



## Milos Zeman

The world media has long ago considered the President of the Czech Republic to be a member of the "club of European friends" of Vladimir Putin. Zeman has repeatedly called the European Union to lift anti-Russian sanctions, maintain constructive relations with Moscow and come to terms with the fact that Crimea is part of the Russian Federation. The Czech president called the reunification of the peninsula with its historical homeland "a done deal".

"This (Crimea's reunification with the Russian Federation – editor's note) is a fact. Ukraine and the part of the international community who disagree with it should bow to the reality", Zeman said in his interview to one of the TV channels.

The Czech leader even spoke at a PACE meeting in Strasbourg with the proposal to help Kyiv get compensation for the loss of the peninsula.

Such an attitude is reasoned not only by love for Russia or respect for its leader, but also by a very specific economic interest. Zeman calls himself a "lobbyist for Czech business and businessmen". The Czech Republic is a member of the Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Program – an alliance of four Central European states (besides the Czech Republic it also includes Slovakia, Poland and Hungary), which advocate Brussels-independent policy. EU sanctions against Russia and subsequent Moscow responsive measures have seriously harmed the export-dependent Czech economy. It cannot compete on equal terms with the economies of the leading EU countries; therefore, the eastern and especially Russian markets are essential for Czech manufacturers and businessmen. Moreover, Russian energy resources are very important for Prague.



## Gerhard Schröder

The former German Chancellor is a long-time advocate of Russia and Europe rapprochement, especially in the economic sphere. Schröder had stuck rigidly his position long before the Ukrainian crisis and the Crimean Spring came. The events of March, 2014 and the subsequent reaction of the world community did not shake his belief.

Being interviewed by the popular German publication Bild, the ex-chancellor stated that "Crimea is an ancient Russian territory", and its transfer into the ownership of the Ukrainian SSR during Khrushchev's time was due to "peculiarities" of the Soviet approach to running a nation. The ex-chancellor added that the reunification of the peninsula with Russia was absolutely legitimate as a matter of law and expressed the will of Crimean people. For this reason, it's absolutely wrong to consider this an "act of aggression" on the part of Russia.

According to Schröder, Europe should develop a partnership with Russia in order to protect its own political and economic interests in relations with the United States and China.

The influential ex-chancellor has been a "fair game" for Western media mud-slinging due to his pro-Russian sentiments, as well as for support of the large-scale "Nord Stream-2" project (a gas pipeline with a capacity of 55 billion cubic meters a year from the Russian coast through the Baltic Sea to Germany). It is no secret that the USA is doing its best to disrupt the gas pipeline construction to please its own companies and to make Europe buy American but not Russian gas.



## Interview







*Sergey Aksyonov:*

# "I NEVER ESTRANGE MYSELF FROM CRIMEANS"

Interview: Maria Volkonskaya

Photo: Daria Samsonova

We asked Sergey Aksyonov, the Head of Crimea, **why the peninsula is attractive to investors** and when the gambling zone in Crimea will start working

## Interview

**— It became known that a gambling zone is going to be opened in the village of Katsiveli. Some bloggers claim that the place has been poorly chosen and it would be better to open a casino in the north of the peninsula. Why was Big Yalta chosen as the best option?**

— Gambling zone is a cluster that demands an individual approach. Gamblers who are willing to leave their money at the casino are usually well-off. Arriving in Crimea, as a rule, they want the airport to be within walking distance; favourable climate and comfortable conditions of stay are expected as well. Belbek Airport is located near Katsiveli and is connected with the village through a direct route. We have negotiated with the operators who implement gambling zone projects in Russia and abroad. Their answer is unequivocal: South Coast. Otherwise, no one will travel here. Katsiveli is the best option; we have been looking for it for a long time. I wish tourists would go to Dzhankoi, and we could attract investment in the first place into depressed areas with an acute scarcity of working places. But, unfortunately, not all business projects can be implemented there. As for the gambling zone, we had public hearings on the topic. It has been decided that the zone will be created in Katsiveli. The agreement is going to be concluded in January the following year; applications from potential investors have already been received.

**— Will local community be banned from gambling like in Monaco?**

— I am not ready to give an unambiguous answer. But I oppose the fact that our people, especially those with low income,

in their attempts to earn money lose everything they have while playing slot machines. We will do our best to neutralize this situation. Which way? Not yet ready to say. But I am sure that the solution to this problem will be found before the gambling zone is put into operation.

**— Since 2014, there have been 13 times more peasant farms on the peninsula. How do you assess this performance, considering the problem of water scarcity – is it a lot or a little?**

— Undoubtedly, this is a lot. Agriculture is not only a large agricultural enterprise that produces processed agricultural products. These are farms and individuals that grow certain crops in their fields and gardens.

We are the proponents of increasing the share of gross regional product through agriculture. The development of farming and assistance to individual entrepreneurs is one of the guidelines of the agricultural industry.

**— More than half of all schools and kindergartens have been repaired in Crimea in five years. Is it possible to**

**say that in the second five-year plan all schools will be put in order?**

— Beyond any doubt. The following year we are planning to complete the glazing of buildings and roof repairs. Next step is going to be the facade and interior repairs, making schools warmer and so on. Equipment installation in computer labs will be carried out in two years. 2021 is the term for the final computerization of all schools in the republic. At this point, major repairs have been made in 350 schools. It would seem that this is a lot – 70 educational institutions per year on an average. But in total, we have 540 schools. So the work is being done stage-by-stage because it is impossible to do everything all at once.

**— Can you comment on the implementation of the national development projects of Crimea in 2019?**