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Putin and Fillon Talk Investment, Taxes

By The Moscow Times

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The construction of a Russian cultural center in Paris was announced before the prime ministers' meeting Friday. **Natalia Kolesnikova**

France urged Russia to grant tax breaks for the Shtokman natural gas project, according to a joint document issued after French Prime Minister Francois Fillon met with his counterpart Vladimir Putin on Friday.

The French government asked for the Arctic project to be exempt from the mineral extraction tax and export duties, according to the document distributed to reporters in Moscow.

Both Russia and France agree that investment decisions on the project are to be made by the end of the year.

France's Total and Norway's Statoil are partners in the Gazprom-led Shtokman project in the Barents Sea. Putin said he supports Total increasing its stake in natural gas producer Novatek.

At the same meeting, Putin said he expects French companies to play an "active" role

in building roads and railways in Russia.

Alstom and Bouygues, France's largest power equipment maker and infrastructure builder, won orders from Russia's government and state-run companies during the meeting.

Alstom will make high-voltage power equipment in Russia and help RusHydro build and modernize power stations in Russia's Far East, according to documents handed out to reporters before the prime ministers met Friday. Bouygues signed an agreement with the Kremlin to build a Russian cultural and spiritual center in Paris.

Putin also reiterated Russia's readiness to provide assistance to the European Union, adding that he welcomed the steps taken by the euro bloc to resolve its debt crisis.

Fillon said France wants other nations to increase pressure on Syrian President Bashar Assad's government to end the "massacres" of civilians. Tougher action is needed because Assad hasn't fulfilled the Arab League's plan to protect civilians, Fillon said after the meeting with Putin.

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