

**Presentation of H.E. Mr. Kirill Barsky,
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“RUSSIA, THE WORLD AND RUSSIAN-THAI RELATIONS”

November 29, 2017

May I please, Your Royal Highness, extend my warm welcome to Your Royal Highness as well as to the commanders, professors and cadets of the Chulachomkiao Royal Military Academy. It is my honor to welcome Your Royal Highness and Your students at the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Kingdom of Thailand.

It gives me special pleasure to speak before Your Royal Highness at the time when Russia and Thailand are celebrating the 120th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. This is why my presentation entitled “Russia, the World and Russian-Thai relations” seems to me more than appropriate and timely.

I have no illusions, Your Royal Highness, that Your profound knowledge on Russia leaves me little opportunity to provide You with new insights, especially after Your Highness visited my country for the second time in October 2017 spending nine fruitful and busy days in Moscow, Sochi and Saint Petersburg. However, by my presentation I will try to further streamline Your understanding of Russia and maybe even to surprise Your Royal Highness with some new facts and figures.

It is common knowledge that Russia is the largest country in the world by territory. But it will be interesting to take note that this vast nation covers more than one-eighth of the inhabited land area of the Earth and is as big as Pluto, the ninth planet of the Solar system. It will take you 10 hours to fly from Kaliningrad, the most western city of Russia, to Vladivostok on the Pacific coast. Russia spans nine time zones and has all climates except tropical. Russia is the “champion of neighborhoods”: it borders 18 countries! Surrounded by 12 seas and three oceans,

Russia has the most extensive coastline in the world. 100, 000 Russian rivers and lakes contain 25% of the fresh water branded by many experts as the strategic resource of the future.

But Russia is blessed to possess a wide variety of other natural resources too. We have 24.4% of the world deposits of gas and second biggest deposits of coal. Russia is the largest producer of diamonds and belongs to top three nickel and platinum producing countries. In terms of oil reserves, Russia is rated the sixth, in gold - the seventh. My home country is the No. 1 exporter of wheat and rye, natural gas, cast iron and rolled steel, jet fighters, tanks and air defense systems as well as nuclear fuel. And we are building more nuclear power plants in Russia and in foreign countries than anyone else in the world.

If Your Royal Highness and dear cadets present here are curious about more amazing facts, just imagine - Siberia has more than 25% of the world's forests! To travel along the Trans-Siberian railway connecting Moscow and Vladivostok, the longest railroad in the world, will take a passenger 7 days allowing to pass through 87 towns and to cross 16 rivers. The length of all gas and oil pipelines in Russia is almost 260,000 kilometers, which is six times longer than equator.

However we believe that our greatest treasure is our people - talented, creative, highly cultured, well educated, hospitable, yet very patriotic, with strong willpower, always ready to stand up for truth and justice, but at the same time compassionate and kind at heart. Russia's population is only 146 million people (very small for a country of this size) but it is home to more than 170 ethnic group speaking some 100 languages. Russia represents not only a striking ethnic diversity but also a versatile religious community: although 86% of the citizens of Russia are Orthodox Christians, we have 15 million Muslims, or about 10% of the total population, and 1 million Buddhists.

Your Royal Highness traveled to the lake Baikal in the eastern part and Saint Petersburg in the western part of Russia and has the first hand impression about how vast this land is. But 1200 years ago Rus was a small union of Slavic tribes geographically squeezed between other nations, between the West and the East. No wonder that the

Russian culture has evolved over centuries absorbing different influences of the neighboring civilizations and developing its own unique civilization. In architecture, fine arts, music, ballet, theatre our predecessors reached an unparalleled level of perfection.

It is suffice to say, Your Royal Highness, that the Russian Academy of Arts was established in 1757. My country is proud of its great artists Ilya Repin, Ivan Aivazovsky, Mikhail Vrubel, Ivan Shishkin, Isaak Levitan and many others whose paintings are the crème of the crème of the world cultural heritage. There are more than 3000 museums in Russia, many of them keeping incredible collections of masterpieces. In Saint Petersburg only we have 221 museums and 45 art galleries. The Hermitage Museum, one of the largest in the world, owns 3 million artworks.

But to enjoy the beauty of the “Northern Capital” of Russia as we often call Saint Petersburg one does not necessarily need to stay indoors all the time. Just walking along the streets of Saint Petersburg will overwhelm you with the grace of architectural designs and stone decorations on the facades of century old mansions proving the popular nickname of this city as a “museum in the open air”. And all the tourism routes will lead you to the Imperial summer palace called Peterhof, or “Russian Versailles”, where Tsar Nicholas II hosted a gala-dinner in honor of King Rama V in July 1897.

Russia is a birthplace of dozens of genius composers like Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Sergei Prokofiev. Russia is famous for its opera and ballet theatres. Among them, the greatest are the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and the Mariinski Theatre in Saint Petersburg. But good theatres can be found in other Russian cities and towns too. Your Highness will be surprised to know that there are 195 puppet theatres and theatres for children in Russia! I remember how fascinated the Thai audience was by the stunning performance of the Ekaterinburg Theatre of Opera and Ballet, which brought to the 19th Bangkok International Festival of Dance and Music in September 2017 a brilliant production “Katya and the Prince of Siam”.

For many decades, Russia has been at the forefront of the global scientific development, and world science and technology are inseparable from achievements,

inventions and discoveries made by my great compatriots. Sometimes we know their names - like names of Faddey Belinshausen and Mikhail Lazarev who first reached and discovered the Antarctic in 1820. Sometimes we do not know them. Why? Because very often their inventions were not patented in Russia but later were adapted by foreigners or used for commercial purposes abroad.

Everyone knows that the first piloted space flight was performed by a Russian young man Yuri Gagarin in April 1961. Russia's leadership in the field of space exploration is internationally recognized. This is why NASA has a requirement that all American astronauts must speak Russian.

But only a few people know that anesthesia was invented by Nikolai Pirogov in 1847, radio - by Alexander Popov in 1885, electric light bulb - by Pavel Yablochkov in 1877, and parachute - by Gleb Kotelnikov in 1911.

Many secrets of the nature were unlocked by Russian scientists. In 1869 the chemistry genius Dmitry Mendeleev was the first to put elements into a periodic table which opened a new era in science. In 1912, Igor Sikorsky invented helicopter. Caterpillar tracks, color photography, petrol cracking, electric welding and synthetic rubber were originally Russian inventions. Every day we watch TV, but how many of us remember that television and telecasting were created by the Russian engineer Vladimir Zworykin?

However, I have no doubt that the cadets of the Royal Military Academy of course know the name of a man who designed the most popular machine gun in the world - Mikhail Kalashnikov. The Guinness Book of World Records insists that since 1949 over 100 million "kalashnikovs" have been produced and sold out across the world.

Your Royal Highness, Russia tops the list of nations with the largest number of people with a Bachelor or Master degree. We have always attached immense importance to education. Therefore, education system in Russia is one of the best in the world. There are more than 900 universities with 4.5 million students in my country. It is only natural that a growing number of young people all over the world wish to do their studies in Russia. We have some 300, 000 foreign students including more than 200 students from Thailand.

Such universities as Moscow State University, Saint Petersburg University, Higher School of Economics, and People's Friendship University are believed to be the most prestigious educational institutions in Russia. Some universities are really unique. For example, professors of the MGIMO - Moscow State University of International Relations teach 53 foreign languages including Thai. No one else can do that! All in all five Russian universities have Thai language programs.

Russia is a great sports power. Olympic and World champions are worshipped as heroes in my country. In July 1980 for the first time in the Russian history, Moscow became the venue of the Summer Olympic Games. In February 2014, the beautiful city of Sochi hosted the Winter Olympics. At the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro the Russian national team won 19 gold, 18 silver and 19 bronze medals finishing the fourth in the standing with the total of 56 medals.

Like in Thailand, the most popular sport in my country is football. Next year Russia will be the host country of the FIFA Football World Cup. The final games of the tournament will be played from June 14 to July 15, 2018 on 12 state of the art stadiums in 11 cities of Russia from Kaliningrad in the European part to Ekaterinburg in the Asian part of the Russian Federation. We expect it to be the most attended World Cup of all times. It is my sincere hope that lots of Thai football fans will visit Russia next summer.

Please allow me, Your Royal Highness, now say a few words about the Russian state, Russian Government and Russian political system. Russia is a federal presidential republic. Our Constitution - one of the most democratic constitutions in the world - was adopted in December 1993. It enshrined principles of the rule of law, division of powers as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The executive power is represented by President and Prime Minister, but President is the dominant figure. The Federal Assembly - our parliament - has two chambers. The State Duma is the lower house and the Council of Federation is the upper house of the Russian parliament.

The judicial power is vested in courts. Courts are absolutely independent in Russia.

The President of the Russian Federation is the head of state. He is guarantor of the Constitution and of civil rights and freedoms. The President is Commander-in- Chief of the Armed Forces. His office is in the Kremlin. President is elected for a 6- year term and can serve for two consecutive terms.

Our incumbent President is Mr. Vladimir Putin. He was President of Russia from 2000 to 2008 when Mr. Dmitry Medvedev was elected President. In 2012, Mr. Vladimir Putin was elected President again while his predecessor Mr. Dmitry Medvedev was appointed Prime Minister. The next presidential elections will be held in March 2018.

Your Royal Highness, Russia is a democratic country. Our political system is vibrant with a wide spectrum of political parties of all sorts. Altogether, there are 77 organizations registered as political parties, big and small. At the parliamentary elections in September 2016 six of them managed to get their nominees elected to the State Duma. The pro-President “United Russia” party has the largest faction in the parliament - 340 seats out of 450, or 75% of all seats in the State Duma. Other major parties are Communist Party, Liberal Democratic Party, “A Just Russia” Party, “Civic Platform” and “Rodina” (“Motherland”) party.

Russia is a strong economic power. According to the World Bank rating Russia is ranked the twelfth world economy. By contrast, in the PPP — purchasing power parity - calculation the Russian economy is No.6 in the world. Dramatic decrease of the oil price in 2015 and illegal Western sanctions jeopardized our economic development for a while. However, smart and timely measures taken by the Russian Government in response to the looming crisis strengthened our economic competitiveness and brought the Russian economy back on track. In the recent years it demonstrated resilience and since 2017 started growing again.

Key economic indexes indicate a healthy status of our economy. Russia has low unemployment rate (4.9% - the lowest in Europe!), low inflation (4%) and low external state debt (only 10% to GDP). Our currency reserves amount to 425 billion US dollars. Russian experts predict that in 2017 our GDP growth rate will reach 2%, and if this trend

continues in 2018 the GDP growth rate may hit 2.5%.

Russia is a peaceful nation. We pursue an independent multifaceted foreign policy aimed at strengthening peace and security, global strategic stability and sustainable development. Russia is a reliable partner, which in its relations with other countries reject double standards. We strictly abide by the basic norms and principles of the international law in particular respect for national sovereignty, respect for territorial integrity of states, respect for a choice of a path of development in accordance with one's national traditions, non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for interests of other countries.

Russia is one of the winners in the WW II and one of the founding fathers of the United Nations, a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council.

Our closest ally is the Republic of Belarus. Together we are building a Union State for the time being remaining independent countries. With Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan we strengthen our defense capability in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Russia is a member of G20 and a dynamic international alliance called BRICS - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Russia plays a leading role in the efforts of the global community to combat international terrorism. The success of the Syrian Army supported by the Russian Armed Forces in its fight against the so-called Islamic State became powerful evidence of our commitment to the eradication of terrorism and manifestation of the military might of the Russian Army, Russian Air Force and Russian Navy.

Belonging simultaneously to Europe and Asia, the Russian Federation is member of many European and Asian regional organizations. In Europe, we take an active part in the work of OSCE, Council of Europe, Council of Baltic Sea States, Arctic Council and Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Russia also actively participates in most of the multilateral associations in the Asia-Pacific region including APEC, East Asia Summits, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Cooperation Dialogue, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia, Asia-Europe

Meetings etc.

At the same time, Russia lies in the heartland of Eurasia. This is why Moscow attaches huge importance to the enhancement of cooperation in the Eurasian region, first and foremost within the Eurasian Economic Union that we established in January 2015 with Belarus and Kazakhstan later joined by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Other platforms which are of great importance to Russia are CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States and RIC- Russia, India and China dialogue.

As Your Royal Highness very well know, Russians came to the Southeast Asia later than other Europeans did. But Russia arrived not as a colonial power but as a friend and partner. The Russian Empire set up its Consulates in Singapore in 1890 and in Batavia in 1895. The first country in Indochina to establish diplomatic relations with Russia in 1897 was the Kingdom of Siam as one of the few independent Asian nations at that time.

My country always supported the struggle of the Asian countries for their independence against the colonial rule. People of Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia still warmly remember invaluable assistance rendered to them by the Soviet Union during their national liberation wars. When those countries finally became independent, they faced another challenge - national build-up. The USSR helped many Asian nations to organize their statehood, to strengthen their economies and to train personnel. Enormous assistance was provided to them in such fields as industry, agriculture, science, technology and education.

ASEAN and Russia are dialogue partners. In 1991, the USSR was granted a status of a consultative partner and in 1996 Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership was established. Last year we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership by hosting a commemorative summit in Sochi. President Putin and ten leaders of ASEAN countries endorsed the Sochi declaration and the Comprehensive Plan of Action for 2016 - 2020.

Striving for new heights of strategic partnership, we are already promoting effective cooperation in security, combating terrorism and organized crime, drug trafficking and

ensuring cyber security. Other major directions of collaboration between Russia and ASEAN are trade and investment cooperation, energy, disaster relief, medicine and biosecurity, education and human resources development. In December 2015, Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin came up with an initiative to shape so called “Greater Eurasian Economic Partnership” with the participation of the members of the Eurasian Economic Union, SCO and ASEAN. Future Russia- ASEAN Free Trade Area is viewed as part and parcel of this project.

Your Royal Highness, the fact that we have been friends for 120 years excited a lot of people in both countries. Russian and Thai Governments set up Steering Committees and elaborated programs of celebrations. I am delighted to report to Your Royal Highness that the celebrations held this year in Moscow and Bangkok were of an unprecedented scope. More than 30 events were organized - separately by the two sides or jointly. The pinnacle of the celebration was the visit of Your Highness to the Russian Federation from September 30 to October 9. Magnificent *Khon* masked dance performance on the stage of the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg in the presence of Your Royal Highness was a truly Royal gift to the Russian people on this auspicious occasion.

In July 2017 a colorful three-day Russian-Thai Festival was held in Siam Paragon jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and the Embassy of Russia. The Post of Russia and Thailand Post issued a beautiful jubilee stamp. In August, the National Legislative Assembly joined hands with the Russian Embassy to hold the “Russian Week” in the NLA Headquarters. Some events like Moscow Cultural Festival in Bangkok, David Lau Photo Exhibition “In the cradle of the Russian Civilization”, Russian Film Week and Russian Art Exhibition “Suvarnabhumi - the Golden land” are to be held in the near future.

Your Royal Highness, for the last years our top level exchanges have been steadily gaining momentum. Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin visited Thailand in October 2003 and was received by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. In July 2007, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit made a state visit to the Russian Federation on behalf of His

Majesty. Our countries laid down a solid legal basis for bilateral cooperation by signing 17 intergovernmental MoUs and 25 inter-agency documents. 9 important agreements between Russian and Thai private companies were signed thus allowing the two sides to launch cooperation in the spheres of trade, tourism, energy, science, technology, environment, culture, education and security.

Necessary institutions were set up to support the emerging cooperation with Joint Russian-Thai Commission on Bilateral Cooperation in the center. Two Sub- Commissions and five Working Groups kicked-off their work. Russian-Thai Business Council, Thai-Russian Business Council and Thai-Russian Chamber of Commerce are facilitating interaction between business communities of our two countries.

Today we are witnessing a growing trend in the Russian Thai bilateral trade. From January to September 2017, our trade turnover has increased by 64%. Mutual investments are growing too. The CP Group is now the biggest Thai investor in the Russian agricultural sector implementing projects in Moscow, Kaluga, Kaliningrad, Nizhniy Novgorod and other regions of Russia worth 1.5 billion US dollars. PTT Public Company Limited is exploring long-term projects in Russia in oil and gas in collaboration with giant Russian companies - Rofneft, Gazprom, Gazpromneft and Novatek.

Tourist exchanges remain a backbone of the Russian-Thai business cooperation and people-to-people contacts. In 2016, 1.1 million Russians visited Thailand while from January to October this year the tourist flow from Russia increased by 24%. I have another good news for Your Royal Highness: starting from this year Thai tourists began visiting Russia in bigger numbers - since the beginning of 2017, the statistics has jumped by 60%! Another good news is that since December 2016 Thai Airways has been flying en route Bangkok-Moscow again. I hope that other air companies will follow this example, because the demand is high and growing. Nowadays about a dozen of Russian and Thai cities are linked with each other by no less than 82 flights per week

Your Highness, 120 years ago our relations took shape as a strategic alliance between the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Siam to protect the interests of each

other. It is very symbolic that during their meeting in September 2017 in Xiamen, China on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha reconfirmed their commitment to the goal of upgrading our relations to the level of strategic partnership.

This brings us to the end of my presentation.

May I, Your Royal Highness, now open the floor for questions.