

# Derek Norberg: RAPP is Always Open to Support Cooperation Between the U.S. and Yakutia

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Unofficial Translation



**The 22nd annual meeting of the Russian American Pacific Partnership will take place in the Republic capital 19-20 July. The number of private sector businesses from the USA depends on the clarity of the appeal sent from the Yakutia companies. Derek Norberg, Executive Director of the RAPP Secretariat told Yasia.**

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**Reference:** The Russian-American Pacific Partnership was established in 1995. RAPP activities are aimed at the development of trade cooperation between the far Eastern regions of Russia and Pacific States of the USA. Currently, this bilateral forum between the private and public sectors seeks to identify and overcome obstacles to business and commercial cooperation. RAPP meetings are held alternately in Russia and the United States. In 2015 the event took place in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. Last year's meeting was in San Francisco (United States) was attended by a representative delegation of Yakutia headed by the first Vice-Premier of the region Aleksey Kolodeznikov. At these meetings, special attention was paid to energy issues and energy efficiency, transport and tourism.

**— How long have the Russian-American Pacific Partnership (RAPP) and Yakutia been cooperating?**

We have worked with the Republic (of Sakha) in the framework of RAPP for more than 5 years. Yakutia is actively involved in the annual meetings. Participants are not only from government but also company representatives from the business community. Your region has always sent a solid delegation making substantial and useful contributions to the discussions. During last year's forum, Yakutia declared its accept to host the annual meeting in Yakutsk.

One year ago, with Dmitry Sazhin, Deputy Director of the Department of the Countries of Europe, North America, and International Organizations of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, we met with Deputy Prime Minister of Sakha(Yakutia), Igor Nikiforov, and conducted preliminary discussions in preparation of this year's meeting. We have continued our cooperation throughout the year. I believe that this meeting will be useful in preserving the good relations between the regions of the Far East and West Coast US.

**— Are there tensions between the RAPP participants in connection with the deterioration of relations between the United States and Russia?**

We cannot ignore the political environment, but we cannot say that Yakutia does not have friendly relations with the States of Alaska, Washington or California. For 22 years we have been developing and strengthening healthy relations between our regions. In the West (of Russia) there are many issues affecting relations between Moscow and Washington that are comparatively less severe in the Pacific theater.

At this stage, our nations are looking for ways to normalize relations, and I think the regions of the Far East and US West Coast can play a special role in this process. The meeting has a particular relevance in rebuilding our relationship and returning to a more pragmatic trajectory.

**— Which topics will be the focus of the upcoming meeting?**

— Together with our partners in the Department of Foreign Relations of Yakutia, we will define the most relevant topics for inclusion in the meeting agenda. Each year we choose thematic areas for particular consideration. Naturally, due to the fact that the meeting will be held here in the Republic of Sakha, we will pay special attention to its interests, while at the same time covering areas of important to other regions of the Far East and the USA. We always ensure the meeting is as useful as possible for all participants.

In any case, when looking at the interests of the two countries, it is clear that the Arctic is a very important issue, and over the last three years, we afforded a separate session on the Arctic. I visited Arkhangelsk a few days ago, and of course, we understand these issues are important for many regions. But the coordination of our respective approaches to Arctic issues is of great importance - both at the regional and federal level.

Traditional themes include Arctic, transportation, tourism and energy.

**— Last year there was information that the forum participants would discuss joint investment projects in various fields. Was it so?**

It's not exactly an investment forum where we promote the funding of specific projects. I rather recommend it as a mechanism for discussing unique approaches to resolving various issues.

However, discussing joint investment projects is certainly allowed. Note that in the framework of the forum there will be organized sessions, presentations, coffee breaks, receptions. What people hear during presentations is one thing, but direct interactions of participants are also very important. We always provide ample breaks between sessions so the participants have the opportunity to engage themselves in lively interaction.

**— Is there a basis to speak about the fruitful cooperation between our Republic and any of the States of the West Coast of the United States?**

— Today I met with business representatives of your region and saw that there are companies that would like to open new opportunities with the private sector in the United States. It is still early to speak about collaboration in the truest of terms, but the interest exists.

The forum meeting can be great and very successful, but the results depend more on the participants and their preparations. In this case, we will fully support their endeavors, because we are all interested in expanding contacts and business relations. However, we are not suggesting there will be specific investment projects immediately following the meeting in Yakutsk.

We are happy to support with companies introductions. Want the meeting to be as effective as possible and now, at an early stage, we need the help of our Yakut colleagues.

The majority of participants from the private sector face bureaucratic challenges. RAPP is the forum in which the private sector can freely identify the problematic issues in open discussion and generate concrete recommendations to resolve them. We pass these recommendations to particular Ministries either in the US or the Russian side for consideration in their ongoing policy work.

**— You can point to any particular RAPP results?**

— I'm not saying that we immediately resolve any issues. Sometimes our recommendations are considered over years. But the performance of the forum is quite high. We decided a number of issues related to the Sakhalin projects ("Sakhalin-1" — The US largest project in Russia on the basis of private investment, including the construction and operation of technological facilities of the world level for the production and export of crude oil and natural gas), visa regime and border areas.

One of the results of the discussions at RAPP was the appearance of Charter flight Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky – anchorage (USA, Alaska). Airline "Yakutia" aircraft are used on the route since July 2012. Immediately after the departure of Alaska Airlines from this route, we took up the question of its renewal. It was incorrectly believed that the route was unprofitable, but in fact the airline just saw greater relative profitability to use its fleet for flights to the resorts of Mexico. The process (renewed flight service) took 10 years, if not more.

**— How likely is it that the forum will attract a large number of US private sector representatives?**

If U.S. companies receive invitations from RAPP and from a Yakut company, it enhances their interest - Especially if your side suggests a specific agenda for discussion. The full list of companies attending will be developed over the course of registration, but I can tell you that there are companies supporting our forum and regularly participating in the meetings. These include GE, CISCO Systems, and many others.

Understanding what opportunities exist in your Republic, is an important factor to attract American companies to the meeting in Yakutsk. This does not mean we need to guarantee them cooperation in any specific sector area, but we need to provide clarity about the opportunities that exist. Beyond that, it is up to the participants.

The Department of Foreign Relations and the RAPP meeting Organizing Committee are always open to provide support between business representatives from the two countries. I want to emphasize that RAPP is not only a great annual meeting, but we work throughout the entire year in support of building relations between the business communities and are willing to organize meetings for companies from Yakutia with representatives of the American private sector.