the level of services provided, as in some places it is very high, which was unavailable even a short while ago, whereas in other places it remains inadequate. We try to be guided by best international practices and success stories in this area. It is necessary to upgrade the existing infrastructure for travelers. Developing new routes that are gaining popularity is of paramount importance. Building more hotels is also important. This must be done by all means. By the way, just a week ago, I signed a special Government resolution to assign stars to hotels. It should be done gradually, step by step, but it must be done to guarantee the required level of tourist services. The stars, inasmuch as possible, should be assigned to reflect the actual level of services provided, and not be just some phony numbers. Tourist clusters and various infrastructure facilities, such as cafes, campgrounds, and so on, are receiving state support.

What else is important? We are currently implementing a fairly large project, International Cooperation and Exports. It provides for simplifying visa regulations for tourists from different countries. This matter really needs to be addressed. This is a tall order, indeed. Speaking of tourist exchanges with the European Union, an opportunity was there at some point, but then, for obvious reasons, withered and there is nothing left to talk about now. I think that if we talk about normal tourist exchanges, then, of course, there is no way to go about it without simplifying visa regulations and establishing hassle-free entry and exit rules, including e-visas. We, in Russia, are willing to go along with the most advanced visa solutions.

There is environmental tourism, for instance. You have it, and we have it. Speaking of Russia, our country ranks first in the world in terms of nature reserves and national parks. We boast a vast territory in this sense. Nature has generously endowed us with resources. So, we will do our best to have as many people as possible marvel at this beauty and see it with their own eyes, of course, without causing damage to it.

There is a kind of tourism that is very important for our Bulgarian partners and our country, too, especially given our cultural affinity. I am talking about historical tourism. I think this is also an important area that we need to promote.

Yesterday at dinner with my colleague, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, we

discussed certain issues that are directly related to our meeting today. I am referring to transport links between our cities and seaports. Indeed, it is a critical area, especially when our neighbours, as they say, are not sitting on their hands and are also expanding such links. I mean all of them, including sea and air. But the one with the unconventional approach will certainly be able to get better terms and more tourists. I think we should do this by all means in order to increase the flow of tourists between our countries.

I am aware that representatives of Bulgaria are planning to come to Moscow for the international travel fair, Intourmarket, which will take place soon. I am sure you will have a good time there and you will want to come back to Russia. Special opportunities are opening up in all modern industries (and tourism is most certainly an industry, a type of business), and our goal is to approach them as unconventionally as possible. Anyone who comes up with an exciting tourist product will certainly be a winner.

I hope your time at the forum is interesting.

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Boyko Borissov (*via interpreter*): Colleagues, ministers and forum participants. We maintain good and pragmatic working relations with my colleague, Dmitry Medvedev, despite the sanctions and extremely high tensions in our multipolar world. We are against dividing our nation into Russophiles and Russophobes. Let us deal instead with pragmatic issues of importance for Bulgarians.

Yesterday evening I enjoyed watching my colleague, whose hobby is photography, take pictures of our landmarks. When we talked about the Thracian treasure, he noted that China did not even have a written language at that time. We do have extremely interesting objects in the field of cultural, historical, religious and even pilgrimage tourism. The government invests hundreds of millions of leva in the restoration of churches, monasteries and mosques so that people can visit them.

As I have said, despite an extremely complicated international situation, we have always maintained a normal and even good tone, which allows us to promote our bilateral relations wherever we are not constrained by the guillotine of sanctions. Stationary and on-site visa centres are open in 59 cities for tourists' convenience. Yesterday I discussed the Burgas-Novorossiysk ferry line with the mayor of Burgas and Mr Medvedev, because in addition to Russian tourists there are hundreds of thousands of Russian citizens who own property in Bulgaria. This ferry line will allow them to travel to Bulgaria by car together with their luggage, greatly facilitating the operations of our tourist sector.

Competition in this sphere can be counterproductive in some ways, to put it diplomatically.

I believe what we discussed with the minister of tourism and the association

of municipalities is aimed at withstanding competition from Greece and Turkey that subsidise charter flights. We would like to discuss in detail opportunities to support this industry. It is possible to develop summer, winter, skiing, hunting and golf tourism. Such opportunities exist in these areas. It is no accident that Russian athletes are always training at such centres as Sportpalace and Belmeken, which further promotes the development of this area. We will try to be more flexible because as the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation said, in the face of such competition, a tourist chooses the best place for recreation, service, food and safety.

Our balanced foreign policy largely promotes security. We have excellent relations with Iran and Israel, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt, Serbia and Kosovo, to name a few. We are doing very well with Palestine, with every leader of these countries. We have tried to make sure that our national interests are protected and security is guaranteed. We actively work with Russian intelligence and Bulgarian law enforcement, and begin this work far ahead of the start of the beach and skiing seasons with a view to ensuring proper security. This is far from easy. But this is exactly why we adhere to an exclusively peaceful policy, in order to ensure the utmost protection against illegal activity.

As regards children's tourism, which I discussed with Prime Minister Medvedev, there is the wonderful example of Kamchia – a children's camp. We can expand this area of activity. Children learn there and play sports. We can do this on a much broader scale at other children's camps and health resorts where the Russian Government helps us with relevant subsidies.

Regrettably, the impact of sanctions on agriculture is particularly serious. We are losing hundreds of millions in this area, and I have always insisted that we go back to the negotiating table and put a stop to these ever increasing conflicts. My colleague and I discussed in detail the threats that exist in the region and the rest of the world. Particular focus was on energy and the economy, and I see big opportunities in the several areas we discussed today.

In conclusion I'd like to say that I hope during these two days of good weather in Bulgaria we managed to show you not only our museums but also the St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and the rotunda of St George's. We hope we have created the kind of impression that will allow us to raise the level of tourist services through joint efforts, because every pragmatist knows that quality is very important.

The stable rate of the lev over 20 years and observance of financial discipline is of the utmost importance. In June we will be invited into the euro waiting room. The currency of other countries fluctuates. This creates good prerequisites. We are proud that our currency is stable and linked to the euro rate, which makes us completely predictable for all other areas of business and the economy and as regards other investors that work in Bulgaria.

Let me thank you for your participation in the forum and for this opportunity to discuss interesting matters in a very sincere and open spirit.