Bilateral trade between Singapore and Russia has grown 43 percent last year – a reflection of the multi-faceted partnership between the two countries.

Speaking at the second Russia-Singapore Business Forum, held in Singapore today, Minister for Trade and Industry Lim Hng Kiang noted that government-to-government ties have also strengthened with increased business activity between the two countries.

For more on this, Jack Yong spoke to Ruben Vardanian, Chairman of the Russian investment bank Troika Dialog Group, and co-organizer of the Russia-Singapore Business forum.

RV: The objective of our forum is to learn about each other, to share information and experience, to get more contacts, to develop business opportunities for both countries. At the first forum, we made a joint venture with Temasek. Temasek is our partner and we’ve been investing in Russian companies. Second, the Russian government chose a Singaporean management company to run the main airport in Russia, which is in Moscow, so this is managed by the Singapore side. We’ve got more and more Singapore businesses in Russia; they are now less scared and their perception about Russia has become more positive as they’re learning about Russia. Hopefully, they form a long term relationship with the Russians.

With the warming of ties, a growing number of Singapore companies are emerging in Russia, across a spectrum of industries, such as food and beverage to consumer electronics.

RV: We are getting more hotels to open in Moscow. Also, we are getting real estate, culture and cooperation the kinds of things that you not only get when you bring a business in. You also bring knowledge about the culture, so that we better understand each other and trust each other. At the end, that’s the key element of success of the businesses – trusting each other and learning from each other, and hopefully, it’ll work for both sides very well.

Held in conjunction with the Russia-Singapore Business Forum, the Russian delegates to Singapore also organized a Business Education Roundtable to discuss opportunities in training and nurturing the next generation of business leaders.

Professor Annie Koh, Dean of Executive Education at Singapore Management University elaborates.

AK: Russia has tremendous resources, so we should see an opportunity here. I think I love the idea that they’ve got lots of R&D capacity. They have, for years, primary research, and I love one of the comments that came from the IT CEO, he said there are lots of engineers who are very grounded, and because they do not have a prototype, they’ve been insulated for many years and they’ve learnt the foundation in sciences and then when they get planted into companies, they don’t have any way of creating applied research, so they learn on the job. So actually, interestingly, their creativity is very high, and their creativity came out from their own resources, not copied from anyone. So I would love to see us working in collaboration with them, where we can tap on their intellectual expertise for R&D and we accompany that with our technology management, soft skills to build global platforms. So Singapore and Russia can actually be very complementary.

What kind of projects can we expect in the coming months, as a result of this roundtable?

AK: Well, the conversations will continue. I think one of the pieces that came up just now is the ability in which we can help in the intellectual services area in aerospace, where we can accompany our management skills with the technological skills and then we work on building a resource pool, so that’s one area. Another possibility is in the banking and finance area, and I love the idea that we can collaborate with them to bring Singapore companies who are hoping to grow global and may not know much about Russia and how to get into business there, so we can work with them at the university to bring a group or consortium of our companies and we could visit them. They can then talk to us and tell us about doing business in Russia, and visit many companies, so that it lends also as a network platform, and I think this is something that we can definitely launch quite quickly.

That was Professor Annie Koh, Dean of Executive Education at Singapore Management University, and before that, Ruben Vardanian, Chairman of Russia’s Troika Dialog Group. They were speaking to Jack Yong.