

UPF Moscow, Russia: Russian relations with the two Koreas and other nations

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Moscow, Russia -- Relations between Russia, the two Koreas and other nations were the topic of a UPF webinar.

The online conference, titled "Korean Peninsula Reunification Influencing the Development of the Russian Far East and the Asia-Pacific Region," was held on February 16, 2021, by UPF Russia.

UPF-Russia President Maria Nazarova, as the moderator, gave an introduction to the webinar. One of the UPF projects is the Northeast Asia Peace Initiative, which works for the peaceful reunification of North and South Korea, she said.

UPF programs bring together leading experts from government, academia, civil society, faith-based organizations, media, business and the arts to explore the prospects for improving relations not only between the two Koreas but also among other countries of the Asia-Pacific Region, which, of course, include Russia and in particular the Far East of Russia.

For years, UPF founders Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, both born in North Korea, have made strong efforts to promote reconciliation between North and South Korea, Mrs. Nazarova said. Thirty years ago, they visited North Korea, at the invitation of President Kim Il Sung, and discussed with him prospects for reconciliation. This meeting resulted in a number of projects being implemented in North Korea.

UPF has held a series of Northeast Asia Peace Initiative forums and study tours in Washington, D.C.; Tokyo; Moscow and Vladivostok; and Seoul. In the coming years, UPF will carry out very ambitious programs and projects for the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

The Russian Federation borders on North Korea. Today the center of world economic growth is moving to the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, one of Russia's priorities is the development of its Siberia and Far East regions.

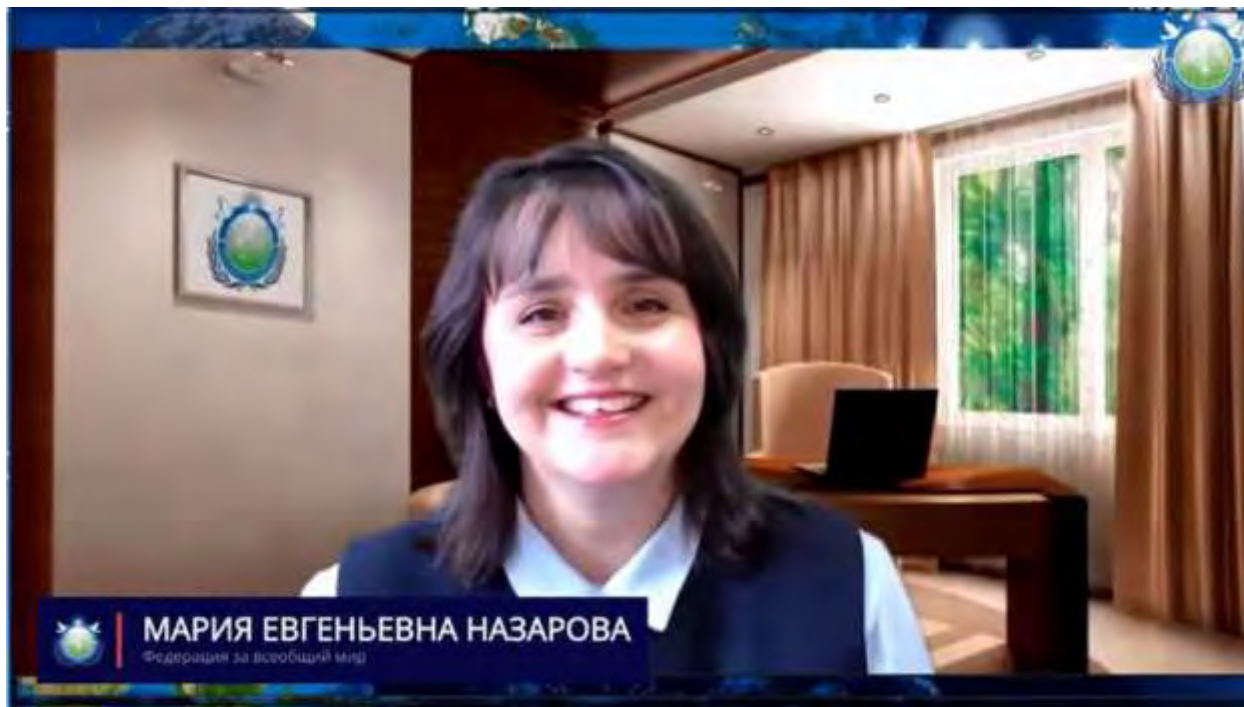
Of course, an important role is played here by building cooperation between the Russian Federation and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, including the Korean Peninsula. What are the prospects for this cooperation?

Presenters

Dr. Valery Timoshenko, the head of the General History Department of Pacific National University and the director of the Asia-Pacific International Relations Study Center, Khabarovsk. He is a member of the

Russian Historical Society and the Russian Military Historical Society, and chairman of the regional branch of the "Knowledge" Russian society.

Dr. Alexander Ivanov, an associate professor in the Oriental Languages Department of the Pedagogical Institute of Pacific National University, Khabarovsk.



Dr. Valery Timoshenko:

The Asia-Pacific region is the most dynamically developing region in the world. Half of the world's production comes from this region, and one-third of all trade. We live in a time when European dominance in politics and economics is coming to an end. The Asia-Pacific region will take the place of Europe.

In Russia, 80 percent of the turnover is directed to Europe. Nevertheless, in recent years much has been done to enhance cooperation with the nations of the region. Ninety percent of Russia's cooperation with the Asia-Pacific region is with China. Russia has little relationship with Southeast Asia, New Zealand or the Philippines. This happens for various reasons -- historical, psychological.

The Far East for Russia is an outpost, a fortress. There is no further land. Therefore, the Russian people and the leadership have a certain attitude -- we keep the borders of Russia, and we do not need to climb into foreign countries. John Stephen, an American historian, told me in a conversation that we have a border guard psychology. Everything else is not interesting to us. There is a habit of establishing relations with Europe, but there is no experience of relations with Asia except with China. We have established relations with South Korea only since the 1990s. One needs to start everything from the beginning: study the mentality, history, business features. But all the possibilities are not being realized 100 percent now. There are also problems.

Russia has relations with both North Korea and South Korea. South Korea is the only economically developed country, a close partner of the United States, that has visa-free relations with Russia. There are also many programs in the Far East, investments in development, in enterprises and infrastructure, railways, oil and gas pipelines. All this will involve North Korea as well.

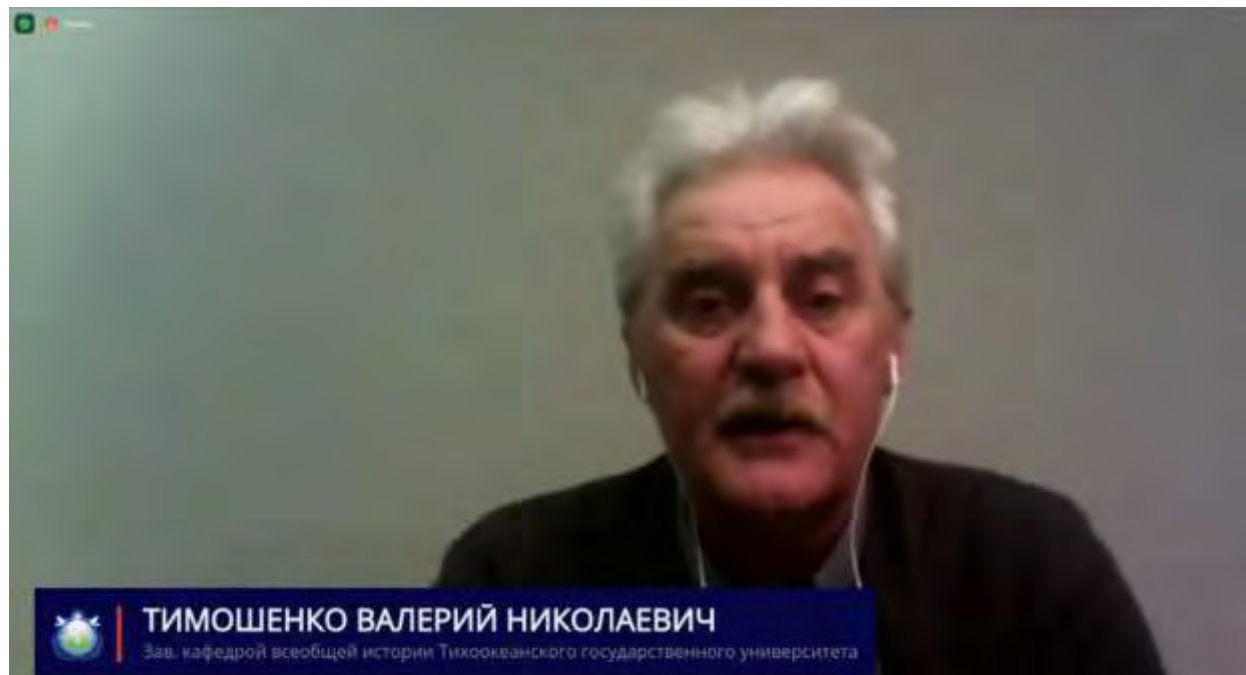
North Korea is very important to South Korea. Last year, there were interesting statements from the North Korean leadership about improving the living standards of the population, Kim Jong-un himself spoke about this, and this requires rapprochement with South Korea. ... Unification of the homeland occupies an important place in both North and South Korean politics. But it is important to understand under what conditions. For now, executives can move away from Kim Il Sung's plan. North Korea is ready to give up "isms" for the sake of uniting the nation. The main thing is unification. North Korea and South Korea understand that this unity will lead to the emergence of a strong economic player in the Far East. Russia, having good relations with both Koreas, can benefit for itself.

South Korea is very interested in transport logistics through the Russian Far East. They want to compete with China and Japan, and for this their goods must be both cheaper and faster. Therefore, the Trans-Siberian Railway is important for them, but first of all, they need a railway through North Korea. Then they will be ready to invest in the development of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The Arctic route is also important. The Northern Sea Route is beneficial to South Korea and not only because it is the route to

Europe -- everyone is trying to catch this process in time.

Dr. Alexander Ivanov:

Concerning the prospects for the development of relations between Russia and North Korea -- I'm not very optimistic. It often happened that relations began to strengthen, they developed, and then what is, that is. Until 1990, Russia had good relations with North Korea. The two nations had common goals: the fight against South Korea and the United States. Gorbachev, having established relations with South Korea, sharply worsened relations with North Korea. Relations with North Korea are not very favorable now.



I myself was a hostage to this political situation in the 1990s. I was just in North Korea. The attitude toward the delegation then deteriorated sharply. We were considered traitors, and we believed that we were sold for a bag of gold. South Korea believed that relations between our countries would be good and hoped to receive natural resources from the Far East in exchange for essential goods. But the prospects were not realized. And now South Korea has largely lost interest in relations with Russia. The beginning of the 1990s was a difficult time. The old is broken, but not new. In these conditions, investments were dangerous. Private investment was just a loss of real money. Such advertising was negative for business between South Korea and Russia.

The power changed with the arrival of Vladimir Putin. Relations with South Korea and North Korea are now beginning to normalize.

Mr. Konstantin Pulikovskiy in 2002 became the president's representative in the Far East. He was able to change a lot. Kim Jong Il came to Moscow, met with Putin. North Korean businessmen began to come to Khabarovsk and offered cooperation between the Khabarovsk region and North Korea. But the local authorities are changing. In 2005 the new leadership was not interested in building relations with North Korea; the internal economic situation became more interesting. I was laid off then; the entire department of cooperation with North Korea was closed.

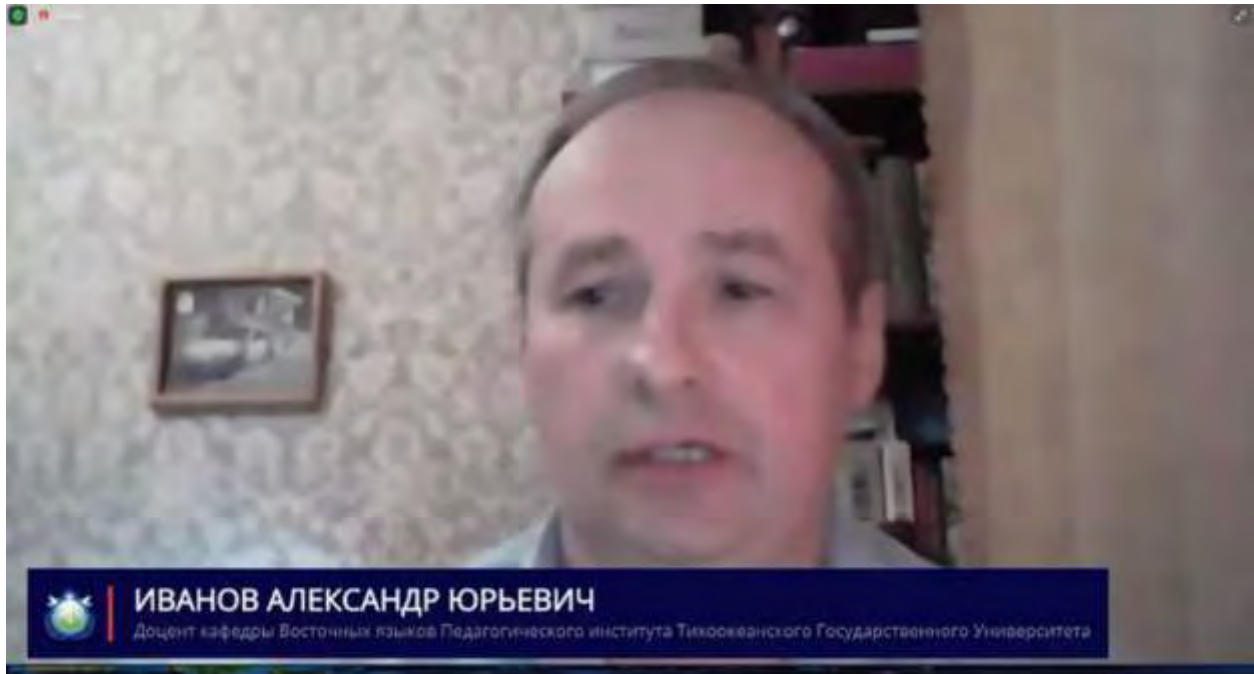
Relations with North Korea have been undermined; now everything must be done anew. Koreans are not vindictive, but their memory is good. They saw this as a betrayal. They have become wary of our words. Inconsistent policy leads to us losing allies. Therefore, we must be serious, we need specialists. We need to carefully build relationships, taking into account the mentality of our partners. First of all, we must not proceed from numbers, trade; we must take into account the human factor. There are many forums, many projects are proposed, but little is being implemented. For example, our trade with South Korea has almost halved in two years. Why? Sanctions? Or U.S. pressure?

In 2018, [South Korean President] Moon Jae-in and [North Korean leader] Kim Jong-un met at Panmunjom. I had tears in my eyes. The words were wonderful. Inter-Korean relations must be resolved between the Koreans. But a week later, U.S. Secretary of State [Mike] Pompeo arrived in South Korea, and everything was again as it was, as if there had been no meeting in Panmunjom. We are similar in this respect. It is also necessary to take into account how we treat partners, how we keep our word, as well as who is behind the partners' backs.

Questions and Answers:

Question: Does the situation on the Korean Peninsula affect the development of the Russian Far East?

Dr. Timoshenko: I agree that there are many shortcomings in relations with North Korea and South Korea. From a military point of view, we are concerned about the situation. North Korea is conducting tests, but it is very close to our borders, some of the missiles fell near Nakhodka [a port city east of Vladivostok]. And from the political point of view -- behind the back of South Korea is the United States, and their influence plays a very important role.



Dr. Ivanov: The absence of conflict would have a positive effect on the Far East. And the confrontation itself on the Korean Peninsula does not affect the development of the Far East. Trade with North Korea is only 8 million -- that's nothing at all. Trade with South Korea is also falling. Therefore, I consider the salvation of the drowning to be the work of the drowning themselves. We must save ourselves. And then, when we make our region attractive from all sides, then our voice in resolving the situation on the Korean Peninsula will have weight.

Question: To what extent do you think production in a number of industries (electronics factories and weaving production) has been transferred from China to the DPRK? -- Alexey Chernolivsky, director of the Organizational and Administrative Department of Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok.

Dr. Ivanov: This is not new, this is normal. China provides work for North Korea. China is their most important ally and guarantor of security. It is beneficial for China to have a younger brother. Although it is expensive, a brother is a brother. China is justifiably moving its production to North Korea. Cheap labor. Therefore, it is possible to supply the goods to consumers more cheaply. That is, it is mutually beneficial. Some accuse China of tying North Korea to itself and building colonies. Where does this not happen? Then we can say that Japan, withdrawing production, creates colonies in Malaysia and Indonesia. Mutually beneficial cooperation is not a new phenomenon; Korean cars are also being built in Russia.

Question: There used to be many workers from the DPRK in the Far East. Is it true that as a result of the sanctions, all North Korean citizens had to leave Russia? -- Vyacheslav from Murmansk.

Dr. Timoshenko: True, many have left. The border is closed. Korean workers are in great demand here, but it is not known when they will return. We must watch when the pandemic ends.

Dr. Ivanov: A year ago, I met with the Japanese consul, who said with a smile that the North Koreans were leaving the Far East, the sanctions were working, Korea was being squeezed. We ourselves are under U.S. sanctions, but here we again support the U.S. What, then, does North Korea think of us? We are losing a partner and an ally. Forty thousand Koreans worked for us. This is foreign exchange income in favor of the state. Now we are suffering losses. Therefore, my opinion is that it was a short-sighted act. Maybe we were so light on North Korea because it is a small country, an insignificant ally and partner? I believe that there are no small allies.

Dr. Timoshenko: All the more it should be borne in mind that they have the fourth [largest] army in the world.

Question: How do you assess the prospects for creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone on the Korean Peninsula, and what are Russia's interests in this matter, in your opinion? -- Dr. Natalia Petrovna Romashkina, head of the Information Security Problems Group, senior researcher at the Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Division, officer at the Division of the Center for International Security from the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences.



Dr. Timoshenko: We are striving to create such a zone. We don't need nuclear weapons at our borders. North Korea is ready to wind down its nuclear program if they had a 100 percent guarantee that the U.S. would not intervene. But the United States does not agree to this; therefore, the prospect is unlikely.

Dr. Ivanov: I agree with Dr. Timoshenko: The prospects are vague -- there should be 100 percent guarantees; there are not. Here's an example. North Koreans say: We will freeze all programs if the United States stops joint exercises near the border (this means 5 miles from the border). There already have been incidents. In 2011 there was a shootout, people were killed. But the United States demands that North Korea first close the programs, and only then will they decide how to proceed.

Of course, North Korea is not ready to substitute the country for the sake of incomprehensible promises. After the Yeonpyeong incident [the North Korean shelling of the disputed Yeonpyeong Island in 2010], the [South Korean military] exercises were not conducted for some time, and then resumed again. So it is clear that North Korea does not believe empty promises, they are afraid of losing their sovereignty and their country. Therefore, they will not freeze nuclear programs in the near future, since no one will give them any guarantees -- neither Russia, nor China, nor America.

Question: Are there labor camps in Russia led by the North Korean military?

Dr. Ivanov: Probably, it is about Chegdomyn. This is a territory in the north of the Khabarovsk Territory. This is a closed area, Russians are not allowed there. But there is no labor camp there.

You need to understand that they have a completely different labor system. Very strict control, implementation of plans. But Koreans are used to working hard and well. At the same time, they earn good money and move freely around the Khabarovsk Territory. This is not a concentration camp, and this is not a punishment. It is the dream of many North Koreans to come here. In order to work in Russia, they undergo a serious selection, for professional suitability, for ideological resistance, for seriousness. You have to be a decent person to work there, so this is not a concentration camp. I can assume that the living conditions there are basic, but what else can they be in the taiga?

Dr. Timoshenko: North Korea found itself in a very difficult situation in the 1990s. We stopped paying them, they were starving, then they had to go back to their homeland. But the situation is changing. We are interested in them.

Question: Is it possible to resolve the Korean nuclear problem through the integration of North Korea into Russia's military alliances without losing sovereignty? Question 2: How relevant is the "one country, two systems" approach today? -- Vyacheslav Pilnikova, history teacher.

Dr. Ivanov: I think there are absolutely no prospects here. It is a very dangerous game to take a

dangerous partner as allies. We will receive even more sanctions from the United States, and we are also an unreliable ally for North Korea.

Dr. Timoshenko: The North Koreans performed in front of students in Khabarovsk last year. They voiced the main idea: If third parties had not interfered with North Korea and South Korea, they already would have agreed. Not only the United States, but also China. China, too, does not strive for unification, because a unified Korea is an economic power and a huge army, that is, a potential serious rival in the region and the world.

Dr. Ivanov: Back in the 1970s, Kim Il Sung proposed the idea of "one country, two systems." The proposal was to create one country called Koryo, but the systems are different. But South Korea has suggested that the system should be determined by the people in a popular vote. However, the population of South Korea is twice that of North Korea, so this approach did not suit North Korea. As a result, even at that time this approach was doomed, not accepted by either South Korea or North Korea.

Dr. Timoshenko: Now North Korea is adopting the experience of China: They allow elements of private trade in property. Therefore, maybe after some time the borders between the two systems will blur and unification will become possible.

Question: It's hard to make forecasts, but given the trends of both the United States and Kim Jong-un, as well as the pandemic, when can we expect a stage of active rapprochement between the two countries? -- Ivan Chelovekov from the Space Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Timoshenko: The pandemic divides. North Korea has closed even more. They have a long history of closely controlling the population. The pandemic will not help in this matter. Only external players can influence the rapprochement of the two countries and the position of South Korea. South Korea is constantly looking back at the United States. It is necessary to assess the possibilities of South Korea for unification.

Let's look at Germany: People in the East still live worse than those in the West of Germany, and this is after 30 years. In the case of Korea, the economic gap is much larger. Is South Korea ready to feed North Korea in the near future? They are not ready. It's expensive for them. South Korea is the largest debtor to the United States -- \$350 billion. In case of unification, this debt will increase even more. Both countries are not ready now for this rapprochement.

Dr. Alexander Zhebin, head of the Center for Korean Studies, Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, also contributed a few words:

It is very important that we now have the opportunity, thanks to UPF, to talk about the security situation in Russia and the economic development of the Far East. Geographically, Korea is far from the central regions of Russia. But Russia's security and economic development largely depend on resolving the situation on the Korean Peninsula. This is a bridge for our advancement to Asia. For 30 years, they have been talking about oil and gas pipeline projects and a railway project.

Many believe that they have not been calculated, but President Putin sees the importance of these projects in political terms. North and South Korea are divided, and there is no trust. How can you develop trust? Only by working together on a mutually beneficial project, as in the field of human relations. This aspect is very important. These projects, above all, not only would bring economic benefits but also would improve policy predictability and move forward toward creating the preconditions for unification.

Many are overly optimistic about unification. So we will wait for the unification, and then all projects will be implemented. In the case of Germany, we agreed, but the U.S. troops have been there for 30 years already, their influence does not allow the normal implementation of the Nord Stream 2 project, which is beneficial to the Germans, but not to the senior ally (not the United States). This situation can happen in Korea as well. The South Korean elite were educated in the United States and cannot imagine themselves without a U.S. military presence in the country. And in the long term, our relationship with a united Korea will not be all that great.

I agree with the assessments of the speakers. We need to think more about our steps, about sanctions against Korea, what the consequences will be. We agreed not to use manpower, shot ourselves in the leg. Then we banned the export and trade of goods that are not related to military issues. Our options are limited by the UN Security Council. And now, for the first time in history, having a friendship agreement, our contacts with this country have come under international control. This strategic aspect sends a very bad signal to other countries. A cooperation agreement with North Korea was signed for 20 years, relatively recently, but it passed almost unnoticed. This does not mean at all that we should support the nuclear program, it is not profitable for us, but we need to look for solutions that would meet our political and economic interests, and would not spoil relations with allies and neighbors, would not lead to a dead end.

Question: Is it possible to say that the Russian Far East is a potentially important bridge for South Korea leading to the DPRK?

Dr. Timoshenko: (quoting former South Korean President Park Geun-hye) "The North, that is, North Korea, should be involved in trade exchanges between South Korea and the peoples of Eurasia, that is, North Korea, which should work to defuse military-diplomatic tensions on the Korean Peninsula."

That is, the answer is yes -- Russian-Korean ties will contribute to military-political detente and rapprochement between the North and the South. Especially transport projects, oil and gas pipeline projects.

Dr. Ivanov: South Korea is unlikely to give up political pressure on the North Korean regime. But they are very interested in economic contacts. For example, there is a long-standing project -- "Tumangan Project," "Tumangan Triangle," where the South Koreans proposed to create a zone in the Khasan region including the territory of China, North Korea and Russia. The South Koreans offered their investments, the North Koreans would work there, and Russia would provide its territory. That is, a kind of free economic zone. This project was very interesting for Russia, North Korea and South Korea. But it still doesn't work, because the Khasan region is a border zone. And for Russia this is a dangerous situation, for example, even from the point of view of cross-border crime. North Korean fishermen are often caught there who are engaged in poaching.

Another project is the railway -- a profitable project for South Koreans to deliver goods not by sea, but through North Korea, to Russia and then to Europe. But here, for some reason, the North Koreans are not going to implement it. Apparently, something does not suit the North Koreans in this project. It is necessary to look for mutually beneficial projects. But I believe that South Korea is interested in economic relations with North Korea.

Question: Is the Zvezda shipyard in [the Far Eastern port of] Bolshoi Kamen a competitor to the shipyards of South Korea? -- Alexey from Vladivostok.

Dr. Timoshenko: South Korea does not build military ships, and Zvezda means military orders.

Dr. Ivanov: In order to be a competitor to South Korea, we need technologies; we do not have them. What can we offer South Korea in return for their technology? Even using Korean technologies at our factories, our products are worse than the same goods made in South Korea. Maybe it's the mentality of workers, maybe professionalism. Consumers are not satisfied with Russian products. Maybe we have lost specialists; technical schools and colleges are closed. Many people do not know how to work with technology and modern equipment. It's hard to compete now.

Question: Why, in your opinion, is our government very weak in the direction of internal migration, given the strategic role of the eastern part of the country? Is there a more profitable foreign presence of capital in the east of the country? -- Adam from Grozny, Chechnya.

Dr. Timoshenko: Unfortunately, the population is decreasing in the Far East. Who is coming? External migrants, mainly from Uzbekistan. You need to get people interested. And the efforts that are being made in this direction are not enough.

Dr. Ivanov: Internal migration goes in the opposite direction. Young people leave, and unskilled labor arrives. Plus the North Koreans left. Some of them were well educated; some were doing simple jobs. Who will replace them? This is a shot in the foot, as already mentioned. International law often plays against us.