

Russia-Latin America Parliamentary Conference Is Optimistic

by Cynthia Rush

Oct. 12—After four days of deliberation, the first Russia-Latin America International Parliamentary Conference, which met in Moscow Sept. 29–Oct. 2, ended on an upbeat note with an announcement by State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin that the event will now take place annually. Organized by the State Duma (the lower House of Russia’s Parliament), the conference was modeled on the format of Russia’s relationship with African nations, and the Russia-Africa summit that takes place annually in St. Petersburg, held most recently July 27–28. At the Oct. 2 plenary session, titled “Cooperation for a Just World for All,” Volodin reported that approximately 200 people, representing 19 countries, had made the long trip from Latin America or the Caribbean to participate.

Although not on the scale of recent conferences attended by representatives of the Global Majority—the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg, or the G77 + China in Cuba—this first Russia-Latin America parliamentarians’ conference was considered a great success. Not only lawmakers, but diplomats, government officials, and experts in many fields gathered for four days to deliberate on the most pressing issues facing the region and the world. As Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov noted to TASS, “Washington and other capitals” were likely unhappy about the success of this conference and “have taken note of it.”

Russia’s increased emphasis on its relations with this region of the world comes at a time when the nations of the Global South are intensifying their efforts to forge a new global financial and development architecture, free from the strictures of the “rules-based international order” and the speculative dollar system. Leaders of developing nations expressed that sentiment very eloquently in speech after speech at the September UN General Assembly in New York.

In his remarks, Volodin emphasized that relations



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Luis Redondo Guifarro, President of the National Congress of the Republic of Honduras, addressing the First International Parliamentary Conference “Russia-Latin America,” in Moscow, Sept. 29–Oct. 2, 2023.

between Russia and the nations of Ibero-America and the Caribbean are long-standing, dating back to the early 19th-Century battles for independence from Spain, or Britain, and France in the Caribbean case, and Russia always supported their struggle against colonialism. He invited the parliamentarians to return to Moscow for a conference next year “to discuss the development of our relations and the building of a multipolar and just world order.” Inter-parliamentary cooperation is essential, he said, both for building the new multipolar world and for combating the brutal sanctions regimes imposed by the U.S. and its allies on tens of nations.

Replace the ‘Golden Billion’ with Development

In his [remarks](#) Sept. 29 welcoming conference participants, Russian President Vladimir Putin pointedly addressed the need for a new financial architecture given that, as he put it, the current system “exclusively serves the interests of the so-called billion.”

Discussion of the BRICS was also on the agenda. The nations of the Global South are currently victims of a kind of debt slavery, Putin said, recalling the reports from African leaders at the July 27–28 Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg that the entire African debt burden amounts to \$1 trillion—an amount “simply impossible to pay.”

It’s the “golden billion” who reap the benefits of the current financial and credit system, Putin elaborated, because “that’s how it’s structured.” The leaders of those golden billion countries “exploit practically other countries ... abuse their position in terms of technology, information, and finances.” They have built international financial institutions in such a way “and introduce rules into financial and economic activities that bring practical benefit only to them.” This, he said, “is certainly something we need to think about. This is something the BRICS are also carefully analyzing.” Thus, “we must all work together to change the



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Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, addressed the need for a new financial architecture: “We must all work together to change the rules in this international sphere.”



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rules in this international sphere as well.”

The nations of Latin America are moving successfully toward forming a multipolar system of international relations and have enormous potential and human resources, he underscored, “to pursue a sovereign, independent foreign policy ... [and] will have a leading role in the world.”

The role of the BRICS will be crucial in this regard too, he added, emphasizing that the BRICS is a “forum for coordinating approaches and developing mutually acceptable solutions based on sovereignty, independence, and respect for one another.” When Russia is the BRICS chair in 2024, he reported, “I believe we will do the utmost to make sure that the so-called Global Majority has the sense that they are not simply the majority in terms of the population size of their countries, but they are the majority on account of their development prospects.”

Trade between Russia and Ibero-America has grown by 25% over the past five years and Russian exports to the region grew by 130% during the same time. “Of course,” he added, “a faster transition to settlement in national currencies and the creation of channels for financial and banking cooperation, as well as of new transport and logistics chains—all this facilitates the further development of mutual trade.”



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Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the Russian State Duma (center) speaking informally with delegates to the Russia-Latin America Parliamentary Conference.

Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation a Driver for Development

Interparliamentary cooperation was the subject of both the in-depth plenary speeches and debate as well as the large number of side meetings and group discussions, in which specific proposals were discussed, covering science, education, and healthcare, as well infrastructure building, energy, rail, and food security, among other areas. Four roundtable discussions were held over the four days, on these topics: “Equal and mutually beneficial economic cooperation: role of the parliaments”; “Development of humanitarian ties between Russia and Latin America: contribution of the parliaments”; “Just multipolar world: role of parliamentary diplomacy”; and “Security for all: position of the parliaments.”

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov [reported](#) that Russia’s parliament had a “very active and creative approach” to the organization of the forum with help from the Foreign Ministry, adding that many meetings were held, documents signed, and projects discussed. “We’re working on a constructive agenda.”

Indeed. In his remarks to the plenary session, Volodin emphasized that there are many issues that can be addressed in the framework of inter-parliamentary cooperation, and that “this will be our contribution to the development of relations between countries which is dynamically increasing.” To build on this concept, the State Duma established cooperation commissions with the parliaments of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. An agreement was also signed granting the State Duma observer status at the six-nation Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) which recently removed Taiwan as an observer and replaced it with the People’s Republic of China. Volodin announced there were also plans to establish a high-level commission with PARLACEN.

At the Oct. 1 roundtable discussion titled, “Just multipolar world: role of parliamentary diplomacy,” Leonid Slutsky, Chairman of the State Duma’s International Affairs Committee, reported:

[I am] convinced that our cooperation with the

countries of Central America will be one of the engines of development and creation of a new multipolar world order on the planet. And our conference, which will be held annually, will become one of the key drivers of this engine.

PARLACEN’s Vice President Guillermo Daniel Ortega Reyes reported that a proposal to create a single parliamentary bloc, which would include deputies and senators from Latin America and the Eurasian region, was also discussed.

We hope that the Russian Federation will support us so that deputies and senators, together with Latin American parliamentarians, will create a single association to build a new world.



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Laureano Facundo Ortega Murillo, Special Representative of the President of Nicaragua for Russian Affairs.

There were many more contributions from Russian and Latin American parliamentarians in this lively debate. Gerardo José Antonio Torres Zelaya, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Honduras, reminded fellow parliamentarians that next year Honduras will chair the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and in this role is prepared to become a platform for discussion of issues

currently on the agenda.

Sanctions: A New Plague on Humanity

In addressing the plenary session, Speaker Volodin stressed that inter-parliamentary cooperation will be essential in helping nations overcome the challenges “we face every day,” chief among which are sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its European allies. Russia has been dealing with sanctions and trade wars for ten years, he said, during which time 17,500 sanctions were imposed on the country. It’s clear, he added, that sanctions are a weapon designed to halt the development of Russia and Latin American states, “preventing the resolution of issues that our people are waiting for and hindering the development of our economies.” In Russia’s case, the sanctions didn’t work, Volodin



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Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the Russian State Duma (right); Luis Redondo Guifarro, President of the National Congress of the Republic of Honduras (center); and Veneziano Vital do Rêgo Segundo Neto, First Vice President of the Federal Senate of the National Congress of Brazil (left).

pointed out. But look at other examples, he said.

Cuba has suffered a U.S. economic blockade imposed more than 60 years ago and has also been designated a state sponsor of terrorism. But it has shown enormous courage and a spirit of battle to defend its sovereignty despite terrible hardship, Volodin said. This is an example for all:

I hope that the capabilities of parliaments will give us [strength] so that we can develop not only relations between our countries but also do everything possible to overcome sanctions, to build a multipolar world, to build a just world order, because it should not be like that when one country decides the future of the whole world, of all other states.

In denouncing the sanctions regime to which his own country has been subjected, Jorge Jesús Rodríguez Gómez, President of Venezuela's National Assembly, reported that today:

Thirty countries are affected by 26,162 sanctions that were imposed by one single country and its satellites: 26,162 sanctions affect 28% of the world's population, 62% of the entire territory of our planet.... These are not just sanctions but coercive unilateral measures, military measures, hybrid war measures—that is a real new plague on humanity.... These are bombs that kill ordinary people, because sanctions are aimed at the well-being of people, aimed at infringing on

the right to healthcare, access to technology, to development.

Parliamentarians from Honduras, Brazil, and Argentina seconded these statements.

Sen. Valentina Matvienko, Speaker of the Federation Council (the upper house of Parliament) and a highly respected diplomat, stated in her remarks to the conference:

We categorically oppose sanctions, any unilateral restriction of an illegitimate nature that violates international law and the rules of international trade.... I believe that the time has come for the international community to firmly raise with the UN and other international organizations the inadmissibility of any unilateral sanctions, so that they are concerned and prohibited, since they are sanctions against the people.

Sen. Matvienko warned that the enormous changes taking place and the movement toward multipolarity can't be stopped, no matter how great the challenges. The world system is undergoing a "stage of renewal" freeing itself from the remnants of neocolonialism, she emphasized. "Latin America ... is undoubtedly becoming one of the centers of this renewed world based on equality and mutual respect."

In his video [address](#) to the conference, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoed that thought, pointing to the growing ties of cooperation between Russia and the Latin American-Caribbean region. The great changes taking place in world politics are reflected in the composition of the participants and agenda of the conference, he said.

We are not only witnessing the formation of a more equitable multipolar architecture of international relations, but are also directly participating in this process. An integral part of this is the increased role of the Latin American and Caribbean states and associations in world affairs. Their voices are becoming louder, and their words are carrying more weight.

He said he was particularly pleased that Argentina, "one of the leading countries of South America," was invited to become a member of the BRICS at the Aug. 22–24 Johannesburg Summit. This status will go into effect January 1, 2024.