The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Biden Visit to Focus on Business

By Anatoly Medetsky

March 08, 2011



U.S. Vice President Joe Biden's granddaughter Finnegan trying on sneakers while shopping with Biden, back, and his wife, Jill, right, in Helsinki. Biden flew from Helsinki to Moscow on Tuesday for top **Pekka Sakki**

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden starts two days of Moscow talks Wednesday with a focus on building stronger business ties amid a political thaw.

Commercial cooperation will come in addition to routine bilateral topics of U.S. missile defense plans and Russia's bid to join the WTO, White House advisers said.

"We see the vice president's trip as trying to expand into new dimensions of reset with a particular focus on ... the business piece," said National Security Council Senior Director for Russian and Eurasian Affairs Michael McFaul.

President Barack Obama's policy of a reset in relations with Russia has lifted them from a low point after the United States condemned Russia's brief war with Georgia in 2008. Moscow and Washington have since then signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and engaged

in much closer collaboration on Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea. On the economic side, Russia has allowed PepsiCo to acquire a major domestic rival and has given the green light for Chevron and ExxonMobil to team up with Rosneft for oil exploration in the Russian portion of the Black Sea.

"This trip for the vice president is an opportunity to take stock of the reset, what we've achieved and where we hope to go next," said his national security adviser, Tony Blinken.

Biden will meet President Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday after having lunch with U.S. business leaders at the U.S. Embassy and traveling with them to the Moscow School of Management at Skolkovo, near the place where the government wants to create a Russian Silicon Valley, the White House said in a statement.

At Skolkovo, First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov will join Biden to participate in a ceremony for Aeroflot and Boeing to sign an agreement. They will then lead a round-table discussion with Russian business leaders.

Biden will start the next day by meeting with civil society leaders — whose names weren't released — at Spaso House, the U.S. ambassador's residence. A meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will follow at the Cabinet building.

The vice president will then return to Spaso House for another round-table discussion — with opposition leaders, whom the U.S. government didn't name either. At 5 p.m., he will deliver a speech on U.S.-Russian relations at Moscow State University, an event hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce. The White House will stream the audio on its web site at www.whitehouse.gov/live.

McFaul said the United States expected an agreement with Russia to cooperate on a missile defense system in Europe by the end of this year.

He rejected speculation in a Friday report by Nezavisimaya Gazeta that quoted an anonymous State Duma source as saying Biden's visit was a show of support for President Medvedev to run for re-election next year.

It would be "foolish for us to think that that is our role to play," he said in a conference call with reporters. "We're not going to do that."

Biden and his Russian government vis-a-vis will also discuss ongoing riots in Libya, but will stay away from the issue of restrictions on U.S. poultry imports, which McFaul indicated was no longer a problem.

"I'm happy to report having spent many, many hours — not many hours — hundreds of hours on this issue last year, that right now we do not have a serious disagreement about that," he said in the conference call.

Biden arrived in Russia on Tuesday evening from Finland where he began his European tour. He will leave Moscow for Moldova on Friday morning.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/03/08/biden-visit-to-focus-on-business-a5457