

Russian-Latin American Parliamentarians Share Thoughts on Geopolitical Situation and Economic Cooperation

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Russia is certainly back to Latin America, the backyard to the United States. In this fast-growing multipolar world, Russia is assertively stamping its feet, intensifying serious coordinated efforts, this time in Latin America. And the State Duma, the lower house of Russian legislators, holds the lead towards off-setting the dominance of unipolarism and U.S. hegemony, 'authoritarianism and exceptionalism' and most importantly to strengthen its post-Soviet presence especially due to the rapidly changing global political situation.

On September 29 - October 2, the first international Parliamentary Conference 'Russia - Latin America' was held in Moscow at the initiative of the State Duma. More than 200 participants, including parliamentarians from different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean attended. In March 2023 for instance, Russia held the second inter-parliamentary conference 'Russia-Africa' and that was followed by a summit late July. Now late September was the turn of Latin America.

Russia has long ago recognized the high potentials in the region, so it is reviewing its weaknesses and strength, and attempting to take more strategic measures in consolidating policy fixtures with 'friendly' countries Latin America. As experts speculated, it may continue attempts to circumvent sanctions, form new alliances and agree on more investment while pushing for expanding trade in the region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke at the opening session on September 29, emphasized the fact that the presence of high-ranking legislators from Latin America and the Caribbean re-affirmed the common desire and willingness to develop a comprehensive beneficial partnership with Russia.

"We are convinced that promoting direct dialogue between parliaments will open up

opportunities for deepening cooperation and expanding it through new areas of joint activity,” he told the gathering of parliamentarians.

Putin, whose speech resonates with such historical names Salvador Allende, Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as selfless fighters for justice and social equality, ceased the chance to utterly slammed United States’ military aid for Ukraine and economic sanctions on Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela and other developing nations in across the world. He vehemently argues for wholesale reforms at the global financial institutions, a faster transition to settlements in national currencies, and the creation of channels for financial and banking cooperation, as well as of new transport and logistics chains – all this facilitates the further development of mutual trade.

Referring to BRICS is an organisation which provides a forum for coordinating approaches and developing mutually acceptable solutions based on sovereignty, independence and respect for one another, Putin said Russia would support Latin America to join BRICS. Russia takes over the rotating chairship from January 2024.

Putin holds the view that, in this new polycentric architecture, countries of Latin America, that have enormous economic potential and human resources and want to pursue a sovereign, independent foreign policy, will have a leading role in the world. Russia hopes the countries in the Latin American region to make progressive and dynamic developments and further strengthen their positions in the world economy and politics. It follows that Russian politicians always advocated for Latin America, for its unity, strength and diversity.

Today with the changes taking place around the world, Latin American countries are showing a pattern in the political approach to may significant issues in the process of support to the formation of a multipolar system. In order to achieve this and their individual national goals, parliaments are expected to play its part. Apparently, the role of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening cooperation between Russia and Latin American countries, and there is really nothing new, as it known to cut most notably across the board: in politics and security, as well as socioeconomic and humanitarian spheres.

In the Latin American region, Russia has a few economic footprints, and there are huge possibilities to create new business, engage in scientific and cultural exchanges and increase tourism in both directions. It currently has a nuclear research and technology centre is being built in Bolivia, that joint biopharmaceutical enterprises are expanding their activities in Nicaragua and Venezuela, and that a metallurgical plant is being upgraded in Cuba.

In his speech, Putin also pointed to Russian-Latin American projects in medicine and public health, and biological and epidemiological security are being implemented with good results. During the coronavirus pandemic, Russia was among the first to supply Latin America with large shipments of vaccines, test systems, sanitary and hygiene products, and other medical and humanitarian goods.

Statistics show that nearly half a million Russians have fully integrated into the society in Latin American region, compared Latinos in the Russian Federation. It explicitly points to the extent how closed has become Russian society, especially being vocal on multipolarism. Simply, both inbound and outbound tourism are down, despite Russia claims to have established visa-free travel system which currently includes 27 Latin American countries.

There were roundtable sessions with themes including – Equal and mutually beneficial economic cooperation: role of the parliaments; Development of humanitarian ties between Russia and Latin America: contribution of the parliaments; Just multipolar world: role of the parliamentary diplomacy; and Security for all: position of the parliaments.

On the enhancement of economic cooperation, trade turnover between Russia and Latin American countries has increased by about a quarter and now amounts almost to US\$20 billion.

“We are convinced that a new world order is being built, and Russia is one of the pillars of this order, one of the main pillars that contribute to the development of multilateral approaches and establishment of mutually beneficial relations,” emphasized the Special Representative of the President of Nicaragua for Russian Affairs Laureano Ortega Murillo.

In his contribution to that, Félix Martínez Suárez, the head of the Commission on Economic Affairs of the National Assembly of People’s Power of Cuba, spoke about cooperation between Russia and Cuba. In 2023, exchanges and visits between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Cuba at the parliamentary level were significant.

“There was a large delegation of parliamentarians with him. The agenda was intense: together with the Cuban side, six relevant working groups were created to address all the important issues of strategic bilateral cooperation in the main areas of our economies. These are finance, investment, agriculture, tourism, energy, education and legislation,” he said at the session in the State Duma.

On countering US interference in internal affairs, it was noted that in March 2023, the President of the Russian Federation approved a foreign policy strategy. And one of the priorities is cooperation on a mutually beneficial basis with Latin American countries. Security issues are key issues today, they are important for the whole world.

Deputy Chairwoman of the State Duma, Irina Yarovaya, in her speech emphasized the special importance for Russia of cooperation with those countries in the region, where the United States of America and its allies are trying to interfere in the internal affairs.

“Nicaragua, like many other countries, was a victim of invasions and robbery by the Yankee imperialists and their allies. They have impoverished our people by destabilizing, financing terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and arms trafficking,” said Filiberto Jacinto Rodríguez López, Chairman of the Committee on Peace, Defence, Internal Affairs and Human Rights of the National Assembly of the Republic of Nicaragua.

Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the National Assembly of People’s Power of Cuba José Luis Toledo Santander recalled that

“Cuban society has been living under a monstrous blockade by the United States and its allies for 70 years, and they are trying to destroy our country.”

Chairman of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, noted the contribution to the development of relations between Russia and Venezuela made by the Presidents Vladimir Putin and Nicolás Maduro. The task of the parliaments is to reach an absolutely new level of dialogue, to provide legislative support for the implementation of the agreements reached

by the heads of states, according to Vyacheslav Volodin.

“We have great opportunities to make our own contribution to the development of relations between our states, our nations. Venezuela and Russia are connected not only by ties of friendship and long-standing relations. We are counterparts and like-minded people, we stand for a multipolar world, building a just world order,” emphasized the Chairman of the State Duma.

“The world is not unipolar anymore. There is no more global policeman who told us what we should do and with whom we should cooperate. Just like you, we stand for a multipolar world – a world based on the principles of cooperation, respect, respect for the right to independence and sovereignty,” said Jorge Rodríguez Gómez.

“We are supporters of building a multipolar world, we stand for a just world order and believe that every country should have the opportunity to develop and plan its future,” emphasized Vyacheslav Volodin at the meeting with the President of the National Congress of the Republic of Honduras Luis Redondo Guifarro. And also with Brazilian Veneziano Vital do Rêgo Segundo Neto.

Vyacheslav Volodin held special bilateral meeting the President of the National Assembly of People’s Power and the Council of State of Cuba Juan Esteban Lazo Hernández. Volodin recalled the first meeting of the Commission on Cooperation between the State Duma and the National Assembly of People’s Power of Cuba was held in Havana in April. Among the priority areas of joint projects between Russia and Cuba, included the extraction and processing of mineral resources, the production of cane sugar, tourism, and solar energy, humanitarian and education cooperation.

In conclusion, the emerging polycentric world offers the right time to bolster the interparliamentary format of Russia’s relations with Latin American countries, so also with Asia and Africa. The development of parliamentarism has become one of the platforms to further in-depth discussions on a number of issues facing Russia in the changing world. Latin American parliamentarians gathered there for a four-day international forum (September 29 to October 2) at the initiative of the State Duma, the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russian Federation.

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