

Annex E.8.20

Public

Press statement following talks with President of South Ossetia Leonid Tibilov

March 18, 2015 15:30 The Kremlin, Moscow

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Friends and colleagues,

Our talks with President of South Ossetia Mr Tibilov took place in the open and constructive spirit traditional for our ties. We discussed practically all matters concerning our countries' strategic cooperation.

Nearly seven years have passed since Russia and South Ossetia established diplomatic ties. Over this time, we have set solid foundations for cooperation and developed our bilateral relations in nearly every area. We have established a good legal base for our ties with already more than 80 different agreements signed.

Today, we have taken another big step on the road to further strengthening our partnership. The main outcome of today's meeting is the signing of the agreement on alliance and integration. It is no exaggeration to call this a milestone agreement. It takes our two countries to a new level of interstate dialogue and sets the long-term directions for our bilateral relations.

It sets out the procedures for our cooperation in the social sector, including on raising pensions and public sector wages in South Ossetia and establishing a compulsory insurance system there.

The agreement also introduces a simplified procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship.

Our countries will establish a common defence and security space, integrate their customs services, and allow free movement across the interstate border

for our citizens.

We will establish the Interior Ministry Joint Coordination Centre, which will make a big contribution to fighting terrorism and organised crime in the region.

I would like to stress that there are serious financial resources to support the implementation of the Agreement: in 2016, about a billion rubles will be allocated to South Ossetia for these purposes. Overall, during the 2008–2014 period, the total volume of financial aid was over 43 billion rubles.

Strengthening South Ossetia's economy and creating conditions for long-term sustainable growth remain priority directions for our joint work. The republic's Socioeconomic Development Investment Programme for 2015–2017 is aimed toward this.

More than 9 billion rubles will be allocated toward implementing 36 projects in areas such as housing construction, housing and utilities facilities, culture and education, and transport infrastructure. There are plans to build a modern all-republic healthcare centre in Tskhinval.

During the talks, we noted the need to increase the efficacy of investments, the return on investment. In this regard, we discussed how to improve mechanisms for monitoring targeted use of the allocated funds. We agreed to improve trade and economic ties.

Based on last year's results, our turnover grew by 18%. We will reinforce this positive trend. We will continue getting Russian businesses involved in joint projects.

We feel our cooperation in agriculture is very promising. I am confident that now, given the pressure of sanctions, South Ossetia's agricultural producers will be able to broaden their presence in the Russian market.

We plan to further assist in training skilled personnel necessary for South Ossetia's economic and social development. This year, we have allocated 80 places at Russian universities to South Ossetia's students. We will work to further expand close contacts in the culture and humanitarian sectors with

the regions.

In conclusion, I would like to once again give a high assessment to today's talks. I am confident that implementing the agreement on alliance and integration we signed today will open a new page in our relations and will certainly take our contacts to a higher qualitative level.

Thank you for your attention.

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