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"ISLAND" IN RAGING OCEAN

AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC INSTABILITY, COUNTRIES OF THE EAEU ECONOMIC UNION DEMONSTRATE HIGH DEVELOPMENT RATES

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is the youngest of the top ten trade and economic unions of the world. It was established ten years ago on the basis of the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space of Belorussia, Kazakhstan and Russia. Today the Union also includes Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, and Iran, Moldova, Uzbekistan and Cuba have got observer status.

Consistently High Performance

According to Alexander Daniltsev, Director of the Institute for Trade Policy of the Higher School of Economics, "The EAEU is the most dynamic integration group in the world".

This statement is backed by the indicators of intra-regional trade growth and connectivity of the EAEU member countries, improvement of macroeconomic parameters and broader interaction. Member countries of the Union pursue a coordinated policy to overcome existing trade barriers, build common mechanisms in energy, industry, transport and finance, create a single stock exchange and conduct payments in national currencies. In 2025 their share in mutual settlements reached up to 93%.

The results of the ongoing work are impressive, especially in the current climate of global instability and unpredictability. According to the data, presented at a recent meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, over 2024 the gross domestic product (GDP) of the EAEU rose by 4,2%, retail trade grew by 7,5%, and industrial manufacturing went up by 4,5% versus 2023.

Individual members of the union demonstrate even more impressive achievements. The GDP of Armenia, for instance, in 2024 climbed by 6%. Kyrgyzstan has become the absolute leader. Its GDP has grown by 8,4%, and the mutual trade volume with the countries of the Union has doubled.

According to Alexei Overchuk, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, elimination of non-tariff barriers in the EAEU due to the transition to uniform mandatory requirements for goods and also lifting of customs controls provide a sustainable supplement to GDP growth rates of the Union in the amount of $14,5 billion per year, and their mutual trade gains 24% on the average.

Due to this, over the last ten years the GDP of the Union has grown by 17,8%, says Alexei Vedev, Director of the Macroeconomic Policy Department of the Eurasian Economic Commission. The EAEU's share in the global economy has increased from 3,7% to 4,1%.

All development indicators of the Eurasian Union are significantly higher not only than the global ones, but than the indicators for other trade and economic unions. For example, the USMCA, established by the United States, Mexico and Canada to replace NAFTA in 2020, displayed GDP growth of a little over two percent. And this was the result for the period preceding the introduction of higher tariffs by Washington against Mexico and Canada.

As for the European Union, this entity has been experiencing a systemic crisis over four years. Starting from 2022, there has not been a single quarter where the EU GDP rose by more than 1%.

Europe's economic issues are related not only to abandoning energy resources from Russia, which were supplied at prices lower than the global ones and were an important growth driver for Western European economies.

"The key issue is that, - as Olga Butorina, Deputy Director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), RAS Corresponding Member, is sure, that the economic space within the European Union has failed to become a common one. Its integration has not resulted in genuine economic convergence, meaning convergence in the level of well-being of member states, it has not been instrumental in

accelerating economic growth, improving living standards. The potential for economic integration in the EU is close to exhaustion".

Regionalization of Economies as Survival Tool

One of the main factors destabilizing the world economy was the process of deglobalization, which began more than a decade ago. The world system, designed for Western countries and primarily the USA to obtain maximum trade and economic benefits at the expense of other countries, is falling apart. Now there are emerging fast-growing economies, which have realized the harm of the old, essentially neocolonial system. They have started looking for new partners, offering equal cooperation principles, and are rebuilding global transport corridors.

In essence, a new architecture of the global economy is being born today.

This phenomenon is resisted by the former main beneficiaries. The United States and the European Union are looking for ways to freeze the rebuilding process, to keep the unipolar world order. They are incapable of offering anything but draconian tariffs and sanctions, as well as instigate armed conflicts.

But even fighting for maintaining their dominance, a seemingly common goal for the West, there is no unity in their camp. Washington is solely concerned with its own interests, epitomized in the MAGA slogan – "Make America Great Again". Even the interests of the EU and NATO allies are sacrificed for this purpose.

The transition into an era, when trade is determined by purely political goals, not by market forces, has pushed many states to establishing regional trade and economic unions and building relations with the most attractive unions of these. The EAEU, in particular, is one of these unions.

"The era of formation of macroregions is coming", - this conclusion is made by Lorenzo Rotunno, senior economist of the Strategy, Policy and Review department and Michele Ruta, deputy head of the same department of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in their "Trade Partners' Responses to US Tariffs" research paper. The authors of the paper also state that a global trade war will be won not by the initiator of "economic reprisals", but by those countries that build beneficial new ties on time and opportunistically form macroregions.

The Eurasian Economic Union has become an island of stability of this kind. It has managed to adapt its national economies to the changing conditions. Naturally, the destructive trends, especially the tariff war, unleashed by the United States against everyone, impacts EAEU countries as well. Restrictions, introduced by Washington and the West are slowing down their growth rates.

However, the primary reason remains unchanged – member countries of the Eurasian Union and states, cooperating with it, now have a "safe haven" to weather the storm. The pandemic and the subsequent sanctions craze have shown that integration tools are effective even under force majeure conditions with disrupted logistics chains.

Unique EAEU Aspects

What makes the Eurasian Economic Union different from all other unions? Its operating principles.

"The Union is built on respect for the sovereignty of its member states, voluntary participation, mutual benefit, and the consensus-based principle of decision-making, - says Sergey Glazyev, Commissioner for Integration and Macroeconomics within the Eurasian Economic Commission, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. – This is limited integration, because it recognizes national sovereignty of each state. Given this, one cannot force countries to delegate their sovereign functions to a supranational body".

EAEU integration is a multi-faceted process, focused on development of individual economies of the union, emphasized the academician. The main advantage for economic operators of the Union countries is barrier-free access to a common market whose volume significantly exceeds the domestic markets of each individual country. At the same time, the Union makes trade agreements with states outside the union in the interests of all members. Free trade and tariff-free zone agreements have been executed with Vietnam, Iran, Mongolia, Singapore, Serbia, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In particular, in accordance with the free trade zone agreement between the EAEU and the UAE the average tariff rate to be applied by the Emirates to the goods, imported into the country from the Eurasian Union, will be reduced from 5% to 0,6%. Customs liberalization will affect 86% of goods or 98% of the total EAEU volume of exports to the UAE.

Overall, just this agreement alone could provide the Eur-

The growth of mutual trade between the EAEU countries increases by an average of 24% annually. (Source: Alexei Overchuk, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation)

asian Union 15–20% more in trade turnover increase. And this is happening in the times when the other part of the world is rocked by the unfolding tariff war, destabilization of international trade and financial system.

Eventual Integration of Integrations

It is little wonder that new regional unions, such as BRICS, SCO and EAEU, based on the principles of equality and mutual respect, are attracting more and more attention from countries around the world today. Anton Kobyakov, Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation, has reported that 59 states are willing to join these entities now.

According to Vladimir Dzhabarov, First Deputy Chairman of the Russian Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, this is happening due to the fact that the EAEU demonstrates an efficient model of regional integration, an alternative to other economic unions.

Today the development of the EAEU shows a clear trend towards transformation into a self-sufficient, harmoniously developed macro-region, attractive for all countries of the world. "The Union demonstrates to the global community that only by respecting each other and observing legal norms it is possible to develop and build the future, and achieve prosperity".

The Union is actively expanding its ties with the Asia-Pacific Region and South Asian countries, it has joined the Chinese "Belt and Road" integration plan and is developing its own transport routes. So, conditions are gradually being created for the emergence of a macro-regional economic entity, Greater Eurasia.

Gao Qi, head of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and China Chamber of International Commerce in Russia is positive that over the next few years the EAEU will become an important bridge between the Asia-Pacific Region and Europe.

Moreover, the idea of "integration of integrations" – a union of BRICS, SCO and EAEU - is being discussed these days. The fact is that there are already significant points of contact between these organizations, and some countries participate in the activities of these entities. This allows for a productive discussion on the formation of a single trade and economic space, covering about 60%, if not more, of the population of the planet and more than a half of the world economy.

Alexander Chertkov

Over 2024 the gross domestic product (GDP) of the EAEU rose by 4,2%, retail trade grew by 7,5%, and industrial manufacturing went up by 4,5% versus 2023 (Source: The Supreme Eurasian Economic Council)

FROM DOLLAR TO QR CODES: NEW GREATER EURASIA ARCHITECTURE UNDER DEVELOPMENT

THIS AUTUMN SAW SEVERAL IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS INVOLVING RUSSIA. THE TIANJIN SUMMIT OF THE SCO MORE SPECIFICALLY OUTLINED THE CURRENT DIRECTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN A MULTILATERAL FORMAT, AND THE MEETING OF THE RUSSIAN AND CHINESE DELEGATIONS SERVED TO DEEPEN BILATERAL COOPERATION. WE HAVE DISCUSSED THE KEY ASPECTS OF THE ABOVEMENTIONED NEGOTIATIONS WITH IVAN TIMOFEEV, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE RUSSIAN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (RIAC), AND ALSO FOCUSED ON PROSPECTS FOR A MOSCOW-DELHI-BEIJING TRIPARTITE UNION AND ON WHETHER RARE-EARTH METALS COULD BECOME THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW TECHNOLOGICAL ALLIANCE.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Tianjin discussed the development of alternative payment systems and the use of national currencies. What projects are being focused on?

The issue of alternative payment systems has been discussed for a long time in various formats. Russia, under the impact of large-scale sanctions against it, has already done a lot to diversify its settlements with key partners. But now the bar is raised to create a multilateral system that goes beyond bilateral trade and financial relations. The need for such a system has objectively become urgent given the weaponization of global finance by the USA and their allies. New payment systems will arise not only as a tool against the West, but rather as a way to diversify the existing means of settlement. The US dollar could still be used, but in the event of unfriendly actions there would be an alternative system available. We see a similar line of thinking among our partners in the countries of the global majority. In a similar spirit, the issue is being discussed at various venues, including BRICS and the SCO.

QR code- based settlements, mentioned by VTB Head Kostin in his interview about the outcomes of China meetings, are viewed as a good solution for payment issues of Russian tourists in China. Can this experience be scaled up in international trade?

Overall, VTB could be viewed as a source of creative ideas that had appeared long before crisis situations, and later turned out to be in demand. For instance, back in the day it was VTB's top management, as far as I remember, that had promoted the idea of dedollarization, and it had been long before the "sanctions tsunami" of 2022. The idea was partially implemented, which helped soften the impact of the sanctions after the start of the SMO. QR code- based settlements seem groundbreaking, especially if scaled up to a wide range of financial and trade deals. There are some functional issues here that need to be addressed, but the idea itself could be a hit.

The SCO summit demonstrates a growing circle of members and partners. Isn't the multilateral cooperation of the SCO and BRICS to a certain degree "diluting" the exceptional depth of the bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing? Do Russia and China face competition for influence over new members of the organizations?

I don't see such competition; it is not noticeable in BRICS. Yes, there is a core of "old" members of the association, but they are not fighting for influence over new ones. BRICS itself was created as a multilateral format. Yes, bilateral relations can be discussed on the sidelines. Leaders of member countries use summits for face-to-face meetings, however, the international agenda remains key and covers an extensive range of issues. It is sufficient to review the declarations from the summits; they concern many dimensions of international life.

How do you assess the prospects of a tripartite alliance between Russia, India and China, and which maneuvers could be expected from India, given its multi-vector policy?

It's premature to speak about a union. Though the idea of a partnership of Russia, India and China (RIC) was voiced by the patriarch of Russia's foreign policy, Yevgeny Primakov back in the 1990s. The ongoing differences between Delhi and Beijing pose a challenge. Moscow's role here is constructive. Russia is interested in preventing any escalation of Sino-Indian tensions. In many ways, it is our country that acts as the cementing link of the RIC. The troika has serious political potential in the future.

Russia possesses vast reserves of rare-earth metals (REM), and China dominates their processing. Can this be the foundation for a common technological space?

REM are a crucial element of economic security. You are correct, we have our own REM reserves, this is a significant resource base. Russia and the PRC can cooperate here. However, it is important to understand that the profitability of REM mining and processing is dependent on the scale of production. China is effectively the only country that has achieved a high level of production scalability, making it profitable due to production scale. There is a lot to learn from them.

Officially, the relations between the two countries are described as an "unlimited partnership". However, against the backdrop of a growing gap in the scale of economies and technological potential, isn't the asymmetry in this connection amplified under the model where China is an investor and a technology hub, and Russia is a supplier of resources? Where is the line where complementarity turns into dependence?

This asymmetry has existed before, it has been highlighted by our experts. The state officials understood it well, but however, there are subtleties. Russia has a number of critical technologies, a scientific school with a long history, and a production base, including nuclear and space technologies, the military-industrial companies. It will be difficult for us to achieve leadership in all areas. Where modernization tasks can be solved with the help of Chinese investments and goods, this should be done, but at the same time, it is of critical importance to maintain leadership in the sectors that are vital to the nation's security and development. BM

Timur Aitov:

"WHO AND WHY COMPARES AI TO A BUBBLE?"

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) HAS BECOME A BYWORD, CAUSING CONSTANT PUBLIC DEBATE. SOME CONSIDER IT AN UNCONDITIONAL GOOD THAT WILL INCREASE LABOR PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY. OTHERS SEE IT AS A THREAT TO THE WORLD THEY ARE USED TO, AND ARE PREPARING FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MOST PROFESSIONS. TIMUR AITOV, CHAIRMAN OF THE FINANCIAL MARKET SECURITY COMMISSION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, TOLD BM MOSCOW FORESIGHT WHY IT'S TOO EARLY TO DREAM OF A "DIGITAL PARADISE".

How do we properly relate to the changes that artificial intelligence brings into our lives: is it here to help or to harm us?

This phenomenon should be viewed from multiple angles. AI is a good thing, but with some caveats. AI services reshape the landscape of many industries and businesses — everywhere they increase the efficiency of employees, automate routine tasks. On the other hand, unfortunately, they initiate uncomfortable questions about staff employment. Many professions are losing relevance and are replaced by AI: marketers, accountants, average lawyers and many of those who perform standard, well-defined jobs, will gradually be ousted.

It turns out that humanoid robots will eventually take over these professions?

We are still a long way from such a dramatic scenario, but it is obvious that the use of AI technologies will boost the productivity of "average employees": so many people will no longer be needed. At the same time, AI will be more actively used by highly qualified and specialized professionals. So far, doctors have already begun to actively use artificial intelligence.

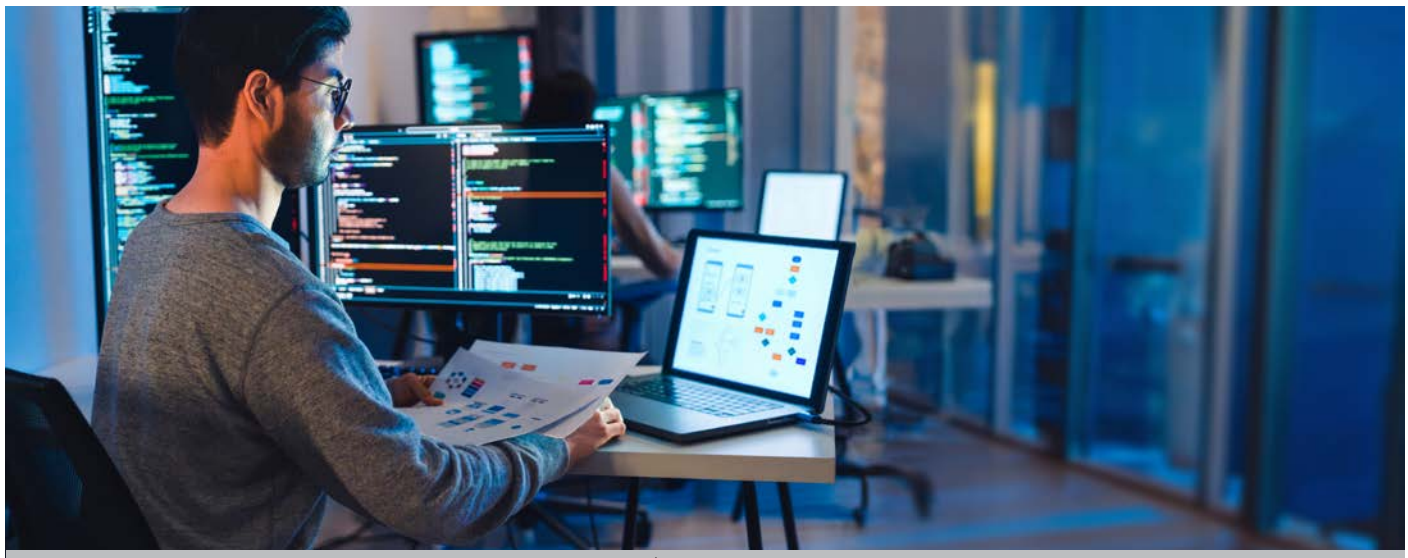
This is exactly what gets everyone scared. Can we really feel happy about the diagnosis made by a machine, not a person?

I can only be hopeful that our doctors will maintain their competencies, operate cautiously and have reservations about AI recommendations. However, routine analysis of X-ray imaging, for example, does not raise any objections from anyone. Here in Moscow, as far as I am aware, a special center has even been created for this specific purpose. For example, digital technologies are already being successfully used by surgeons, to precisely adapt robot movements to the manipulations of a specific surgeon.

Russian banks are also using AI to select the best commercial proposals for their customers. This is, by the way, the primary and most promising area of AI banking operations for the next few years. Though bankers are actively implementing capabilities of this technology in the IT security sphere and financial analysis applications as well. And of course, IT specialists and software programmers are actively using AI, for instance, to generate software code.

Sounds great, but it doesn't quite meet society's expectations. People are expecting to get robotic assistants at home.

The changes are also noticeable in everyday life. Voice-activated AI assistants are already in use in everyday life. I am sure that many BM readers have these devices somewhere on a table in their kitchen, talking back in a regular human voice. Detailed search engine results are also provided to us by artificial intelligence. Which, by the way, makes website owners unhappy, because they drop out of search results and thus lose 30-40% of user traffic.



The current capitalization of tens of the largest global big tech corporations today is about $22 trillion, and this "bubble" keeps on growing

There has been a lot of negativity surrounding AI lately. Even skilled professionals fear job losses and a transformation of the labor market. But there are also simply odious statements, close to conspiracy theories, that this whole technology is just another "bogus" thing, and the more actively it is used, the more noticeable this will become. What is your take on this?

As I see it, there is no longer any doubt that all this hype around AI is, of course, a typical "bubble". Tech stocks are significantly overvalued — all this is happening against the backdrop of the enthusiastic hype surrounding artificial intelligence. So, it is reported that the planned 2025 investments by Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Meta (designated an extremist organization in Russia and banned) Oracle, a significant part of which will be spent on AI infrastructure expansion, will exceed $350 billion. The current capitalization of tens of the largest global big tech corporations today is about $22 trillion, and this "bubble" keeps on growing.

The numbers are mind-bogglingly high.

Indeed, and not only for you. But that's not the point. Even in the medium term, the AI technologies are unlikely to be economically viable, because the costs of their development are currently many times greater than the cash flows they generate. However, industry giants are constantly increasing their AI expenditures, ignoring any substantial justification. None of the big tech companies have presented any AI monetization concepts or development roadmaps. It is more important for companies to stay within the general trend, just catching up will be much more difficult. By all indications, we are facing a typical "bubble" in the IT sector, reminiscent of dotcoms of the 1990s, which had collapsed overnight by 2001.

To be fair, it must be said that AI has many fans who actively promote this technology.

That's right, so it's important to remember that this inflating "bubble" has a lot of support: its supporters provide perfectly rational arguments. They remind us that this situation of re-evaluation of the new has always existed. Market theory describes the well-known "hump" (Gartner Hype Cycle) as a curve displaying the stages of development of any innovative technologies: transition from initial excitement to mature implementation or the onset of complete disappointment. According to the concept, any innovation gradually reaches an asymptote — a reasonable level of interest in new technology. Though, Gartner does not provide any clues as to when this will happen specifically to AI, and when will this interest be reasonable.

But right now people would like to understand what do they do? Let's say, what kind of AI-related occupation is worth dedicating their time to: will there be future demand for prompt engineers, neural network, labor market professionals, or should they choose something else?

A new field of specialization — just the very same task setter, only now he sets tasks not to programmers, but to a neural network, which requires systematic, broad and analytical thinking. A task setter clearly indicates to a neural network what response is required from it, what should the structure of the response be, how should it change in different situations. A prompt engineer needs to anticipate AI errors and develop quite a complex scenario to implement sophisticated routine tasks. Of course, the level of communication of prompt engineer with a machine is still more "human-like", but going deeper and having to be more and more accurate and specific, it may ultimately come to a machine-like language, used by code programmers. This is why a good prompt engineer could easily transform himself and be in demand when AI-related specializations become less popular.

Our country had already embarked on a course towards digitalization before the pandemic. The fact that this choice was fateful and correct became clear to everyone during the self-isolation regime. In theory, the development of AI should have pushed further the processes that had begun then. But, as it turns out, there will be no such push? Or will it bring about a different effect?

During self-isolation, everyone clearly realized that it's a good idea to work remotely. Various online conference programs and other useful applications have appeared. I have no doubt whatsoever that remote technologies will push the AI industry further, both to increase the immersion effect and to support multiple meta-verses and digital twins. Digital twins

of physical objects, such as exhibitions or factory floors, are already in operation. I am sure there will be twins for real people, providing an "avatar" and ready to perform specific routine tasks for people. Fundamentally, the concepts of digital twins are clear: these have been around for a long time and naturally, had appeared long before the pandemic.

Which are those?

For example, gaming fans know all too well such game-verses as Second Life, where one could control one's own virtual copy.

What should we prepare for, then: what will be happening with the development of AI services going forward, let's say, in two or three years?

The range of interaction with artificial intelligence technologies will gradually expand. Many of us will get our personal AI-assistants and consultants. These will help someone write software code, sell products and provide customer support, manage staff and give them assignments. At the same time, of course, it would be easier for some to interact with new AI technologies, some would resist for longer, but a transition will be inevitable.

Gradually, millions of robots will appear around us that will automate various types of human physical activity: for example, in everyday life, robots will be able to vacuum the floor or weed the garden beds. There will be further specialization: large language models will automate significant volumes of routine cognitive activities, and humanoid robots will perform the heavy lifting.

You're describing it as if it were a science fiction novel.

Indeed, it all seems pretty much out of science fiction for now, however, even today, for instance, a small startup company has released a video where their robot actually makes a cup of coffee.

It is possible that the very concept of developing artificial intelligence, which today copies human intelligence, will be adjusted. We are accustomed to acting as a kind of standard of universality and limitless possibilities. But robots of the future may not require such versatility, they could become more specialized and focused on a narrow area of application, where they would be obviously superior to humans. They do not necessarily have to look like humans either.

Your forecast is a little too optimistic. Are there really no downsides to AI expansion?

Naturally there are, and these have been discussed for a long time in terms of job losses. This is a real problem. Artificial intelligence will by all means replace or facilitate staff reductions in many industries with varying pay grades. All kinds of agents working with clients, accountants, and media clerks, copywriters, PR specialists and average marketers will suffer, and likely even musicians, composing their native "timeless classics". Of course, the hardest thing will be to replace creative people who come up with unconventional solutions: here artificial intelligence will most often prove powerless. It has a hard time with actual creativity. But typical standard solutions will certainly be subject to the substitutive influence of artificial intelligence — it will perform its tasks cheaper, faster and more accurate than even the current specialists.

In conclusion, I would like to note: human labor replacement will certainly not be 100 percent, but it will be AI assistants that will lead to staff reductions in companies.

Anna SOLNTSEVA

It is reported that the planned 2025 investments by Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Oracle, a significant part of which will be spent on AI infrastructure expansion, will exceed $350 billion

NUCLEAR COOPERATION AND ATOMIC COMPETITION

Yekaterina Borisova

Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ph.D (History)

Russia and China cooperate in many areas. Nuclear energy is a most developed and long-standing of these areas. This May, A. Likhachev, CEO of the Rosatom State Corporation, emphasized an unprecedented level of partnership: "No other country could boast such depth in the study of technologies and such breadth in the agenda of cooperation, starting from space energy solutions and ending with the construction of large nuclear power units in the territory of the People's Republic of China". China already has four VVER-1000 power units of Russian design in service, another four 1200 MW reactors are under construction at the Tianwan Nuclear Power Plant and Xudapu Nuclear Power Plant sites. But the nuclear industry of China has gained such high competencies and momentum that now it is ahead of Rosatom by the number of under construction and commissioned reactors.

Initially, China did not limit itself to one specific technology: it has nuclear stations, built to French, Canadian, Russian and American designs. Having gained versatile experience in the construction and maintenance of this entire set, Chinese experts started developing their own reactor designs, taking these to the global market and driving international competition.

Currently China is building 30 nuclear power units, and there are 58 nuclear reactors with the total installed capacity of 60,96 GW in service. "In terms of the overall scale of nuclear energy industry, China has for the first time ever taken the top position in the world", - says the 2025 Report of the China Nuclear Energy Association (China's Nuclear Power Development Report – 2025). However, quantity does not always turn into quality. Chinese corporations do not yet have any sodium-cooled fast reactors or lead-cooled fast reactors, which are now operated by Rosatom, and also do not have the same amount of orders for NPP construction abroad. The first power plant based on a Chinese design is under construction in Pakistan.

However, there are several nuances that indicate that our unexpectedly formed competition has the hallmarks of a long-term mutually beneficial partnership.

China already has four VVER-1000 power units of Russian design in service, another four 1200 MW reactors are under construction at the Tianwan Nuclear Power Plant and Xudapu Nuclear Power Plant sites

The growth of global nuclear generation, in addition to clearly positive aspects, also leads to growing volumes of spent (irradiated) nuclear fuel (SNF), discharged from reactors. The issues of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel or its geological disposal remain to be fully resolved. Nuclear scientists from all over the world are struggling to solve them, and cooperation in this area is only welcomed. Nuclear power is based on such advanced scientific knowledge and a very narrow field of specialists, that every talent and every project complement each other, creating a synergistic effect.

Following the results of the "World Atomic Week – 2025", held in late September in Moscow, Rosatom joined an underground radioactive waste disposal project, being implemented in China, for the waste which cannot be recycled now. The project in question is named "Methods for monitoring and evaluating hydrological response during mining operations in the Beishan underground research laboratory". Now experts of the Russian state corporation will be able to take part in a full range of hydrogeological studies at the construction site for the underground research laboratory, which is useful in terms of gaining experience by Russian experts as well. Russia is implementing a similar underground research laboratory project in Krasnoyarsk Region. Both facilities are located in the same geological formations.

However, disposal of the most highly radioactive part of spent nuclear fuel is only one of the options for solving the problem. Spent nuclear fuel can be reprocessed and reused in reactors. And this technology has been best mastered by Russian Rosatom specialists: Russia is building fast neutron reactors (also called "breeders"), sodium-cooled or lead-cooled (BN-600, BN-800, BREST-OD-300). These reactors not only burn up SNF, including its most hazardous components (minor actinides), which until now could not be recycled and needed to be buried, but also generate new fuel. The opportunity to generate more potential fuel than is consumed means a solution to short supply of Uranium–235, currently in use at all operating NPPs. Introduction of such reactors will mean closing the nuclear fuel cycle (CFC) and transitioning to a new era of nuclear energy. And this technology is only available in Russia.

Back in 2023 the Rosatom State Corporation and China Atomic Energy Authority signed the Comprehensive Program for Long-Term Cooperation on Fast Neutron Reactors and Nuclear Fuel Cycle Closure, and a relevant roadmap was developed in 2024. China is following its own path to developing a closed nuclear fuel cycle, but cooperation with Russia is on the table. For China, this is a chance to make a technological breakthrough in this area and reduce decades of costly in-house research, and for Russia it would be an opportunity to establish its standards as global. It is expected that a Chinese demonstration CFC project will be unveiled in 2035.

Full cooperation and partnership are not mutually exclusive with the competition between China and Russia in the area of nuclear reactor construction globally; and this competition will only intensify. The first major confrontation took place this summer when Kazakhstan was selecting a contractor to build the country's first modern high-power nuclear power plant. Several potential suppliers of nuclear technology were considered, including Chinese CNNC, South Korean KHNP, Rosatom and French EDF corporations. Rosatom won the competition: Kazakhstan's first NPP will be based on two VVER-1200 units. Reactors of the type are in service in Russia and Belorussia, are being constructed in China, Turkey, Bangladesh and Egypt, Hungary is making preparations for construction of such a reactor.

But despite the fact that Rosatom makes most advantageous offers and has extensive construction experience, China is also reinforcing its positions. It is expected that the second and the third NPPs in Kazakhstan will be built by a Chinese company. As a long-term goal, Astana is considering construction of three nuclear power stations, including the option of implementing small modular reactors.

Small Modular Reactors (SMR) are yet another promising area in nuclear power. All Nuclear Club countries are focused on building these, but only Russia and China have such units in operation. China's first HTR-PM small reactor went into service in 2021. But it became the world's second existing small reactor after the "Akademik Lomonosov" Russian floating nuclear power plant.

HTR-PM, a Chinese High-Temperature Gas-Cooled Reactor, the pride of China's nuclear science, is predominantly a Chinese development, based on a German legacy design. However, Russia is also providing assistance in the development of the reactor range, conducting full-scale tests of Chinese design elements at our own sites.

Rosatom is ready to help anyone who wants to develop nuclear energy, and it is not afraid of any competition. In the opinion of the head of the state corporation, Russia will win "in any competition, just because no other company in the world can match the depth of its nuclear technologies, in terms of depth of scientific validity, breadth of competence and scale of activities", as he said in an interview to Russia 24 TV channel.

In response to a question about the fear of losing one's advantages as a result of transferring competencies to foreign companies, he explained: "We are constantly improving our technologies. In this sense, we have no fear that by transferring these projects to other countries for implementation, we are nurturing our own competitors. Our fundamental science, our applied science, the tasks set by the President and the government <...> enable us to advance nuclear technologies at an accelerated pace, and in fact, lead entire countries in many modern solutions".

Ultimately, the combination of cooperation and constructive competition stimulates scientific progress, creating a synergistic effect that is beneficial for all participants in the process. BM

MOSCOW VIDEO GAME AND SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS TO ENTER CHINESE MARKET WITH CITY SUPPORT

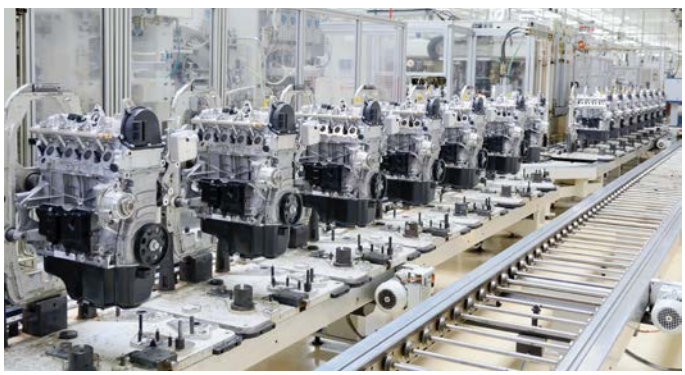
Thanks to the city's support, Moscow companies will place their digital products in 15 major Chinese app stores, such as Huawei AppGallery, Xiaomi GetApps, Tencent MyApp, and others. As a result, Moscow IT businesses will gain access to one of the largest and most promising global markets for software, video games, and apps.

The project is being implemented by the Moscow Export Center (MEC). Participants will be selected based on an expert assessment. Moscow companies will receive various support measures, from interface translation into Chinese and legal support (patent and licensing, legal review of international treaties) to the integration of local payment systems and marketing activities. Thus, Moscow digital products will be available on more than 15 online platforms in China, taking into account local requirements and specifics.

Software, mobile app and video game developers registered in Moscow for more than six months are invited to participate. One can submit an application through one's personal account on the Moscow Export Center website. The committee will select nine companies: five in software development and four in the video game industry.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY HEAD: RUSSIA AND AFRICA MAY INCREASE MUTUAL TRADE VOLUME TO $50 BILLION

Over the past five years, Russia's turnover with African countries has increased by more than 60%, from $16.8 billion to $27.7 billion. By the end of the decade, this figure is expected to reach approximately $50 billion. This was stated by Sergey Katyrin, head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation (RF CCI).



This growth is primarily due to the increased supply of food, mineral fertilizers, energy, and engineering and chemical products. Projects in agricultural technology, agricultural processing, logistics, and construction are currently actively developing. The share of settlements in national currencies is increasing, Katyrin also emphasized. This makes trade more resilient to external fluctuations.

The CCI head reported that demand for Russian products and services is currently growing in African countries. The African market requires solutions in subsoil use, digitalization, nuclear and hydropower, and Russia has the experience to create the necessary infrastructure. A special investment mechanism has been created to support the Russian companies operating in the African market. Cooperation between African institutions and BRICS, the EAEU, and the SCO has great potential, Katyrin believes. 12 of the world's fastest-growing economies are in Africa, that is a credible signal for investors, he stressed.

MOSCOW INCREASES NUMBER OF HOTEL ROOMS

Since 2023, 25 new hotels have opened in Moscow, increasing the number of hotel rooms by 2,408 units and 4,916 beds. Currently, more than 2,200 accommodation facilities are open in Moscow, with the capacity of 445,000 guests. The number of hotel rooms exceeds 114,000, and by 2030, the Moscow tourism development program plans to increase it by another 25,700 rooms. This was announced by Evgeny Kozlov, first deputy head of the Moscow Mayor's and Government Office and Chairman of the Moscow Committee on Tourism.

Demand for accommodation in Moscow is steadily growing. Last year, a new record was set. 26 million travelers visited Moscow. According to preliminary estimates, the occupancy rate of three- to five-star hotels in the city reached 78% this summer.

The city's preferential rent program of "1 ruble per square meter per year" is helping to open new hotels. It allows for the restoration of urban real estate, including architectural landmarks, and the development of the hotel industry. The hotel must occupy at least 75% of the total floor area, and the hotel itself must be rated three, four, or five stars. According to Ekaterina Solovyova, head of the Moscow Department of City Property, investors are currently leasing five buildings with a total floor area of over 2,300 square meters under the program.

2025 BRICS INTERNATIONAL MUNICIPAL FORUM

The 2025 BRICS International Municipal Forum, held in Saint-Petersburg on October 29–31, 2025, showed that today it is cities that are becoming the fastest facilitators of international agreements, and Moscow operates as a de facto methodology center in this system. The Russian capital was represented at the forum by the Department for External and International Relations (DEIR) and the Moscow Centre for International Cooperation; the Government of Moscow acted as the lead partner of the event.

The main intrigue of the forum was not only sharing the experience on "smart cities", but also a transition to practical integration mechanisms: a Program for Cooperation between the Government of Moscow and the Provincial Government of Havana, and also a Memorandum of Intent to establish friendly relations between Moscow and Zhengzhou were signed in Saint-Petersburg. These documents consolidate direct ties between megacities, establishing for them the same level of interaction previously available only to nations: infrastructure, transport, digitalization, culture, urbanism.

City As Economic Actor

Sergey Cheremin, DEIR Head, in his speech voiced the key idea of the forum: the largest cities by scale of their economies are now comparable to individual states, and therefore, they should have their own foreign economic tools. "Moscow has over 150 partner cities and over 100 running cooperation programs, including with the capital cities of BRICS and those, who have only recently joined the organization", — he pointed out. In fact, Moscow is building a network of municipal counterparties in Eurasia, Latin America, in the Middle East and Africa, using municipal diplomacy as a tool to support Russia's foreign economic ties.

For Moscow's partners, the attractiveness is determined not only by the volume and solvency of the capital city's market, but also by the quality of urban policy. In recent years, Moscow has been able to demonstrate several "package" solutions at once: a comprehensive territorial development program, an accelerated transport infrastructure construction model and a powerful suite of digital services. Since 2011, the capital of Russia has commissioned more than 120 metro stations, and

the Big Circle Line has become the world's largest line. Electric buses and electric river transport are being developed in parallel. These are illustrative projects that can be transferred as a technology and as a management model.

E-Government For Exports

The digital part of the Moscow case attracted particular interest from partners. Moscow is a world leader in digital services, ranking in the top three, and, according to Cheremin, today provides about 450 online public services in all key areas— transport, healthcare, education. The key development is the "digital twin" of the city with over 6 thousand layers, allowing for planning of development, utility networks and social infrastructure in an integrated configuration. For BRICS cities facing chaotic urban expansion, this is a ready-made tool to reduce development errors and costs.

Alexey Shaposhnikov, Chairman of the Moscow City Duma, supplemented the technology agenda: Moscow already operates over 100 AI-based projects, and the transition to e-services has already saved about 100 million hours per year for residents. But what is important for an international audience — the capital city is simultaneously developing a regulatory framework and is ready to share it. For this purpose, a Parliamentary Movement for BRICS Capital Cities was created on Moscow's initiative, it is a forum for exchange of legislative decisions, without which the implementation of AI services and digital platforms in cities would simply bog down.

India, China, Latin America: Expanding Geography

The forum also showed a shift in the geography of Moscow's priorities. At the "Russia – India" session, Sergey Cheremin noted that the trade turnover between the countries has already reached $70 billion, and India is a regular top-three foreign economic partner of Russia. At the same time, both parties recognize the imbalance in their trade structure and are looking for new avenues — tourism, textiles, machine building, pharmaceuticals. The Indian side specifically mentioned its interest in Russian IT solutions for "smart" cities

and the transport agenda — Moscow is not only a technology supplier here, but also an example of a large-scale roll-out.

Cooperation with China was discussed at a special session. Moscow spoke of the landmark "Huamin Park" project, Chinese-Russian healthcare initiatives and pointed out that the foreign trade cooperation of the capital city with its Chinese partners has exceeded $104 billion. An important point for the economic magazine: over the latest years, China's direct investment in Moscow has gone over $2 billion, more than 300 large Chinese companies do business in the city. This suggests that municipal diplomacy here has already been converted into real investments, and wasn't limited to cultural exchanges only.

Latin American cities also expressed their interest in Moscow's experience. Execution of a Program with Havana and participation of Governor Yanet Hernández Pérez proved that for countries of the region, BRICS is not only a political support venue, but also a way to access Russian and Chinese urban technologies. The Cuban side openly spoke about the need for "democratization of international relations" and saw city alliances as a tool for circumventing global restrictions.

Municipal Diplomacy As Response To High Funding Costs

The forum was set against the backdrop of a high key interest rate and a slowdown in some infrastructure projects at both the federal and corporate levels. Under these conditions, as emphasized by Sergey Cheremin, cities become more autonomous economic players: they have their own budgets, clear priorities and a fast management chain of command. Municipal cooperation is a way to maintain international activity, even when large business projects require more time for financial closure.

One of the forum's key sessions was aptly named "Municipal cooperation as a driver of regional integration and international economic ties." The session was attended by representatives of Havana, Tehran, Ankara, Tshwane, AIM Congress. The key message of the session was that cities are better positioned to expediently create transparent terms for investors through simplified regulations, entry points, industrial and technology park sites. And Moscow, judging by the level of interest, is perceived as a city that can quickly establish these terms. BM

Routine inventory of large warehouses takes up a few days and costs a pretty penny to owners, and the drones, developed by engineers of a Moscow-based company, perform the same task in a matter of minutes, without diverting labor and financial resources. Evgeni Grankin, CEO and founder of UVL Robotics, in his interview to BM Moscow Foresight spoke about the unique start-up company and various achievements of his business.

Evgeni Grankin:

“There are no analogues to warehouse drones by UVL Robotics anywhere in the world ”

How did it happen that, having started a successful career in Royal Dutch Shell oil and gas corporation in 2006, you took to developing warehouse inventory drones?

At British Shell corporation I worked my way up to the position of the head of project logistics for Russia and Eastern Europe cluster, simultaneously operating as head of the inventory committee.

Let me point out, that any major company, whether it's a manufacturing or retail company, has its own warehouse space of thousands of square meters. Goods have to be counted on schedule, and reports have to be filed with a tax office, as required by law.

Shell had six warehouses under management: cycle count was performed weekly, and full inventory, when the warehouses were shut down for three days, was conducted quarterly. Goods were stacked right up to high ceilings: to look at an item number, you had to climb to a height of more than 10 meters using a forklift and then write down the number and location of containers. It took a lot of effort and nerves.

Manual re-counting invariably resulted in mistakes. Shell multi-tier warehouses stored crates, boxes, barrels. Any inventory controller would feel very tired after two or three hundred containers and could easily register a crate or a barrel instead of a box.

One day it occurred to me that the quite tiresome inventory process could be performed by special-purpose drones. I dreamed of creating something like a remote-controlled drone, climbing up to the ceiling and using a video camera to record goods on multi-tiered racks. Back then it was a rather futuristic idea – UAVs, frankly, were not as widespread as they are today.

In 2016 I started implementing this idea of mine in Moscow, simultaneously working at the Central Scientific Research Automobile and Automotive Engines Institute (NAMI). I founded UVL Robotics two years later.

To tell the truth, it was the coronavirus pandemic, the start of which was announced on March 11, 2022 by the WHO, that helped our business grow. Starting from that day, many warehouse workers were forced to quarantine. The coronavirus caused personnel shortages: warehouse clerks were beneficially replaced by our drones. And then e-commerce got a strong development boost.

Why did UVL Robotics decide to develop its own production of warehouse drones?

Even today, we have to make our own drones, platforms and software (SW) due to the fact that there are still no analogues to our drones on the world market.

Could it really be that after ten years of UVL Robotics' operations, your company still has no competitors on the global market?

In parallel with our proprietary drone development, I closely studied foreign markets, thinking that there were other companies in the world manufacturing warehouse UAVs. However, even in the USA, it seems, the issues of warehouse inventory never aroused interest of any developers. Though, in South Africa and France there were companies working in the area of interest to us. But by early 2020s UVL Robotics had already had at its disposal a more advanced technology, our warehouse drones had proven themselves in practice in Russia and abroad. The company got major investors, we participated in international exhibitions, received awards, and signed contracts.

Today, when the products by UVL Robotics became known far beyond Russia, our company has competitors in the West. For example, several start-up companies have been established in the United States. But, according to their customers, Americans are rushing out "half-baked" products and are not yet ready to widely introduce their solutions into production.

Before February 2022, UVL Robotics, a small start-up company, had managed to gain recognition in America, Europe and the Middle East. If it's not a secret, what original technologies were used to create the UVL Robotics drones?

Our warehouse drone is a multi-rotor type unmanned aerial vehicle powered by rechargeable batteries. Each UAV features a code scanning system, a high-resolution camera, an autonomous positioning system and blade protection to avoid damage to goods.

UVL Robotics' specialists developed a neural network-based detection system, which can find a label, marking, or barcode in a camera's frame and scan it with a laser scanner in real-time. The software puts these into a single file. The file, after a drone route is completed, is exported into a warehouse management system, verifying the collected information against the database to identify any irregularities.

The second technology is local navigation. GPS navigation does not work indoors, this is why we have developed our own system, building a warehouse map for flying along warehouse racks in line with preset algorithms.

UVL Robotics offers its customers a reduction of their inventory count timelines by 50 times, improving work safety by eliminating the human factor, improving inventory count accuracy up to 99,9% and significant cutting of costs for the process.

Which companies or organizations might find your drones interesting and useful?

UVL Robotics classifies its customers into four groups.

The first major group are logistics operators with large warehouses, providing cargo handling and storage services to end customers.

The second group are FMCG companies. For example, PepsiCo (owned by Russian Wimm Bill Dann), which prioritizes continuous improvement of their process productivity because they ship large quantities of goods to retail chains every day. Correspondingly, inventory management is a headache for PepsiCo: in routine operation mode, when no drones are used, the company is forced to stop warehousing operations for a few days.

The third group are industrial corporates, such as Gazpromneft and SINTEC, a manufacturer of motor oils. Both corporations, generally, have large product volumes, and this is why they value both fast and safe operations.

And the fourth group are retail chains or e-commerce companies. Since they have huge warehouses, high turnover of goods, fast and accurate stock count is very important to them.

Can your drones operate outdoors?

About five years ago we entered the inventory market for property, located at open storage sites. These storage systems are actively used by many commodity and manufacturing companies.

The solution, developed by UVL Robotics, comprises an autonomous drone with replaceable antennas, software for autonomous navigation and warehouse layout generation. The UAV is equipped with an RFID reader, capable of automatic identification of objects.

The main advantage of implementing RFID technology is that a customer can track the entire product lifecycle from manufacturer to end customer, and it is not limited to local warehouse inventory management only.

Could you tell us how many customers in Russia use UVL Robotics drones in their warehouses?

Today we provide services to more than 30 Russian customers. Our key customers are major logistics corporations, retailers and FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) companies.

Apart from the well-known brands that I have already mentioned, these are the Kraft Heinz Company food corporation, Kimberly-Clark corporation, specializing in healthcare products, TechnoNICOL, an insulation product manufacturer, Royal Canin, L'oreal, Dixy, owners of major food retail chains, Metro Cash & Carry, FM Logistic company and others.

Despite the sanctions, are you continuing to successfully develop your business abroad?

For obvious reasons, UVL Robotics does not work directly with the USA and Europe. But we have made great progress in the Middle East, particularly, in Oman, where our company is developing a new line of business: autonomous delivery of cargo and mail using drones, as well as transportation of spare parts for industrial equipment to hard-to-reach areas.

I would like to note here that in many Western countries we have encountered severe restrictions from regulators, for example, bans on overflying cities, flights near airports and highways. Then we decided to go a different way and turned our attention to the Sultanate of Oman, where the government and the business did not mind changing the existing standards to implement autonomous delivery to remote regions of the country.

In 2018 we were able to provide unprecedented support to the people of Oman after a natural disaster – we had managed to deliver medicines to locations inaccessible to any standard means of transport. UVL Robotics turned out to be the first company in the Middle East to be granted an official permit for delivery by drones in the Sultanate of Oman.

We performed drone test runs in the Arab Emirates – in Abu-Dhabi and Dubai, and also in Saudi Arabia. A prospect of working in warehouses in India and Brazil has emerged, major companies from South Africa, Ethiopia and a number of other African countries, are interested in cooperating with us.

Recently Skolkovo hosted an "Unmanned Systems" international forum. On the sidelines of the forum, we signed a memorandum of cooperation with a number of major Ethiopian companies, interested in implementing the same technologies by UVL Robotics that are used in Oman.

During my latest trip to the PRC I had visited 10 large plants and it turned out that the Chinese do not have any warehouse drone technologies. So, I believe that great opportunities are opening up for our company at the domestic market of China.

How successful is your company in the CIS countries?

UVL Robotics operates in the CIS countries through its partners. These are small markets for us, though there are warehouse logistics customers there. But delivery prices are very low and there are significant restrictions on drone operations. This is why investors are reluctant to risk their money on development of this business. So let me be frank: it would be inexpedient to set up a whole drone fleet in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan.

How much weight can your drones carry?

Now they can carry up to 100 kilograms. But we have started focusing on the most mass-market segment: parcel delivery and e-commerce. If we look at the statistics of international express delivery companies, UPS, DHL and FedEx, for goods and documents, then 80% of all deliveries are packages up to five kilograms.

Do your technologies provide for any special drone landing and takeoff pads? What can you say about safety of the drones?

Another advantage we have is that we have created a special drone landing pad, which is also a smart parcel station (or a parcel locker). High-precision sensors guide drone landing, and then a parcel is automatically unloaded. Then it sinks into the locker and into a relevant section. Then an end customer comes to pick it up at a convenient time and retrieves his parcel in three minutes at the most. And we are also not wasting any time on recharging – a robot would automatically replace the battery, and that's it, the drone can fly along.

Our second advantage is that we have learned to make safe drones. There are three most important concerns in the Middle East: privacy, reliability and safety. Privacy means no cameras on a drone, so you do not violate any personal space when flying over houses and villas. This concern is of the utmost importance in the Middle East, though many companies disregard it while chasing profits.

UVL Robotics' developers take the safety issue very seriously: a drone, flying over a city, over mosques, over people should not create any issues, noise or discomfort in an urban environment.

World practice shows that drones around the world crash for various reasons. The question is, how do they fall? How do your drones fall down?

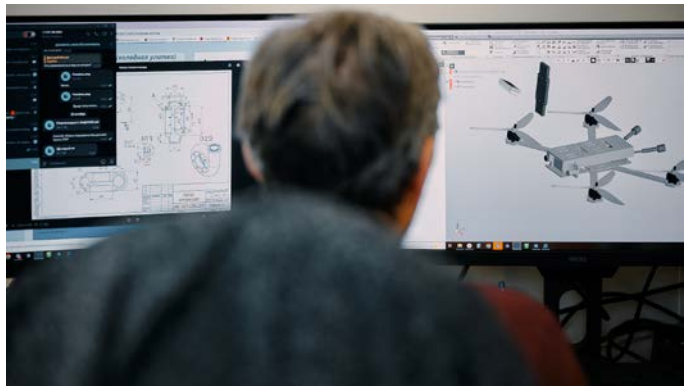
Our drones fall down too, but with a parachute and a soft landing system, in a special designated area. Even if a motor locks up or the electronics malfunction, our drone would land within the closest perimeter in a safe zone, away from people. These safe waypoints are input in a drone's mission.

The New Scientist, describing American drone operations, reported that developers had an idea to set up a collision avoidance system for UAVs ...

This is where Americans are lagging behind Russian developments! Each UVL Robotics drone is equipped with a collision avoidance system. When the global airspace will be buzzing with thousands of UAVs, making deliveries every day, it should be understood, how these drones would communicate between themselves, interact with small aircraft, fly around skyscrapers. We are working in this area now.

The weather in the Arabian Peninsula is hot. How are Russian drones doing there? Are UVL Robotics' drones designed to operate in cold conditions?

June to September is the hottest season in Oman. During the day, the air temperature can reach +40–45 °C, and the humidity increases significantly. Of course, the developers were immediately faced with the task of adapting the drones to work in tropical desert climates. First of all, we had managed to solve the issue of cooling the device. Today our drone with a pre-cooled battery can fly a pre-set distance and land on a smart parcel station, which has a cooling system, enabling the drone to restore necessary conditions and fly further on. In addition, due to the heat, flights have to be limited to 15-20 minutes.



Just recently UVL Robotics has conducted a demonstration inventory count at a METRO warehouse in Noginsk, where drones operated in spaces with varying temperatures, down to -24°C in a deep freeze warehouse. Our drone tests had shown that they could withstand even lower temperatures.

Evgeni Dmitriyevich, your company is constantly expanding. Where do you plan to get a whole army of skilled professionals, capable of controlling drones?

In Oman UVL Robotics local representatives select local Arab candidates. No special IT education is required for candidates. They will be trained to operate our equipment.

Today we already have the employees whom we consider our partners. The local staff are very enthusiastic about performing their duties and they like their job.

I'll tell you about Said, just one of our technical managers, who is an Omani. Said is the head of the drone fleet service team – workers repair and tune up UAVs. You can count on people like him.

How successful is the cooperation of your company with the Government of Moscow?

The results of our cooperation are clear. Since 2018 the company has been a resident at Skolkovo, which is currently managed by Moscow. They know UVL Robotics technologies and products very well and trust us.

In 2021 the company got a large grant for the development of a hardware and software system for warehouse inventory control. This money helped us to create the warehouse drones that currently operate at many indoor and outdoor sites in Moscow. BM

RUSSIAN LITHIUM: MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE

The subject of lithium in Russia has always been the domain of a small group of industry professionals, those who fully aware of the importance of this strategic alkali metal for the economy. There was no question of it becoming an object of sustained national interest, like oil, gas, gold or coal. But the times are changing, and life generates more and more plots, where lithium calls for attention of both the state and people, being a priceless resource of the future.

The main plot is tied to the Kolmozerskoye deposit of rare-earth metals in Murmansk region. The deposit was discovered in 1947 by scientists from the Geological Institute of the Kola Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, it contains over 500 thousand tons of lithium, which makes for about 24% of total national reserves. A year ago production at the deposit was licensed to OOO Polar Lithium, a joint enterprise of Rosatom and MMC Norilsk Nickel.

Field geological exploration work is currently being completed, which would make Russia one of the world's top three leaders in reserves. It is planned to start production as soon as in 2026, and this will most likely allow the country to meet its needs for this metal, and according to a statement by Denis Manturov, First Vice Prime Minister, to start exporting it in 2030. By this time the Ministry of Industry and Trade has plans to get 85 thousand tons of lithium carbonate (hydroxide).

Geological features of the Kolmozerskoye deposit make it unique on a global scale. The principal ore-forming mineral of the deposit is spodumene, containing almost 97% of lithium oxide (Li2O). This is a type of lithium ore from which the metal is significantly easier and cheaper to extract than from the more common lepidolite. Along with lithium, deposits of rare elements - tantalum, niobium, cesium, rubidium, and beryllium have also been discovered, which makes it even more important against the backdrop of a growing demand for raw materials for the production of batteries and electronics.

According to Nikita Maslennikov, lead expert of the Center for Political Technologies, in terms of extraction efficiency and technological feasibility the Kolmozerskoye deposit looks extremely attractive. This is primarily due to its composition of mineral raw material: spodumene is objectively much more valuable to miners than lepidolite. As for the total proven reserves of lithium in the RF territory, according to the last year's data, these amount to 3,5 million tons of lithium oxide (Li2O). This is 6,5% of the global volume and the fourth place in the world: Bolivia, Argentina and Chile are ahead of us. The reserves are concentrated in two clusters – Murmansk (1,2 million tons) and Irkutsk-Zabaikalye (2,3 million tons).

During the Soviet years, lithium was produced at the country's only Zavitinsky Mine in Eastern Zabaikalye, built back in 1941. About 40% of the reserves were extracted, and in 1997 the deposit was mothballed due to "adverse economic conditions", and more specifically due to unprofitability of production. After this, domestic needs were covered mainly by supplies from the three above-mentioned Latin American countries, and this trade was carried out exclusively in hard currency. The West's sanctions freeze on foreign currency reserves of the RF rendered this format unviable: nothing else could be used to pay for the metal, and in 2022 Argentina and Chile suspended deliveries. Ultimately, the import of lithium raw material crashed by 60%, and Russian processing capacity has virtually ceased to function. This is why from the start of the SMO the government (primarily represented by the Ministry of Industry and Trade) became concerned about how to achieve full self-sufficiency in the shortest possible time.

According to Maslennikov, currently in Russia there are 17 lithium ore deposits of varying degrees of development and,

correspondingly, involvement in the production process, which, in essence, is just getting started. Mining the ore is only half the job. It is still necessary to build chemical plants and establish the production of compounds suitable for batteries. All of this requires robust infrastructure: treatment, processing, logistics. So for now lithium has to be imported, in very small quantities.

"It is important not to be content with the role of the owner"

There are two ways to mine lithium: hard-rock mining and brine extraction. In the first case the metal is extracted from rock formations in mines (for example, at the Kolmozerskoye deposit), in the second case the metal is extracted from ground waters with high mineral content. The hard-rock mining is more expensive, but it allows to extract lithium within a month. This way remained the only way till the 1990s of the XX century, until in Chile they learned how to extract lithium from brines – concentrates, found at a shallow depth, below two meters. Evaporation of the concentrate (after the concentrate is pumped out of the ground by powerful pumps) requires huge amounts of water: production of a ton of the metal requires almost 2 million liters of water. The process could take up to 18 months. However, the end result more than pays for all the costs.

The range of industrial applications of lithium is inexhaustible. First of all, it is a key component of lithium-ion (Li-Ion) batteries, without which electric cars and electric buses won't start or drive, and laptops and smartphones won't turn on. All alternative energy sources – wind, solar, wave – require large power storage capacity.

This metal is added to aluminum alloys, reducing their weight and increasing their strength, which is critical for the aerospace and space industries. Lithium compounds are used in nuclear reactor cooling systems, in dentistry and pharmaceuticals, in the production of plastics and building materials. Lubricants with lithium are in demand in the aviation and military industries, because they ensure the operation of equipment in extreme temperature conditions.

"According to forecasts, by 2040 the volume of global consumption of lithium, the lightest metal on the planet, will grow by 40 times", - says Nikita Maslennikov. – In this situation for Russia it is important not to be content with the role of the owner of world's largest raw lithium reserves, but to become on par with leading producers and processors. Today, the production volume is about 1 thousand tons per year. It is planned to increase this volume by ten times to 2028 – up to 10 thousand tons, and to achieve complete sovereignty and start exports by 2030".

According to the expert, a government investment program for ₽150 billion envisions the development at the Kolmozerskoye deposit of a full production cycle for batteries. Lithium, which is also called "white gold", is a critical element for energy transition: without it, there would be not only electric cars, but no gadgets, power storage and accumulation devices whatsoever".

Alexander Larin

Capital City Specifics

As for lithium batteries, their advantages are undeniable: they charge fast (for example, an electric bus charges in 20 minutes), without emitting harmful substances and are highly efficient: up to 95% of the battery energy is utilized. In this regard, we can recall as in the summer of 2020 Moscow completely retired one of the city's symbols – the trolleybus: the authorities quite reasonably decided that in terms of performance trolleybuses were inferior to electric buses. Indeed, both types of urban public transport run on electricity, but the differences are significant. Moscow's electric buses, assembled in Neftekamsk, a city in Bashkortostan, at NEFAZ factory, a subsidiary of KAMAZ, are truly mobile (they are not tied to trolleybus power lines), they are more environmentally friendly than trolleybuses and have better off-road capability.

Another obvious advantage is the so-called regenerative braking (Lat. recuperatio — "reverse reception; return"): when the driver applies the brakes, the engine switches to generator mode and begins to charge the batteries. This helps to save energy and increases the range. Lithium-ion batteries (there are also lithium, nickel, manganese and cobalt, NMC batteries), used in the electric buses, have high energy density and allow you to travel a significant distance on a single charge. Generally, lithium stores more energy by weight than other battery materials, such as cadmium.

It is also important, that it is fully suitable for recycling because it is not a consumable raw material like oil. Moscow authorities decided to use this property of lithium to benefit the Moscow Metro: lithium-ion batteries, that are no longer in service, are planned to be used in the metro power supply systems, to replace the traditional lead batteries. According to Maxim Liksutov, Deputy Mayor for Transport and Industry, even after the end of their service life in electric buses, batteries retain 40-50% of their original capacity. "They fully comply with all safety requirements and are capable of serving in the metro for about ten more years", - pointed out the vice-mayor.

There is yet another point: The implementation of this innovative idea will not require additional expenditure from the city budget, unlike purchase of new lead-acid batteries.

General summary: Neither Moscow's, nor the national economy could do without lithium. Over time, the significance of this alkali metal, its role and place in various spheres of life, from household use to infrastructure megaprojects, will only increase. All that remains is to learn how to make the most of this rich resource potential, of which other countries could only dream. And we'd better be quick about this.

Dmitry Mateychik: **“I'LL SPILL THE BEANS ABOUT THE SECRETS OF CHOCOLATE MAKING”**

KADZAMA is a name that is undeniably familiar to chocolate business owners all over the world. The company produces mini-factories for artisans, not only helping to make money, but, most interestingly, to entertain and educate those with a sweet tooth. Dmitry Mateychik, founder and CEO of KADZAMA, in his interview to BM Moscow Foresight spoke about the unique project.

Is there any specific meaning to the name of your company?

The name KADZAMA is derived from “kaizen”, a Japanese word, and completely reflects the system of our corporate values. Kaizen is a Japanese business philosophy, focused on continuous improvement. Apart from this, KADZAMA is just catchy and beautiful!

A question for you as a professional chocolatier: is it true that “good chocolate should be expensive”?

I cannot agree with this, since the price is still determined by the manufacturer. You can make chocolate from mediocre raw materials, but once you pack it in an expensive, beautiful wrapper, there will be no shortage of buyers. Crafty sellers make a lot of money on this, though it could happen the other way around. For example, I know small producers and artisans who buy very high-quality raw materials, and they sell their product cheap just because they haven't invested in packaging, marketing, or advertising. Such mini-factories usually survive only thanks to regular customers, perfectly aware of high quality real value of such chocolate.

Is chocolate good or bad for you?

Like any other product, if consumed in moderation, chocolate does not harm human health. They say that chocolate contains sugar, and that it is especially harmful for diabetics. The problem with diabetes is not the sugar itself, but the amount of its consumption and with attitude towards one's body and health. So chocolate is not to blame for anything.

For some reason, many people believe that chocolate producers themselves do not consume it. What's your favorite kind of chocolate?

I eat chocolate all the time, but mostly out of professional curiosity, and it could be both cheap and expensive chocolate. I often come across counterfeit and low-quality chocolate, but I taste it all with just one goal in my mind – to get to the bottom of it, to the limits, and to find the summit of the art of craft chocolate making.

Where do you think the best chocolate in the world is made today?

I wouldn't risk naming specific addresses. Of course, today there are such well-known industry leaders as Lindt & Sprüngli, Ritter Sport, Mars, Nestlé, Ferrero, but the world's best chocolate could be made by a regular craftsman or confectioner, living somewhere in Africa, Belgium or in Russia. His name would be known only to a few professionals and those who love sweets. He does his job without fanfare, using high-quality raw materials and natural ingredients, and he does not shout out “I am the best!”

Chocolate is a delicacy, therefore, as international experts believe, it is mostly consumed in areas with a high standard of living and a cool climate.

Russia occupies one of the leading positions in this conditional rating. Our standard of living is quite high, and most of the country is located in cold latitudes.

And what about the legendary chocolate bars, such as Alyonka, Gvardeisky, Zolotoy Yarlik, Vdokhnovenie, which were exported and glorified the USSR?

Soviet chocolate was high quality, but not the best in the world. First, they had very high quality standards back then, strictly observed at such factories as Rot Front, Red October or Spartak. All of these enterprises were state-owned. If a chocolate factory made poor chocolates, consumers blamed the state for it.

The second point was the access of Soviet manufacturers to high-quality raw materials. A lot of cocoa bean growing countries supported socialism, and that's why Moscow had guaranteed access to high-quality raw materials. Roughly speaking, machines and equipment were sent to Cuba, and the USSR got high-quality raw materials for chocolate production.

Where do chocolate factories buy their raw materials today?

Cocoa beans grow on cocoa trees, which are plants cultivated in the tropics of both hemispheres. The origin of cocoa is the Amazon rainforest, but today the trees are grown in subequatorial countries with a warm and humid climate.

Cocoa beans are supplied to the global market by Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uganda, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and many other countries with poor economies located near the equator. During the Soviet era our factories had strong ties with these countries.

Is the equipment you manufacture capable of processing nuts??

Our equipment allows us to make chocolate and nut pastes. The nuts are ground into a filling, which is then used either for candies, or as a standalone product like Nutella.

You produce mini-factories for artisans. And who are those artisans?

Craftsmen today work in small workshops in the small business sector. They have firmly established themselves, let's say, in blacksmithing, sewing, pottery, chocolate making.

Craftsmanship is almost always about handmade products, with high-quality ingredients and small quantities of products. An artisan shoemaker will never make two identical pairs of shoes.

Any reader of your magazine, if they want, could learn the craft of a confectioner in two years and even make the best chocolate in the world. You just need to set this goal. There is nothing super complicated about producing a delicacy that meets world standards. It's much harder to make money selling chocolate.

What does your product range look like, which equipment has the highest sales volume? Why is it unique?

KADZAMA focuses on equipment for the production of chocolate, candies, dragees, and nut pastes.

Our products are used at all stages of chocolate production. Businesses can buy everything they need – from cocoa roasters to chocolate bar templates. New products feature cocoa bean crushers with glass viewing windows. The equipment by the company is in high demand with Russian craft chocolate makers and is exported to over 60 countries.

Our main product, by which we are recognized in the world, is called melanger – this is a stone mill with granite millstones. This is a standard operation: a bowl rotates, inside there are two granite millstones, grinding cocoa beans or nuts. This simple machine was invented over 100 years ago in large European factories. But since modern factories have gone far ahead in terms of equipment, and this seemingly obsolete technology is no longer viable for major chocolate factories. Nevertheless, it is of use to our mini-factories and brings hefty profits to their owners. This is what our achievement is about.

The global chocolate equipment market itself is small, so there aren't many competitors for us there. It so happened that today KADZAMA is the best company in the world, manufacturing this equipment.

You have said that the equipment under the KADZAMA brand, made in Russia, is supplied to 60 countries. So it turns out that chocolate has not been subject to Western sanctions?

No, it hasn't. Literally all of Europe continues to buy our equipment - Germany, France, Holland, Belgium, Czech Republic, Spain, Poland, Finland, Norway ... KADZAMA has customers in North America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Our mini chocolate factories operate in Hawaii (USA) and even on the island of Reunion (an overseas department of France) in the Indian Ocean.

In Russia, small businesses are also showing growing interest in chocolate equipment by KADZAMA.

Isn't anyone in Russophobic Europe alarmed by the fact that the equipment was made in Russia?

Those small business representatives in the West who are doing business, working their fingers to the bone, have no time for political intrigue and insinuations. They need to feed their families, pay for education of their children and healthcare of elderly people.

Dmitry Vasilievich, it is still unclear, why would small businesses in Belgium, France or, let's say, in Germany, where they reputedly make the best chocolate in the world, purchase equipment from a Russian company?

Because our equipment for mini-factories is better and more reliable in operation than that of others. These are not my words; this is what our clients all over the world think.

You produce not only equipment for chocolate production, but also chocolate itself?

Indeed, we call it Chocolat Frais. It has an unusual taste -

a mixture of traditional cocoa notes with a hint of bitter absinthe. Chocolat Frais became a real pleasure and enjoyment for true gourmets, as did the ritual of tasting the best varieties of chocolate, which we offer during our interactive tour of our Moscow factory for children and adults.

Where are KADZAMA's assembly shops located?

Our production facilities are located in Tula, where we assemble melangers, crushers, tempering machines, freezers and other equipment.

The total floor area of the shops and warehouses is about 1000 m2. All in all, KADZAMA is a small business.

In our Shosse Entuzuiastov office in Moscow, we provide services to our customers and develop, conceive new equipment. We also have a small chocolate production shop, where we, without bothering anyone, conduct master classes for schoolchildren, their parents and teachers.

You have more than once mentioned your idea – to create a global network of mini-factories under the common Frais brand. Could you please expound on this?

My idea is that our mini-factories are not so much for producing chocolate as they are for introducing people in different countries to how it is made, which equipment and raw materials are used.

At our operating Moscow mini-factory our specialists conduct master classes and teach everyone the basics of the profession. This is a place where history, science and of course magic of the most popular treat on the planet. In other words, I want to lift the veil on the secret of chocolate making.

50 and more kids, mostly aged 6-12 y.o., arrive to us by buses, together with their parents and teachers. You know, we have not had a single adult say "It was boring!" It turns out they want to try out for themselves how to operate a crusher, a melanger, and how you can make chocolate out of cocoa beans.

We also have yet another adult audience – members of the "Moscow Longevity" club. Older people are also interested in our tours and master classes, where they could process cocoa into chocolate with their own hands.

We are becoming popular. KADZAMA is making good money on factory tours.

A similar establishment, the Chocolate Museum, has for more than 30 years remained one of Cologne's top tourist destinations, greeting more than 600 000 visitors every year.

As for setting up 400 mini-factories across the world, I believe we will do this in partnership with local businessmen in about three years. And they will operate under Frais, a common brand. Let's say there was a company in Brazil that liked our idea. We will supply them with chocolate mini-factories, and they will have to manage production and delivery of master classes. We plan to conduct online trainings for future professionals.

What name have you picked for your "chocolate houses"?

They will have a common name – "Frais Distributed Confectionery Factory".

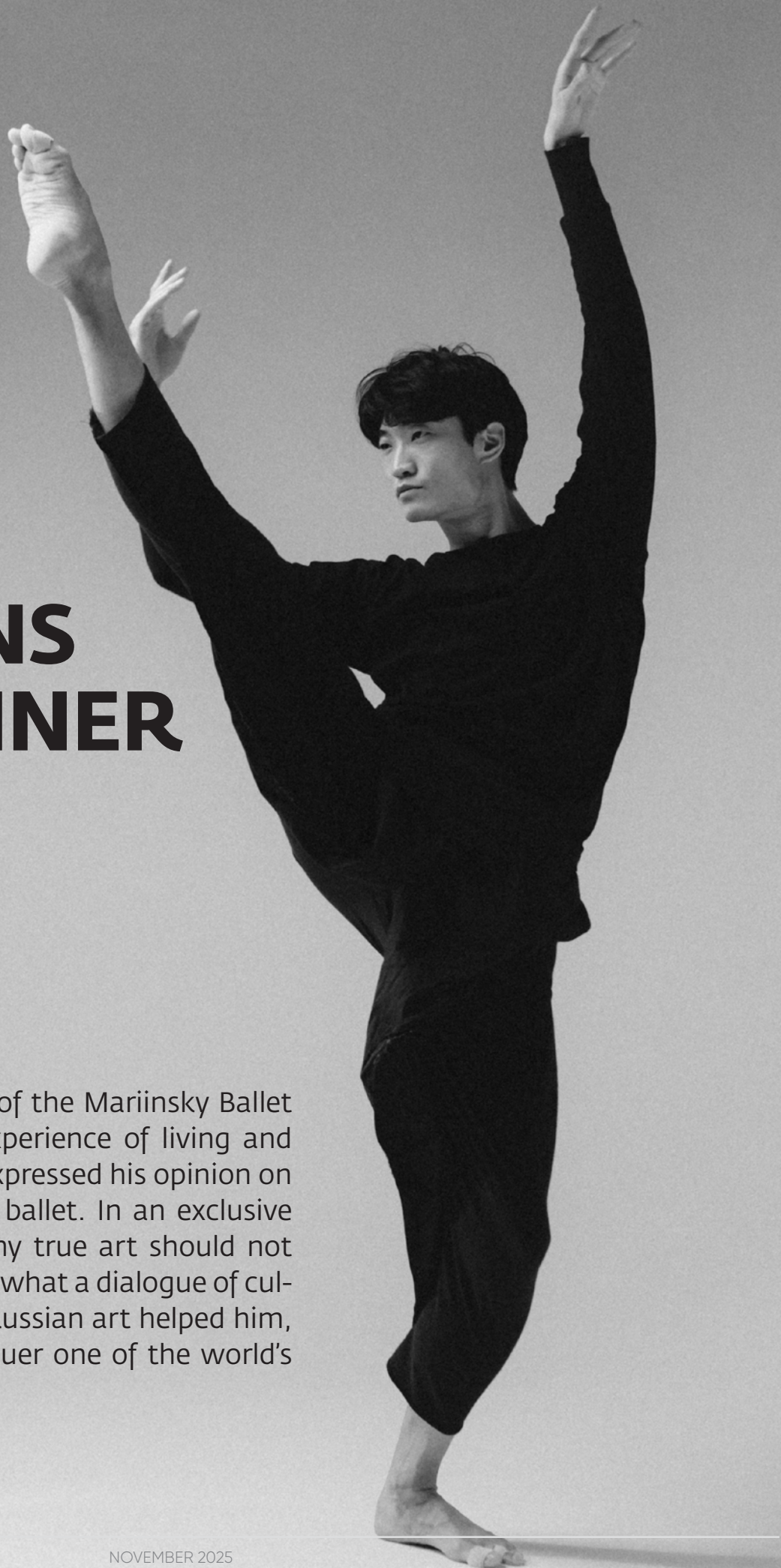
How many of the 400 factories do you plan to open in Russia?

At least more than half of the mini-factories will be in Russia. The territory of our country is vast and it will be easier to negotiate with entrepreneurs here than in Europe or Latin America. In any case, we have already opened the first spot in Moscow.

How does KADZAMA intend to build its cooperation with the Government of Moscow?

KADZAMA is young company that is not large. We have limited experience communicating with representatives of Moscow departments and the Moscow Innovation Cluster, which facilitates the development of high-tech product exports. But the fact that the MIC brings together Moscow companies ranging from start-ups to major corporations and research institutes, gives our business more confidence in the future. KADZAMA would like to be useful to Russia and Muscovites.

Andrei Sokolov



Kim Kimin:

“ART AWAKENS YOUR INNER SELF”

Kim Kimin, the premier of the Mariinsky Ballet Company, shared his experience of living and working in Russia and expressed his opinion on the future of the world ballet. In an exclusive interview, he reveals why true art should not chase and follow trends, what a dialogue of cultures means, and how Russian art helped him, a Korean artist, to conquer one of the world’s most prestigious stages.

Do you feel like being kind of a "cultural bridge" between East and West?

First of all, I feel responsibility since I represent both Korea and the Mariinsky Theatre in Russia. I would be happy if I could contribute to forging friendly ties between the two countries through my endeavours. However, my main audience is currently Russian, as most of my performances take place in the Russian Federation.

Dance is considered to be a universal language. Do you notice fundamental differences in emotional expression and body language technique between the Russian ballet school you work in and the Korean or international school?

In this case, it is more accurate to talk not about school, but about culture. In Korea, ballet is presented in the same format as the Russian ballet school. My teachers, Vladimir Kim and Margarita Kullik, are representatives of the Russian school, and my "base" the movements of my arms and legs was established by them. Therefore, it is easy for me to dance in Russia. However, culture also leaves its mark. That's why I read Russian novels and listen to Russian music with great interest, not only to learn the techniques of Russian ballet, but also to penetrate the essence of the Russian soul, to fully understand the Russian audience and communicate with them in the same language.

Did Russian ballet help you learn Russian faster?

The Russian language is very difficult, but the body language and personal communication make it easier to acquire good command of this verbal instrument. Even when speaking the same language, misunderstandings can occur, so it is better to conduct all important negotiations in person. Through the body language on stage, we interact closely with the audience. I also feel the conductor's mood very well, which he conveys through the music, and I adapt to it. My teachers instilled this ability in me.

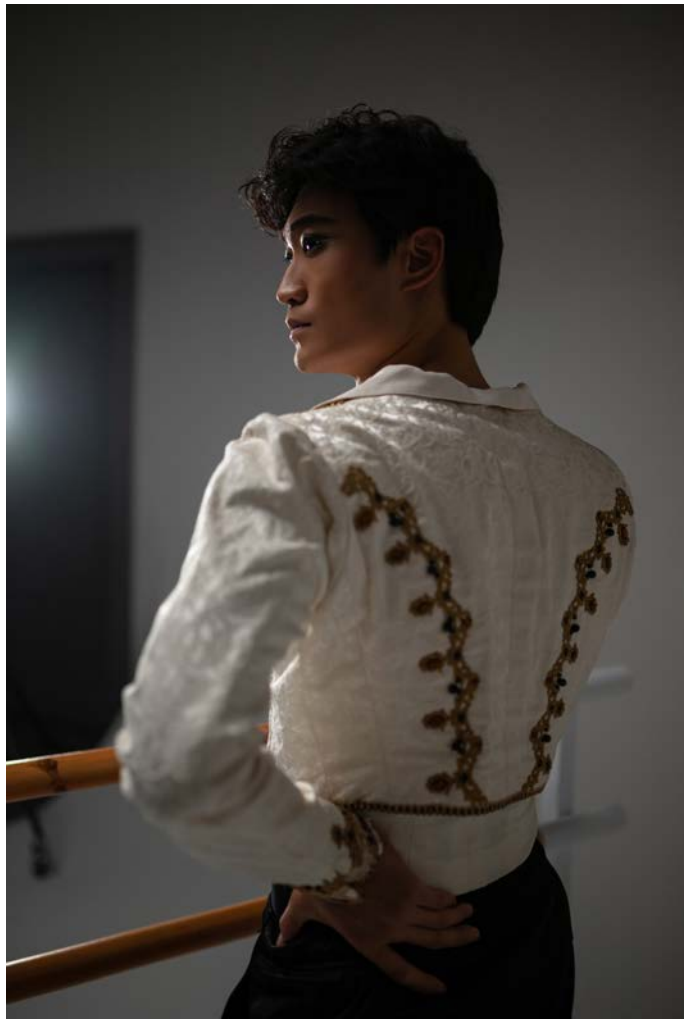
The city where you live and work, St. Petersburg, also has its own mood and character, which is often sort of harsh. However, the city captivates with its architecture, art, and unique ambiance. Does the city's atmosphere influence your creative tonus?

For me, this is the most beautiful city. I feel ashamed that I haven't seen all of its worthy sights in the 15 years I've been living here. As I explore this city, I realize why so many legendary artists have been born here and left the legacy of their work here. They are brilliant in their own right, but the city has also played a significant role in their creative work. St. Petersburg has had a profound impact on me as well. I love dancing here.

How do you feel in Moscow?

I also enjoy visiting Moscow. I really like the Sapsan express train. For those who live here, it's all very familiar: you don't feel the same beauty that visitors note. This is true everywhere. However, after 15 years of living in Russia, in St. Petersburg, I still find it exciting to travel to Moscow and explore other cities in the country.

What was the most unexpected challenge you faced when you moved to Russia, whether it was in the ballet class, everyday life in St. Petersburg, or exploring and discovering the Russian mentality?



The most complicated part was understanding the Russian mentality. Russia is like a second home to me. I love Russian literature, music, and art, but I am still Korean. Everyone has only one homeland. Therefore, I see Russia through Korean eyes. I love it here, and I see the beauty of this place. If I'm in a bad mood, I get behind the wheel and just drive around the city. St. Petersburg is especially mesmerizing at night.

As for the challenge... The Russian people are very emotional for me. Koreans are more reserved and closed, and we don't show our emotions. That's why it was difficult for me to express myself on stage at first, and I was very shy.

What turned out to be easier for you than you expected?

The weather. I adapted quickly. I like the Russian winter. It was also scary to live alone in a foreign country with a distinct culture. People in Korea know much less about Russia than they do about the United States. But it's easy for me in Russia. The Russian people are very helpful and honest. I have a very close friend here, and he once told me, "Kimin, don't worry, the people of St. Petersburg are very kind."

When I first arrived here, Victoria Teryoshkina, my partner in the ballet The Corsair, gave me the card of a Korean restaurant at our first rehearsal to help me feel less homesick. It made me feel very warm inside. All the artists at the Mariinsky Theatre are just as helpful, always ready to assist.

Which role and which ballet was the toughest challenge for you to come to terms with the stage character?

The ballet "Leningrad Symphony." I wanted to refuse the main role because I'm not Russian. I felt that I didn't have the right to do it, that it would be disrespectful to the Russian people. But the ballet master, Gabriela Trofimovna Komleva, approached me and said, "Kimin, you must do this. You can do it." I take my roles very seriously and responsibly. To get under the skin of a stage character, I watched seven or eight black-and-white movies from that time.

Sergei Prokofiev's ballet "Romeo and Juliet", Renata Shakirova and Kim Kimin

The life of a professional ballet dancer demands incredible discipline. Have you faced differences in the approach to nutrition and fitness in Russia and Korea?

I have never had any problems with my diet. I have always been slim. I can eat anything (Korean, Russian, Japanese, European... cuisine), and I enjoy it all. Food is a source of happiness for me.

As for discipline, I know my strengths and weaknesses, and I constantly work to improve myself and overcome my shortcomings. I've been accustomed to doing everything to the best of my ability since childhood, waking up early and engaging in additional training to maintain my optimal fitness. As a result, I have limited time for socializing, and I rarely go out with friends for coffee.

How do you relax?

I prefer to stay at home, watch movies, listen to music, talk on the phone, and read books. These activities provide the best form of relaxation. For ballet dancers, it's important that their legs stay higher than their hearts during rest time. I don't need to relax in any other way. I love ballet, I'm a fan, and it's not a burden for me; it's a pleasure.

Which ballet contests and competitions were the most significant for you? Tell us about this experience.

The Arabesque Ballet Competition in Perm, where I won the Grand Prix. My idol, Vladimir Vasilyev, was present at the competition, and I was very excited to perform in front of him. He once said that he had never seen Kimin perform in a full stage performance, and he came to watch the ballet La Bayadère at the Mariinsky Theatre. He has very powerful internal energy and charisma; when he's sitting in the audience, it feels like there are not 1,500 people watching the performance, but a million. It was very exciting to perform in front of him. Thankfully, he always gave me positive feedback.

Performing at the Mariinsky Theatre is a dream for many. You have probably fulfilled your own aspirations. What is your next big artistic goal?

I just love to dance, and it's important for me to have a new repertoire, new choreography, and new work. I love classical ballet, but we live in a modern world, and we need to move forward, which means having new stories and new choreography. It's not just about performing Swan Lake, Don Quixote, or La Bayadère in their original form; I want to see and participate in completely new productions. We need to create new ballets so that future generations can dance our ballets in our suggested version, and so that they can appreciate them as we do. Classics, and art in general, allow us to see the sleeping "I" within ourselves.

Where is the world of ballet heading now, and what are the current trends?

Ballet performances are becoming shorter and more dynamic. This reflects the dynamics and trends of the times. However, I disagree with this approach. Great art should not adapt to the audience's demands; it should be slow-paced and thought-provoking. Art should educate. Today's children are no longer able to maintain their attention for long periods, and this is a huge problem. There is popular music designed for the masses, and then there is classical music. These are different genres with different goals. I want to show what I love and engage the audience in what I enjoy. It's worth noting that our ballet dancers face a challenging task: time demands quick action, but they leave this hustle and bustle behind the scenes.

What message does ballet as an art form convey?

Ballet cannot be an item of the "one size fits all" type, but it must be loved. Art is necessary for people. It is not a matter of choice, but a duty for individuals. It brings peace and happiness. Art awakens the inner self.

Where do you see your personal future: in Russia? In Korea?

It depends on my wife, who I do not have yet. To be honest, I do not believe that a family is necessary. I am willing to live alone. But if I have a wife and children, I will be happy. Ultimately, the future is determined by Fate.

Kim Kimin was interviewed by Ekaterina Borisova

Sergei Prokofiev's ballet "Romeo and Juliet", Renata Shakirova and Kim Kimin

BM Moscow Foresight

Founder
Department for Foreign Economic and International Relations
of the Government of Moscow
E-mail: dvms@mos.ru

Publisher
InterMediaCom Ltd
E-mail: info@imc.su

The magazine is registered with
at the Federal Authority
of Legislative Control in Mass Media
and Cultural Heritage Protection.
Media registration certificate
FS77-52596 issued January 25, 2013.

BM Moscow Foresight #9, November 2025
Site: moscowforesight.ru
Telegram channel: t.me/moscowforesight
VK page: vk.com/moscowforesight

Photo provided by:
Photographer: Nikita Shorinov, Marianna Sorokina
Provided by Press Service of the Department of Entrepreneurship
and City Innovative Development of Moscow, Press Service
of the Moscow City Property Department
Private archive: Yekaterina Borisova, Kim Kimin, Timur Aitov, Ivan Timofeev
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