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Patrice BLANDIN: I engage myself to make a significant contribution to the maintenance of bilateral economic cooperation between our companies and partners in the Russian Federation

European companies have had a long history of mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia. The forced breach of relations, currently affecting the international business, has led to significant losses.

Patrice Blandin, the Honorary Consul of the Russian Federation for the Auvergne Rhone Alpes Region, Co-Chairman of CPME Auvergne Rhone Alpes, a leading French business union, is hopeful and expecting that the current situation between France and Russia will not go on forever, meaning that the grounds for rebuilding ties must be prepared now, with consideration to global and alternative policies.

Mr, Blandin, let us briefly go over your extensive track record. Your primary education says you are a tech-savvy

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professional and early in your career successfully worked as an engineer with an industrial engineering company not only in France, but also in Latin America and Iran. You are well-versed in performance of various power systems, including nuclear and hydro-electric power stations. Skipping over your army service, you went on to work as a manager in corporations with offices in the Middle East, Africa and China. How did your trajectory of life take you to Russia?

In the earlier 1996, I was managing the International branch COMAP of LEGRIS's Group, based in Lyon, in charge of development in eastern countries. COMAP was producing heating valves and sanitary distribution in building industry. Russia was an open and new market for the group, we have identified that opening a branch office in Moscow to distribute our product range would be a very good target for LEGRIS's Group. Not so easy at this time to identify potential customers, as distribution market on this field was at the beginning, so I searched to some other companies in Lyon with whom we can share together the cost of opening an office and implement commercial and administrative staff on complementary product line.

We have finally opened our office COMAP Russia in Petrovka Ulitsa together with company TECOFI (Industrial Valves) and DE DIETRICH (Gas boilers). We've achieved a very good success until 2009 up to 12 M Euros Turn over for COMAP, when I left the French group LEGRIS after it has been sold to AALBERTS Group Netherlands.

Today COMAP is still working in Russia but through their FLAMCO / BROEN subsidiary.

These 13 years' experience of my life in Russia has been very important to my international career, I have appreciated a lot to work with Russian people, building a network with local companies, when we initiate strong partnership, it keeps for years.

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What is the current situation in the sphere of cooperation with Russia?

The current situation regarding cooperation with Russia, particularly in terms of international and regional organizations, is complex and reflective of Russia's broader geopolitical challenges and ambitions.

Russia has been active within BRICS, particularly in its efforts to promote a multipolar world order. The BRICS New Development Bank is pushing for financial transactions in national currencies rather than relying on the U.S. dollar or euro. Russia's role in BRICS highlights its strategy to counter our western financial dominance and offer alternatives to countries in the Global South, despite the economic pressures from sanctions. These developments underscore Russia's ongoing efforts to maintain its influence through various regional and international platforms, which is a very pertinent strategy.

As Co-President of CPME Auvergne Rhone Alpes, French leading business Union representing more than 240.000 companies, we expect that the actual situation between our countries will not continue forever, we want to keep running and prepare the future of our economic and financial relationship, my personal target is to develop on a creative and safety procedures our economic cooperation between Russia and French companies from the area of Auvergne Rhone Alpes in respect to global and alternative policy.

Your vast experience of operations in various countries allows you to make your own opinions on how the present-day geopolitical situation reflects on business processes across the world. Could you please assess the logic of the current events?

The current geopolitical situation between our countries, particularly in light of the broader tensions between Russia and Western nations, has significantly impacted business processes, by sure. The logic behind these events lies in the complex interplay of economic sanctions, political stances, and global alliances.

Following subsequent sanctions imposed by the European Union, our both businesses have faced numerous challenges. These sanctions have restricted trade, particularly in sectors like energy, technology and finance, leading to disruptions in supply chains and financial transactions. Companies have had to navigate these restrictions, leading to increased costs and uncertainties in their operations.

Moreover, the political climate has led to a reevaluation of business partnerships, with French companies reducing their exposure to Russian markets and seeking alternative suppliers or markets. By consequence, Russian businesses are

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increasingly turning to non-Western countries to mitigate the impact of these sanctions.

In summary, the logic of the current events is rooted in the political and economic responses to geopolitical tensions, which have driven both countries to adapt their business strategies in response to a more hostile international environment. We will do our best from my side to keep running past and actual partnership between our countries looking to the future and don't erase decades of development together.

Do you have any personal forecasts for development of the global economy under the existing conditions?

Forecasting the global economy under current conditions involves assessing a complex mix of factors, including geopolitical tensions, technological advancements, monetary policies, and shifting consumer behavior.

Some of the key themes that are likely to shape the global economy in the near to medium term in my point of view could be lower global growth, regional divergence, inflationary pressures and monetary policy, technological disruption, digital transformation, green technology, global fragmentation as ongoing tensions between major powers, particularly the US and China, could lead to more trade restrictions and sanctions, not only to Russia, impacting global trade and investment.

Companies may continue to move production closer to home markets or to politically stable regions, impacting global trade patterns. This trend is driven by the need to reduce supply chain vulnerabilities exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global economy is likely to experience slower growth, with significant regional divergence. The transition to a more sustainable and digital economy could provide new opportunities, but also presents risks of disruption, geopolitical tensions and demographic shifts will continue to shape the global economic landscape.

Policymakers and businesses will need to navigate these challenges carefully, focusing on resilience, innovation, and sustainable development to achieve long-term economic stability.

The world is going through a transformation of global value chains, and not all businesses are capable of keeping up with the changes... You have managed to achieve profits in a few loss-making companies. Could you share your recipes for success?

Question regarding “recipes” is linked to the fact that French gastronomy often leading to success... It might be ;-)

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Parameters are independent to the type of business, to be enthusiast, curious and always learning, loving your work, maintain objectives, get cultural adaptation capacities, and the main key factor for me: Surround well with people, knowing the value of each to delegate carefully but effectively.

It's so difficult to achieve high level of any competence companies need, we have to be optimistic to create development and believe in it, but not too much as we also need to be realistic and pragmatic, we need to listen to our teams but also to lead and decide, we need to delegate after checking carefully to our managers' quality, to encourage our people to become better and succeed together. Easy to describe but not so easy to realize!

You are an Honorary Consul now. What are your current objectives?

As Honorary Consul, I engage myself to make a significant contribution to the maintenance of bilateral economic cooperation between our companies and partners in the Russian Federation.

My personal objective is for civic engagement by wishing to serve our two communities, and contribute to the well-being of Russian citizens travelling in France or through their being residents. Assistance of Russian nationals in their administrative procedures is also part of my mission, as also supporting Russian culture on our French territory.

Currently a Lyon industrial in the field of metallurgy, I am willing to bring my skills to coordinate complex projects of accompanying Russian companies that are engaged with our French companies in the exchange of goods and services, to facilitate the logistical and financial management of their flow.

I hereby undertake to represent the Russian Federation with respect and dignity, both to its nationals on national territory and to the French authorities.

To finalize, here is a rather simple question: What are your impressions of Moscow, that is the Moscow of today?

I'm very impressed because the last time I came to Moscow a couple of years ago, before the COVID pandemic. Now, I was fascinated to discover a new modern Moscow. At Vnukovo airport, when I arrived, I transferred easily to a train that terminated at the Kievsky Vokzal (railway station). The last time, I was unaware of the convenience offered by the use the Yandex application. True, today's Moscow looks much more modern and dynamic compared to whatever we have in any part of Europe. Indeed, I was very happy to rediscover my new Moscow.

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