

*Vladimir Putin's opening remarks:*

Good afternoon, dear friends,

Today, we are honouring, here on the banks of the Neva River, the victors of the first stage in the international regatta of training sailing ships, a regatta which has been gathering young sea lovers from many countries for more than half century. This regatta is deservedly considered one of the largest and most prestigious sailing competitions in the world.

Allow me to offer a sincere greeting to all the participants in these races, their organizers, and certainly, the residents and guests of our northern capital St. Petersburg, who are here to share this wonderful festival of sea and youth with these sportsmen.

The Tall Ships' Races are a unique, very impressive show. This year, St. Petersburg is its main stage, a second stage. This city, which was built as the Russian Empire's gate to the sea, has been hosting fleets of ships from all over the world for more than 300 years.

The chronicle of St. Petersburg, its inimitable image, and its very atmosphere are inseparably linked with the sea and sea faring. I am confident that the dozens of grand sailing ships, which are now anchored in this historic port, will allow you to feel this in full measure, while the rustle of their sails and the creak of their ropes will remind us of a time of legendary clippers.

There is no doubt that seeing the world's sailing fleet at its best is a memorable event. It will not leave either the racing experts or new spectators indifferent. This event will prompt even more people to experience the adventures of the sea. The dream to sail the seas will capture new imaginations, resulting in new crews setting off into the open sea.

I would like to emphasise the importance of the mission promoted by the Tall Ships' Races. The main concept has always been to build relations between states and nations, establish direct personal contacts, develop tolerance in young people, and teach them to respect each other, and to understand diverse cultures. Every year, the regatta brings thousands of young men and women together, and knits their friendship with a tight reef knot.

Poland, where the current regatta began, has a wonderful saying: "No one will find out who his true friends are and who is only pretending, more quickly than the sea.."

At sea, a skill to guide a ship and the knowledge of navigation are not the only important factors. The success of a voyage largely depends on the personal qualities of each crew member. Courage and responsibility play an important role here, but loyalty to the traditions of the maritime fraternity is overriding.

Participants in these Races still have two stages of serious struggle. The Grey-Haired Baltic Sea is fraught with many navigational surprises. I am confident that you will cope with each challenge, that you will obviate the obstacles and race with the wind.

Regatta participants have been through serious training, and only the best of the best have gone to sea. I would like to congratulate you on the first stage, and wish you success. Now let us turn to the main reason for our meeting - awarding the victors.