

Interview with President Putin

Via interviewer Charlie Rose, 24 June

Interview with the President of Russia and Other Parties at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum

Charlie Rose: Mr President, I would like to begin by saying that it is a pleasure to be here in your home city, the place where you began your political career. This is also a historically important city – Russia was born here as an empire. This is a very important place.

There are some very serious issues that can be resolved only if Russia takes action, if you take part. We are talking about economic policy, foreign policy, Ukraine, the Baltic states, Europe, Syria, Iran, China, and Russia. There are very many questions, there are problems, and there are conflicts. Russia has to play its part in finding solutions to many problems. There is the issue of borders, the issue of Russia and Ukraine. Could you help us understand as you see it: where are we? How did we get there and where do we go from here?

Vladimir Putin: First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to work with us today and moderate this meeting. This forum is called the St Petersburg International Economic Forum. I would like us to focus on economic issues. However, I would agree with you that without resolving a number of acute critical situations it is hard to move along in the economic sphere.

We have discussed the developments in Ukraine on numerous occasions, and I understand that this is unavoidable. However, you know, we either keep talking about Ukraine all the time, or a few years ago we were talking about the crisis, say, in Iraq and some other countries. We keep talking about things that already happened, but we never discuss why they happened. And if you do want to talk about this and it does seem important, I would prefer to begin with precisely that.

Why did we arrive at the crisis in Ukraine? I am convinced that after the so-called bipolar system ceased to exist, after the Soviet Union was gone from the political map of the world, some of our partners in the west, including and primarily the United States, of course, were in a state of euphoria of sorts. Instead of developing good neighbourly relations and partnerships, they began to develop the new geopolitical space that they thought was unoccupied. This, for instance, is what caused the North Atlantic block, NATO, to go east, along with many other developments.

I have been thinking a lot about why this is happening and eventually came to the conclusion that some of our partners seem to have gotten the illusion that the world order that was created after World War II, with such a global centre as the Soviet Union, does not exist anymore, that a vacuum of sorts has developed that needs to be filled quickly. I think such an approach is a mistake. This is how we got Iraq, and we know that even today there are people in the United States who think that mistakes were made in Iraq. Many admit that there were mistakes in Iraq, and nevertheless they repeat it all in Libya. Now they got to Ukraine.

We did not bring about the crisis in Ukraine. There was no need to support, as I have said many times, the anti-state, anti-constitutional takeover that eventually led to a sharp resistance on the territory of Ukraine, to a civil war in fact.

Where do we go from here? I would not like to get too deep into the subject here. Today we primarily need to comply with all the agreements reached in Minsk, the capital of Belarus. I would like to reiterate that we would never have signed this document if there had been anything we were not satisfied with. Now that it happened and we signed it, we will work to achieve its full implementation.

At the same time, I would like to draw your attention and the attention of all our partners to the fact that we cannot do it unilaterally. We keep hearing the same thing, repeated like a mantra – that Russia should influence the southeast of Ukraine. We are. However, it is impossible to resolve the problem through our influence on the southeast alone. There has to be influence on the current official authorities in Kiev, which is something we cannot do. This is a road our western partners have to take – those in Europe and America. Let us work together. Charlie Rose: What do you want from the Kiev Government, what should they do? Vladimir Putin: We do not want anything. The people of Ukraine should want the Ukrainian government to do something, or not to do.

We believe that to resolve the situation we need to implement the Minsk agreements, as I said. The elements of a political settlement are key here. There are several. The first one is constitutional reform, and the Minsk agreements say clearly: to provide autonomy or, as they say decentralisation of power, let it be decentralisation. This is quite clear, our European partners, France and Germany have spelt it out and we are quite satisfied with it, just as the representatives of Donbass are. This is one component.

The second thing that has to be done – the law passed earlier on the special status of these territories – Lugansk and Donetsk, the unrecognised republics, should be enacted. It was passed, but still not acted upon. This requires a resolution of the Supreme Rada – the Ukrainian Parliament, which is also covered in the Minsk agreements.

Our friends in Kiev have formally complied with this decision, but simultaneously with the passing by the Rada of the resolution to enact the law they amended the law itself – article 10, I believe, which practically renders the action null and void. This is a mere manipulation, and they have to move from manipulations to real action.

The third thing is a law on amnesty. It is impossible to have a political dialogue with people who are threatened with criminal persecution. And finally, they need to pass a law on municipal elections on these territories and to have the elections themselves. All this is spelled out in the Minsk agreements, this is something I would like to draw your attention to, and all this should be done with the agreement of Donetsk and Lugansk.

Unfortunately, we still see no direct dialogue, only some signs of it, but too much time has passed after the Minsk agreements were signed. I repeat, it is important now to have a direct dialogue between Lugansk, Donetsk and Kiev – this is missing. Finally, they have to begin the economic recovery of these territories, of course.

I would like to repeat something I have already said many times: the excuse that ‘we do not have the money’ does not work here. If the current authorities in Kiev believe that this is Ukrainian territory inhabited by Ukrainian citizens who have the right to receive, say, disability benefits or the pensions that they earned under the existing Ukrainian law, the Kiev authorities

cannot refuse to pay, they simply have no right to do so. They are violating their own constitution. All this has to be done, and not in words, but in practice.

Charlie Rose: As you may know, the United States of America believe that you are arming the separatists, you encourage them, you engage the Russian Armed Forces to fuel the conflict. There is strong concern that this could lead to a new cold war.

Vladimir Putin: You know, it is not local conflicts that cause a cold war, but global decisions – like the withdrawal of the United States from the antimissile defence treaty. This is a step that pushes us all towards a new spiral in the arms race because it changes the global security system.

As for regional conflicts, the conflicting sides seem to always – and I stress, always find weapons. This is true of eastern Ukraine as well.

I would like to say that if this situation is resolved by political means, no weapons will be necessary, but it does require goodwill and a desire to enter into direct dialogue, and we will assist in this. What we cannot do and would never agree to is for someone somewhere, anywhere, to proceed from a position of force, first using the police (they call it militia there), then special services, and then the armed forces.

Before the army units and the so-called battalions – armed nationalist units – appeared on those territories, there were no weapons there; and there still would have been none had they tried to resolve the situation by peaceful means right from the start. Weapons appeared there only after they started killing people using tanks, artillery, multiple launch rocket systems and aviation. That gave rise to resistance. Once an attempt is made to resolve the issue by political means, the weapons will be gone.

Charlie Rose: What are the acceptable borders for Ukraine, for Russia? What borders do you find acceptable?

Vladimir Putin: What do you mean when you speak of borders: geographical borders, political borders?

Charlie Rose: Political borders.

Vladimir Putin: Regarding cooperation, we have always said and continue to say – there is nothing new here – that with all the current difficulties, I have always thought that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, one ethnic group, at least; each with their own peculiarities and cultural characteristics, but with a common history, a common culture and common spiritual roots. Whatever happens, in the long run Russia and Ukraine are doomed to a common future.

We have proceeded right from the start from the idea that Ukraine has the right to make its own choice – civilizational, political, economic or any other. It is no secret – we all know that Russia actually initiated the disintegration of the Soviet Union and providing sovereignty to all these countries. Nothing has changed since then. However, apart from the ties I mentioned earlier, ones that took shape over decades, very specific things in the present hold Russia and Ukraine together: we have a common engineering infrastructure, a common energy infrastructure, a common transportation infrastructure, common regulations and so on and so forth. We are

held together by the ability to speak the same language. Now, this has to do with Russia and our interests.

We have always proceeded from the notion that we will resolve everything, even disputes, by means of negotiations – and it is only natural for neighbours to have disputes. However, if some third parties get involved in these negotiations, we expect them to take our interests into account as well, rather than simply offer us a choice. If you are asking what we expect in the political sense – we expect a comprehensive, trust-based and equal dialogue.

Charlie Rose: I would like to get back to Ukraine, but let us talk about Russia's relations with a whole number of countries, including the United States and China. Characterise the relationship with the United States: what's wrong with it? What's right with it? What does it need?

Vladimir Putin: In other words, where we have some positive developments and where we have problems.

I will begin with the problems. The problem is that we are being forced to accept other's standards and solutions without consideration for our understanding of our own interests. We are actually being told that the United States knows best what we need. Let us decide what our interests and needs are ourselves, proceeding from our own history and culture.

Charlie Rose: How exactly is the United States trying to decide what you need?

Vladimir Putin: By interfering in our internal political processes, including by means of funding the non-public sector, by imposing international security decisions. For instance, I already mentioned the issue we came across first – Iraq, and this immediately cooled off our relations. Do you remember the statement 'If you are not with us, you are against us'? Do you call this dialogue? This is an ultimatum. You should not use ultimatums when talking to us.

Now over to the things that unite us – these do exist. We are united by the desire to eventually combat common threats, including terrorism, the expansion of drug threat and a very dangerous tendency towards the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. There are also issues of humanitarian interaction, like combatting severe infections that hit entire regions of the world. There are issues dealing with the global economy, and this has to do with the sector that we have a direct significant influence on – energy. There are also other spheres where we are cooperating quite successfully and I expect that this would serve as the basis that would make it possible for us to restore our previous relations with the United States and move on.

As for the People's Republic of China, the level, nature and confidence of our relations have probably reached an unprecedented level in their entire history. For 40 years – I would like everyone to hear this – for 40 years we have been negotiating border issues. We found compromises and solutions; we met each other halfway and closed the issue. 40 years! We have not managed to resolve these issues with all countries. Besides, we are developing economic ties, we are actively cooperating within international organisations and the United Nations Organisation.

We are creating new unions that are developing quite actively and are becoming attractive to many other countries: this is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, for instance. It was initially created to resolve border issues after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but it then developed and now it is an organisation that other countries would like to join. Most probably at the coming summit in Ufa (our next summit is in Bashkiria) we will decide to accept India and Pakistan. We are also developing other forms of cooperation – BRICS, for instance.

In my address, I spoke of the integration of our efforts within the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Route Economic Belt. In other words, we are developing our relations in this area too. China is our major trade and economic partner. Our relations are developing very effectively.

Charlie Rose: Some say this is a natural relationship because China has the cash and Russia has natural resources, so there is a natural affinity right there.

Vladimir Putin: You should read what American analysts write. I am sure you do and are only pretending not to. American analysts, politologists and economists say the United States is also turning towards China. China is a growing economy. If anyone has any concern over a decrease in their growth rates, the First Deputy Chairman of the State Council of China said that 7 percent is the highest economic growth in the world in any case.

Not only Russia. Why? The whole world is looking at Asia, and Europe is also looking for opportunities to develop relations, while for us this does come naturally – we are neighbours and this is a natural affinity. Besides, there are certain values that we jointly uphold on the international arena quite successfully, like equal access to resolving key international issues.

Charlie Rose: Is it a more natural affinity than Europe and the United States? Is China more in the future a place that Russia feels more comfortable with than Europe or the United States? And could that lead to some anti-western alliance?

Vladimir Putin: Anti-western?

Charlie Rose: Anti-western, anti-American.

Vladimir Putin: There is no country, including China, against which we or China, as far as I understand China's policy, would build our policy. We do not form alliances 'against', we build alliances in favour of things – in favour of implementing our national interests.

I would like to stress: you are expanding the North Atlantic bloc, NATO. The Soviet Union no longer exists, while the bloc was set up to counterbalance the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is gone, the Warsaw Treaty is gone, while NATO not only exists, it is expanding. You are doing it, while China and we are not creating any blocs, we do not have a bloc mentality, we are trying – and successfully, it seems – we are trying to think globally, not only sharing responsibility, but also trying to find mutually acceptable solutions and compromise. We never proceed from the position of force. We always search for solutions, solutions within the process of negotiations.

Charlie Rose: We have read much about you and your country; there are three things that I constantly see. One is a sense of warning to be respected, another is to have an equal

conversation, a third is a sense, perhaps in your history, a great concern about borders and having a buffer zone for Russia. Am I accurate in that?

Vladimir Putin: You know, I hear this all the time: Russia wants to be respected. Don't you? Who does not? Who wants to be humiliated? It is a strange question. As if this is some exclusive right – Russia demands respect. Does anyone like to be neglected? It is actually not about respect or the absence thereof – we want to ensure our interests without in any way harming our partners. However, we are counting on a constructive, direct and substantive dialogue. When we see an absence of dialogue or an absence of desire to talk to us, this naturally causes a certain response.

I will tell you an interesting story that has to do with the so-called eastern partnership that our colleagues in Western Europe are promoting. This idea, incidentally, is actively supported in the United States as well. Our first reaction to the idea of an eastern partnership was quite positive. Why? Because we proceeded from the notion that Russia and the East European countries are held together by a thousand ties, including economic ones. These are common technical regulations, as I said, common infrastructures and so on. Therefore, we proceeded from the idea that if Europe started working with them, pulling them in in some way, this would inevitably lead to some constructive interaction with Russia. And we would work together. We would argue over some things, agree on others, but we would be arriving at some common solutions that would allow us to build a new economic and, eventually, humanitarian and political space.

Unfortunately, none of this ever happened. How did the crisis in Ukraine that you began with occur: Ukraine was offered to sign the association agreement. Wonderful. However, everyone knows that Ukraine is a member of the free trade zone within the CIS (which Ukraine, actually, wanted to get established). This zone offers lots of preferences and benefits.

It took us 17 years to negotiate the terms of our accession to the WTO. Now, in one move, they decided to enter the customs territory of the Russian Federation through Ukraine. Is that the way things should be done? And when we suggested holding consultations, we were told it was none of our business. Is that the way issues should be resolved, specifically where Russia is concerned?

What has trust got to do with it? This is not about trust – it is about having our interests taken into consideration.

Charlie Rose: Let me talk about a couple of places where there is a dramatic need for cooperation between the United States and Russia. One is Iran and the nuclear negotiations and the P5+1. Do you think there will be an agreement? And what kind of agreement do you want to see?

Vladimir Putin: First, I want to stress what I see as the essential point here, namely that we have a common understanding with all participants in this process, including the United States and European countries, and Iran itself, I hope, on the fact that we all categorically oppose the spread of weapons of mass destruction. This is our position of principle and it is this that enables us to work constructively with the United States in this area.

We are very pleased to see that the Iranians have also changed their position considerably, which has made it possible to reach the agreements we have today. We most certainly support

these agreements. The only thing that I think would be counterproductive would be to deliberately undermine the agreements by putting demands on Iran that it cannot fulfil and that are not relevant to the main issue – the issue of non-proliferation. I hope, though, that things will not reach this point and we will sign the agreement soon. I think that [Foreign Minister] Sergei Lavrov knows better than me when it will be signed.

Sergei Lavrov: When it is ready.

Vladimir Putin: I ask, “When can we sign it?”, and he says, “When it is ready.” Our diplomats always talk this way. (Laughter)

I think the signing will take place soon. I met yesterday with the Director General of the IAEA, and what is most important of all here is that after the signing, the process of executing these agreements must begin, and this will take approximately six months. Just as important though, is for your country, the United States, to take a positive attitude towards these agreements and give them your support, to secure Congress’ support. We know the discussions currently taking place in the United States, and we know that the President has the power to sign these agreements himself, meaning they do not need to be ratified. This is not our affair and we cannot decide it. There are issues we cannot decide for the authorities in Kiev, and there are matters we cannot decide for the authorities in Washington. The ball is therefore in your court. But we hope that the US President will achieve a result that will most certainly go down as one of the biggest foreign policy achievements of his presidency.

Charlie Rose: But do you believe that this agreement will go ahead, given what Mr Lavrov just said?

Vladimir Putin: I do, and we are working towards this. We think it is absolutely essential to defuse the situation. It is equally important, though, for all of the regional powers to have the assurance that they will not end up confronting a worsening situation in the region or face threats. This is the situation we absolutely have to avoid. I stress that Russia seeks to develop good-neighbourly and friendly relations with Iran and with all the countries in this region.

Charlie Rose: I have another foreign policy question before we turn to the economy and the issues a number of speakers raised.

Syria is another matter very much on our minds today. Do you see any solution to the current situation? Russia supports Bashar al-Assad’s government and has done so for many years. Iran also supports Assad’s government. It seems as though the pendulum is swinging this way and that. What possible solution do you see? How can we end this terrible civil war that has created millions of refugees? When can we find a solution?

Vladimir Putin: The sooner, the better. Let me repeat that our position on this issue is based on the fear that Syria could descend into the same kind of situation as what we see in Libya or in Iraq.

You know, after all, that before the state authorities and Saddam Hussein himself were destroyed, there were no terrorists in Iraq. Let’s not forget this. People prefer not to talk about this today, but is it really so hard to see who created the conditions for terrorism to flare up in these places? After Iraq was invaded, the old authorities were all sent fleeing or were destroyed, and Saddam was hanged. And then we ended up with the Islamic State.

Look at what is happening in Libya. It has ceased to exist as a state and is in the process of total disintegration. Even US diplomats have suffered losses there. We know the tragic events that took place there. The main issue, as we see it, is that we do not want to see Syria take this same road. This is our main motivation for supporting President Assad and his government. We think this is the right position. It would be difficult to expect us to take any other line. Moreover, I think that many would agree with our position on this issue.

I mentioned Iraq several times. We know what is going on there. The United States supports Iraq, supports, arms and trains the Iraqi army. In two or three attacks, the Islamic State captured so many weapons, more than the Iraqi army probably even has. This includes armoured vehicles and missiles, though the general public is poorly informed about all of this. This was all just recently. The Islamic State is now better armed than the Iraqi army. And this has all happened with the United States' support.

The United States supposedly withdrew from Iraq, but our special services and the information we receive from Iraq itself indicate that thousands of US service personnel are still in Iraq. The results are deplorable and tragic.

We do not want all of this to repeat itself in Syria. We call on our partners in the United States and Europe, but above all in the United States, of course, to make greater efforts to fight this absolute evil that is fundamentalism, the Islamic State and similar groups that essentially all have their roots in the well-known global terrorist organisations that have already launched repeated attacks against the United States itself. Our call is for political settlement, which should, of course, guarantee the regime's transformation, and we are ready to discuss this matter with President Assad too.

The UN just recently declared the importance of working together with President Assad to fight the Islamic State and other terrorist groups. We are ready to work with the [Syrian] President to ensure that the political transformation process can go ahead so that all people in Syria feel that they have access to the instruments of power, and in order to put an end to this armed confrontation. But we cannot achieve this from outside and through the use of force. This is the real issue.

Charlie Rose: All right, but are you ready to call on President Assad to step down if this would make an alternative political solution possible or would help to fight the Islamic State, say?

Vladimir Putin: Our moderator is a real American. I said, "without outside intervention", and he asks me if we are "to call on President Assad to step down?" Only the Syrian people can do this. How can we ignore such basic things as this? As I just said, we are ready to engage in dialogue with President Assad about carrying out political reforms together with the healthy opposition forces. I think this is constructive and realistic.

Charlie Rose: Mr President, let's come back to the economy. I have many questions. Here, we have Ronny Chichung Chan of Hang Lung Properties investment company, Mahmood Hashim Al-Kooheji, general director of Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company, and also president of YPF Argentina, Miguel Galuccio, with whom we will talk about energy. We all heard a lot about China here today. What opportunities do you see for building more profitable cooperation between China and Russia?

President of Investment Company Hang Lung Properties Ronny Chan: As the President [Vladimir Putin] said, I think the economy is the key area for cooperation between China

and Russia. As a businessman, I think that Russia and China are a match made in heaven. Russia is rich in natural resources, whereas China lacks natural resources but is growing fast. China has capital for buying natural resources. From an economic point of view, it would be hard to find two countries that complement each other better.

The only remark I want to make is that I am sure that President Putin has a strategic vision for Russia's relations with China, but Mr President, I am not so sure about your business community. I am not so sure that your businesspeople are ready to make use of the advantages the Chinese market offers. Just take a look around. How many Chinese are there here in the audience? I feel quite alone here on the stage. How many Russians are there in China? I don't even know. Talking to my Russian friends about all of this over the last couple of days, I came to the conclusion that people here still see Asia as a place they would like to get hold of, but they are not ready to go and commit themselves economically there.

President Putin said just now that China is one of the world's big economic powers today. Mr President, I would like the business leaders present here today to show more readiness to engage in practical work with us. You mentioned financing, for example, which is essential for many Russian projects. Many companies are registered in Hong Kong, because the Hong Kong market is linked to the Shanghai market, and will soon be linked to the Shenzhen market too. The Shanghai stock exchange is the fifth-biggest in the world, the Hong Kong exchange is in sixth place, and Shenzhen is number eight. If we combine these three exchanges, we get the second biggest securities market in the world. Why not have Russian companies register in Hong Kong? This would help them in their work with China. I think this would be an excellent opportunity, Mr President.

Vladimir Putin: I agree with my colleague that we need to give Russian-Chinese economic relations concrete substance and projects. I think too that we need to do this not just in big business, but also develop ties at the level of small and medium-sized businesses, so as to weave a natural and living fabric for working together in all different production sectors.

In terms of individual countries, though, China is our number one trading partner. Our bilateral trade comes to \$85 billion. Yesterday, I spoke about this with the First Vice Premier [Zhang Gaoli], and I discuss it regularly with President Xi Jinping. I think that over the coming years, we could take our trade to a figure of \$200 billion.

All of what you said just now is absolutely correct. We must proceed without haste, of course, take things carefully and ensure all the necessary conditions. This goes for both us and our Chinese partners. I said in my opening remarks that we do not place any restrictions on free movement of capital. Even during the difficult crisis of 2008 and 2009, and last year too, we did not restrict capital exports in any way. But we hope that our partners will offer the same conditions. The yuan is becoming an increasingly stronger regional currency. We all see that this is happening. But experts know that there is not enough free movement of capital. If steps in this direction go ahead, this will be major progress towards liberalising our relations.

We understand very well that our Chinese partners also have to take a cautious approach, and they are the better judges of what measures they should take. The decision to carry out payments for our trade operations in our national currencies – the yuan and the ruble – is already a big step towards deepening and expanding our relations. The first yuan-ruble trading took place just recently, and we are sure that this will continue and develop, and will create new opportunities for work in the real sector of the economy.

Overall, I agree with you. We need to keep moving in this direction and we shouldn't focus just on agreements at the government level and just on decisions made by the sovereign funds and so on. Of course, this is all important, too, and creates a platform for broader format work. We are working on this and we will continue in this direction. Thank you.

Charlie Rose: Thank you. Next, we have Mr Mahmood Hashim Al-Kooheji, the general director of Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company. What investment opportunities do you believe exist in Russia, and what questions do you have?

General director of Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company Mahmood Hashim Al-Kooheji: Please allow me to thank you, Mr President, for organising this forum and for inviting me to attend, because this gives us an opportunity to meet our partners in Russia.

Mumtalakat is Bahrain's sovereign fund. Like other sovereign funds, we have the opportunity to invest throughout the world. We feel that it is imperative to have sustainable growth and there should be potential for investments that will give us long-term stability and interest. We have investments in Europe, the United States and other regions. We are currently considering and analysing opportunities to invest in Russia. When you ask me about the Russian economy, I think that it is very promising and it has a very solid foundation. The reason I think this is because the Russian economy has a highly trained workforce, a highly educated workforce within the country. In addition, it has the necessary resources that support this workforce – this has been brought up extensively. So the Russian economy is a very large market, which makes it much simpler for us to find a niche. These three components allow us to feel confident that investments in Russia will be good market investments and will be long-term.

Our fund tries to find partners that will allow us to work freely in the economy. I think, Mr President, your initiative in organising the Russian Direct Investment Fund is a very good idea and it is a major step because when we came to the Russian market, we found an institution, an organisation, that knows this market and works with it professionally and transparently. This is very important when we are selecting our partners. Any investment in the Russian economy allows us to find the necessary partner. This makes the Russian economy very appealing to us in the long-term.

Charlie Rose: Thank you.

To my right is Miguel Galuccio from Argentina. As you know, Argentina and Gazprom have signed an agreement on working together on a gas field. What are the opportunities for joint work between the two states in the energy sector?

President of YPF Argentina Miguel Galuccio: First of all, thank you very much, Mr President, for giving me the opportunity to participate in this forum.

Energy is a very important direction for all South American nations, especially Argentina. We have extensive experience in economic growth, which our economy demonstrated over the past ten years. We are producing oil and gas – mainly gas. We have traditional natural resources, we also have natural gas and traditional energy resources. Moreover, we also have non-conventional sources of energy, which we are now beginning to develop.

Volume has increased by 25 percent recently. We believe non-conventional energy sources can be very efficient, and their production can be very profitable. To meet this goal, we must make major investments into this sector, and we need other nations' and companies' technologies and know-how. We feel there are great opportunities arising in energy.

We are engaged in strategic cooperation with Russian companies. Russia and Argentina have formed a wonderful relationship. We strive to develop the potential of our relations and work in various sectors. Our company has signed an agreement with Gazprom that will give us the opportunity to continue cooperating effectively in the future. We have signed a memorandum of mutual understanding, which is aimed towards the joint development of our country's resource base. Thank you.

Charlie Rose: Do you have any other comments on this issue, as far as opportunities that are becoming available for both countries are concerned? It seems to me it would be very interesting to hear the points of view from different regions.

We already talked today about the effect of sanctions. You feel the effect of the sanctions is overstated. Many people have said so. How do you view the opportunities and the need for further advancement of the Russian economy? What paths exist for this, in terms of the institutional framework, the rule of law and so on?

Vladimir Putin: With regard to what was just said by our colleagues, as far as Argentina is concerned, President of Argentina Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and I discussed the opportunity for cooperation in the oil and gas sector during her visit to Russia and my visit to Argentina. We agreed that our leading companies will engage in joint work. To be honest, I don't know what happened next, but I was very glad to hear just now about the specific agreements to begin this joint work. Indeed, Argentina has enormous potential, and naturally, working together with a leading global company like Gazprom can give a very positive result. As for sovereign wealth funds, if I am not mistaken, the Bahrain sovereign fund is not only a partner of our Russian Direct Investment Fund, but also has an agreement that, I believe, your fund has 10 percent participation in all the projects by the Russian Direct Investment Fund – is that correct? Please note what our partners have agreed to. Automatically, as soon as the Russian Direct Investment Fund implements a project, the Bahrain fund automatically joins at 10 percent. This is a very high level of trust not only towards the Russian economy, but also towards the professionalism of the colleagues at the Russian Direct Investment Fund. I would like to ask everyone to welcome our partner and express words of gratitude for this trust.

Things are not so bad as far as sanctions are concerned: there are upsides and downsides. This is a time when we are undergoing structural changes and it is genuinely possible to take steps that can have long-term positive effects.

As for the sanctions you mentioned, and how we are going to overcome today's situation, I would describe the current state of affairs by saying that it is not any kind of catastrophe for us. We feel that we must achieve several goals; they are less ambitious than the ones we set several years ago, but I very much hope that this will be a different quality – a better quality – than we had in previous years.

Here is what we want to achieve: first of all, we want to ensure our economy's growth in the short term, over the coming years, at the global average level, which is about 3.5 percent.

Second, it is imperative for us to achieve annual labour productivity growth of 5 percent. And third – this is a very important indicator – we must bring inflation down to 4 percent. This is what we must strive for – absolutely, through a coordinated and balanced macroeconomic and budget policy.

All the trends we are currently seeing in our economy allow us to assert that these goals are absolutely realistic and we will reach them soon. At the same time, we would naturally prefer not to respond to the destructive actions that some of our partners are attempting to impose – and which they are imposing at a loss to themselves. There have been various calculations among our European partners; some have said that European manufacturers are losing around 40 to 50 billion; now, the most recent reports I saw and heard from Europe say that European manufacturers may suffer losses of up to 100 billion.

Our trade with Europe has dropped by nearly a quarter. Meanwhile, trade with your country, the United States, has grown by 5.6 percent. Our commodity flows from EU countries to the Russian Federation have decreased somewhat, and import has nearly halved; it used to be just under \$30 billion, and now it is slightly over \$15 billion.

At the same time, if we look at the trade structure, with the increase in trade with the United States, imports from the US have increased by about 11 percent. Overall, we can certainly say that this does not balance out the losses in cooperation with Europe, but I am confident, I know for certain, that nobody wants any losses at all, in the sense that Russia is experiencing a recession and many experts in Europe – not Russian experts, European ones – are talking about stagnation.

So if we want to create absolute growth in the global economy, in Europe, in Russia and in general, then we certainly need to eliminate various sanctions, especially unlawful ones imposed outside the framework of the United Nations, and work together. I have already stated how we are going to do that. We will broaden economic freedoms, this is a key element; we will ensure a competitive jurisdiction and work on our human resources and improving management systems.