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Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, September 4, 2019

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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs and

European Integration of Moldova Nicolae Popescu

On September 11, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks in Moscow with Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova Nicolae Popescu. This is the new Moldovan Foreign Minister's first visit to Moscow after the formation of that country's new government last June.

The ministers will update the agenda of bilateral relations based on the principles of the 2001 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. They will exchange views on major issues of bilateral cooperation and international issues of mutual interest.

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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's participation in the extended session of the General Council of the World Chambers Federation

On September 11, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is expected to take part in the extended session of the General Council of the World Chambers Federation (WCF) that will be hosted by the Congress Centre of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The federation is an international NGO that represents the interests of the chambers of commerce and industry all over world. Its goal is to further develop the institution of the chambers of commerce and encourage cooperation between them.

At this session the participants plan to discuss the role of the international business community in resolving major issues of global economic progress.

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Fifth Eastern Economic Forum

On September 4-6, Vladivostok is hosting the fifth annual Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) established by the President of the Russian Federation to promote the accelerated development of the Russian Far East and the expansion of international cooperation in the Asia Pacific Region.

The main guests of the forum – Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, Mongolian President Battulga Khaltmaa and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe – will also hold bilateral meetings with President of Russia Vladimir Putin.

This year Vladivostok is hosting over 4,000 representatives of official and business circles from over 30 foreign states. Japan, China, India, Great Britain, the United States, Switzerland and Italy will have

the biggest delegations.

The forum's agenda provides for the discussion of a broad range of existing and new measures of promoting economic growth and upgrading living standards in the Russian Far East. The participants will also discuss specific promising projects, laying emphasis on the opportunities of enhancing practical cooperation with their foreign partners. The main issues for discussion are scientific and technical cooperation, digital transformation of the economy and international trade, participation of Russia's Far Eastern regions in the global added value chains, the future of the Russian Arctic and cross-border transport corridors.

The forum's business programme includes about 70 events: thematic panel sessions, roundtable discussions and business dialogues: Russia-ASEAN, Russia-India, Russia-China, Russia-Japan, Russia-Republic of Korea and Russia-Europe.

The Intergovernmental Russian-Singaporean High-Level Commission, the Public Council of the Northern Sea Route, the conference "A Common Economic Space from the Pacific to the Atlantic: The Greater Eurasian Partnership," the 8th APEC International Conference on Cooperation in Higher Education, and the 5th Russia-China Media Forum will hold sessions on the forum's sidelines.

A vast exhibition and cultural programme has been prepared. A number of sports competitions will be held, including the international judo tournament under the patronage of President of Russia Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe.

We hope the Fifth Eastern Economic Forum will become yet another major step towards implementing Russia's strategic policy on making its Far East an economic growth point in the Asia Pacific Region.

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2nd Dialogue of Young Diplomats from the Asia-Pacific Countries on the sidelines of the 5th Eastern Economic Forum

The 2nd Dialogue of Young Diplomats from the Asia-Pacific Countries will take place on September 5–6 on the sidelines of the 5th Eastern Economic Forum. This is a new conference started by the Russian Foreign Ministry's Council of Young Diplomats a year ago. This discussion platform has gained a positive reputation as a tool for horizontal diplomacy, a concept for informal networking between young representatives of foreign affairs agencies and an extension of the Young Diplomats Forum initiative.

The upcoming conference will cover a wide range of topics related to both the complex international agenda that is relevant to the entire Far East region, and local issues of mutual interest. The programme includes meetings between young diplomats from the Asia-Pacific Region with guest speakers – for example, Amur Region Governor Vasily Orlov.

Following the conference, participants plan to adopt a final document.

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Second World War 80th anniversary events in Poland

These events were supposed to commemorate 80 years since the outbreak of World War II, a tragic chapter not only in 20th century history but in the history of all mankind. This date has been marked for many years, bringing together representatives from various countries as an event that truly deserves global attention. But frankly, it is appalling to see what this year's event has turned into. It is a quintessential example of rewriting history. Except this time it all went too far and became full-blown global bigotry.

Warsaw reduced what I wish I could call memorial events to a spectacle that was completely subjected to a demonstration of so-called unification of a civilised, free and democratic world against evil – first, Hitlerism, then Communism and, finally, modern imperialism. All this evil is allegedly represented by Russia. It is an attempt to rehash history and invent an “axis of truth.” Naturally, this whole concept is based on NATO's cynical, flagrant and hardline approach. This is not even propaganda or misinformation. It is a crime against our common history.

The concept of the event was formulated by Polish President Andrzej Duda, who said in his statement that, in political terms, World War II only ended in 1989 along with the weakening of the Soviet Union, which withdrew from the historical scene. What is this? Where did he read this? Who suggested this? Where is this group of real history experts – I would like to see them? I don't mean those who pretend to be experts or those who wrote a couple of posts on social networks but those who have written serious research papers and are recognised by the academic community. Where are the historians who signed off on this?

He was not the only one with these insinuations – there was a chorus with these dreadful, cynical and very dangerous lies.

I would remind all those who had to listen to this and then, probably, read this that the International Military Tribunal established at the USSR's initiative by the London Agreement between the governments of the USSR, the United States, Great Britain and France on August 8, 1945 accurately defined the timeline for one of the bloodiest conflicts in modern history and named the people responsible for it. These included all the top-ranking officials of the Third Reich and the Axis powers and all those whom we called and continue to call collaborators or accomplices. Any interpretations or pseudoscientific concepts, including statements about the responsibility [for unleashing the war] which has yet to be reviewed, and the equal responsibility of two totalitarian regimes that were at war, as well as the two periods of the occupation of Eastern Europe – all those statements made in

Warsaw have no legal or historical foundation whatsoever. We will firmly oppose all attempts to revise the outcome of World War II or rewrite it, in particular, attempts to forget its final documents or misrepresent them, including by bringing to trial, in addition to Nazi criminals, anyone else who was not there at the time [of the tribunals]. This is a crime against world history and our common history – a history that came at a heavy cost of millions of people losing their lives. This was not the end of obscurantism.

Many have shown their value in Warsaw. Polish Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak was one of these. He blamed Moscow for not receiving war reparations from Germany. This is not only beyond the boundary of decency but humaneness as well. I would like to remind that the 1953 Declaration stating Poland's refusal to receive reparations was approved by the legitimate Polish government, which was recognised by the international community and represented this country in the UN. Or do they think differently in Warsaw today? If Warsaw has changed its mind and thinks differently, then it must first sort things out as far as its own history is concerned. Before making statements like these, one should think about, among other things, the legal implications. I will also remind you that due to a number of diplomatic efforts by the Soviet government, 25 percent of Germany's territory in 1937 borders was transferred to Poland after the war ended: these are areas to the east of the Oder-Neisse line and other areas. We will release more materials about the substantial financial aid and logistical and technical assistance provided by the Soviet Union to Poland and about the rebuilding of the country.

We will never get tired of returning to this subject; we will never get tired of refuting fake stories, innuendoes and misinformation because this subject is eternal and ever-lasting. The multiethnic Soviet people, as we always emphasise, the allies of the USSR in the anti-Hitler coalition and participants in the guerilla and resistance movements have displayed unparalleled courage in order to allow subsequent generations to live, work and create in a world free from the man-hating ideology of Hitlerism.

The victory over Hitler's National Socialism has a tremendous uniting message. We will never get tired of repeating that, despite ideological differences, the nations that fought and rose against the crimes of Hitlerism represented different cultures, traditions and religions, including the views on their future in terms of culture, economics and politics, but they united their efforts. They were able to overcome their differences to prevent a catastrophe, which could really encompass all of humankind. That uniting message was addressed to all countries. One of the main objectives of the countries and governments that managed to hold on and defeat Nazism and Hitlerism was to unite efforts in order to prevent the repetition of similar mistakes in the future. I want to emphasize again that we did this even then, during the Cold War, notwithstanding our differences in political and economic views. Unlike our Western partners, we do appreciate the contribution of all countries and peoples in the struggle against Nazism, and we do not attempt to follow a pattern of confrontation by dividing the victory into our victory and their victory. Only combined efforts will allow us to prevent the horrors of war from recurring. This uniting drive is being neutralised by the efforts of the leadership of some Western countries, with Poland playing a leading part, which everybody can see

now. However, it is not the Polish people, but certain politicians who are pursuing their own interests.

I would like to remind you that Warsaw consistently follows a course of historical distortion: they demolish monuments to Soviet soldiers-liberators and desecrate their graves and memory. Regretfully, some of our former allies in the anti-Hitler coalition have decided to show solidarity with Poland and support this trend: fashion is fashion.

For example, US Vice President Michael Pence, in his September 1 remarks, mentioned dual invasion of Poland in 1939, two occupations of that country, and thanked European nations for their contribution as freedom-fighters without saying a word about the Soviet people. According to that high-ranking US representative, 16 million American soldiers, the British and patriots of resistance movement only had the merit of liberating Europe from Hitlerism. We remember who liberated Poland and how, and what price was paid for this.

Such actions and statements by Western leaders only testify to their own political impotence and historical short-sightedness. With their politicised judgements, which are far from historical truth, they betray the memory of all the fallen in that war, including their own compatriots.

Let's remember what they forgot to say in Warsaw: what preceded the beginning of World War II?

At that time, right-wing nationalist forces came to power in a number of Central and Eastern European countries. The borders fixed by the Versailles Treaty did not suit them. Take Poland, for example. Preparing to take part in the partition of Czechoslovakia and hoping for German support, Poland concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1934, which actually implied allied relations with the Nazis. We can also recall 1938 when Britain and France agreed with the Munich collusion in an effort to send the Wehrmacht war machine to the east.

I think it is also worth remembering the gist of a "liberal world order" to which the historical truth is being sacrificed now in Warsaw. The "liberal world order" was a continuation of a colonial or neocolonial regime for most developing nations. It is strange that this was not expressed in Warsaw in 2019 when a free world and values are mentioned. This regime meant "the right of the strongest" and the law of the jungle for a number of continents, not just countries. Let's remember napalm in Vietnam and depleted uranium in Yugoslavia. Maybe some people have forgotten about Abu Ghraib and the methods that the "liberal world order" that is in reality a regime used in the Middle East and North Africa since the start of the 2000s. Maybe we should also recall how representatives of this "liberal world order" dealt with those who described these methods like Julian Assange. Many Asian, Latin American and African countries were denied an opportunity to develop properly in the 20th century due to this "liberal world order." Their governments were simply shuffled to please those that represented states that are now called liberal and democratic. The "liberal world order" is to blame for countless expedition wars with millions of victims, distorted economies and poor populations deprived of rights in entire regions of the world. This is the truth. So, why didn't you talk about this in Warsaw?

Now let's get to the main point. They should have spoken about this in Warsaw since they so willfully prolong the world wars, starting and ending them whenever they want. Let's talk about international terrorism that the world community does not know how to deal with. It was born and grew from the criminal experiments of the "liberal world order" when the West supported all kinds of anti-government, extremist groups to enable them to uphold the values of the "liberal world order" with arms in hand on the territory under their control. This applies, for instance, to the mujahidin in Afghanistan who eventually became al-Qaeda. Wasn't it interesting to discuss this in Warsaw since everyone has departed so far from the main theme of the event?

Let's be honest and straight. During the entire postwar period the USSR and its allies kept the world from a global disaster and complete barbarity, and curbed the expansion that the leaders of the "liberal world order" tried so hard to carry out. Take the process of decolonisation. What did the "liberal world order" have to do with this process? Name the countries and nations that had the opportunity to stop being colonies based on free will, the will of the representatives of Western countries. I am referring to the countries that announced fantastic achievements in the freedom of the "liberal world order." Does someone know? Can someone recall?

It was the Soviet Union that provided the impetus for decolonisation in Asia, Africa and Latin America and maintained regional security in Europe. At the same time, it was restoring, on its own, the economic infrastructure of the war-ravaged countries. But some people do not want to remember this. This is not interesting because it completely destroys the myth of the "liberal world order" and the benefits it brought to humanity. It is worth recalling them and we will continue to do this. In the past, we felt embarrassed about doing this, but after the mayhem in Warsaw we have no choice.

We urge our Western partners to stop distorting historical facts and renounce attempts to undermine the existing system of international law. They should be guided in their assessments by the international law that unequivocally fixed the results of World War II. It is in our common interests to depoliticise as much as possible any discussions of our recent historical past and channel them into a professional dialogue between academic historians.

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Eternal Flame lighting ceremony near the Russian War Memorial in Ljubljana

On September 1, an Eternal Flame lighting ceremony took place in Ljubljana near the memorial commemorating Russian and Soviet soldiers who fell in Slovenia during two world wars. To light up the Eternal Flame, fire was delivered from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier near the Kremlin Wall in Moscow.

A Russian delegation headed by Deputy Speaker of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly Pyotr Tolstoy took part in the event timed to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the beginning of World War II. The delegation consisted of representatives of the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Defence,

the Ministry of Culture, the Government of the Samara Region, the Russian Historical Society, the Russian Military Historical Society and the Russian War Veterans Union. On behalf of Slovenia, President of the National Council Alojz Kavsca, Mayor of Ljubljana Zoran Jankovic, other public officials and core groups of anti-Nazi and youth organisations attended the event.

We consider the Eternal Flame lighting in Ljubljana to be important evidence of both the Russian and Slovenian peoples' intention to preserve the historical truth about the events of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, and mutual respect for the unparalleled feats of our ancestors who won a Great Victory over Nazism. We are grateful to our Slovenian partners for their caring attitude to Russian war memorials in Slovenia and for their consistent support of the activities of the International Research Centre of World War II in Maribor, Slovenia, aimed at promoting unbiased assessments of the past.

We are convinced that further bilateral war memorial projects will help consolidate peace and mutual understanding in Europe. We are open to involving the widest possible range of countries in this cooperation.

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Update on Venezuela

Venezuela's radical opposition continues to take steps to destabilise the political situation in the country. A few days ago (August 29), Juan Guaidó, the President of the National Assembly, announced the formation of his own "government." We consider this another dangerous attempt to legalise the duality of power, to create a pseudo legal reality that can only lead to the further polarisation of Venezuelan society and slow the search for the middle-ground solutions Venezuela so desperately needs to improve the humanitarian situation and to embark again on the road to progressive advancement.

There is no doubt as to who instigated Juan Guaidó's willingness to make this statement. Apparently, the United States, having seen the failure of power-based scenarios to topple the legitimate Venezuelan authorities, is trying to design a new strategy "to restore democracy" in that country. This slogan is now used to justify the formation of a parallel government in total violation of all norms of the rule of law in the country. The lack of legal grounds in Washington's actions is revealed in a perfect way as many of Guaidó's so-called ministers have long been working for organisations sponsored by US NGOs. It confirms once again that the White House is not willing to let the Venezuelan people independently agree on a political settlement to this domestic conflict in strict compliance with the Constitution.

We will continue, alongside like-minded nations, to oppose the imposition of external management to a sovereign state, to call for adherence to the standards and principles of international law in all aspects of the settlement of Venezuela's domestic crisis.

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Opening of Venezuela Affairs Unit at US Embassy in Colombia

We have noted the US' decision to open a Venezuela Affairs Unit at the US Embassy in Colombia. In view of severed US-Venezuela diplomatic relations, a logical question arises: What are the objectives of the new office? According to the US State Department, Washington is planning to use it to legitimise contacts with self-proclaimed "acting president" Juan Guaidó and to further pressure the legitimate government in Caracas.

This political and propaganda scheme was designed in the bowels of the respective agencies in Washington. A number of questions come up as to the methods to be used for achieving the proclaimed goal of the so-called "restoration of democracy and the constitutional order in that country, and the security and well-being of the Venezuelan people." How can one speak of the restoration of constitutional order when everyone supported by Washington as members of the legitimate government is being sponsored by Washington itself?

In recent years we have seen such noble pretexts for restoring democracy being used by US administrations to promote their own interests (which are totally unrelated to the interests of the peoples and countries in other regions), interfere in the domestic affairs of sovereign states, and use force and illegal unilateral sanctions bypassing the UN Security Council.

We call again on all nations who have influence to refrain from unilateral steps, to facilitate intra-Venezuelan talks aimed at searching for a solution to the crisis via an inclusive dialogue under strict compliance with the Constitution of Venezuela.

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Terrorist threat from Kosovo

We note that Kosovo continues turning into a terrorist stronghold. A whole territory has been taken away without asking anybody and against the decision of one more sovereign state, Serbia, and it was interpreted as "protecting liberal values." Let me tell you what it may lead to in that region.

Previously recruited and trained Kosovo Albanian ISIS fighters are returning to the region from the war zone. (They know where to return. This is a "black hole" where they think they can continue their recovery and then make a forced march to another region.) There have been about 250 such cases put on record. And we have been told that Kosovo is a land of opportunities. Obviously, the opportunities should not be for terrorists only. Civilians should also have some opportunities. And not only those living in Kosovo. Why is security denied to the adjacent countries, including Serbia,

which has not revised its views on the territorial issues and sovereignty?

It is important to understand that the issue concerns the followers of a radical ideology with vast combat experience. It creates evident security risks in the Balkans and Europe in general. What we see is a growing terrorist threat, which Kosovo Albanian authorities are unable to counter even if they wished to.

We are calling on those who are supporting Prishtina – the US and the EU – to give this issue their utmost attention. We believe that the Kosovo Force and the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo will take the necessary measures based on their mandates to neutralise the threat. Responsibility for the situation primarily rests with the aforementioned international institutions.

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Germany's response to US air raids on Idlib

We noted German Government spokesperson Steffen Seibert's statement that Berlin did not have complete information on the attack carried out by the US in the Idlib de-escalation zone on August 31. What does this lack of "complete information" mean? What is needed to provide it? When steps were taken in response to the Salisbury incident with no proof whatsoever, we were told that "there was adequate information," which no one had seen. So when the world saw and the media broadcast that the US attacked Idlib, and that the US also said this, the German Government said there was no complete information about this. How is this possible? This is an interesting type of democracy and freedom of speech.

If there is no complete information in the media and a lack of information posted on official US websites, Germany as a member of the international coalition headed by the US could have requested appropriate information from its allies or used NATO channels. It might have found out what was happening through the European Union. We are aware of the relationship between Washington and Brussels that continues to release statements on the situation in Idlib and in Syria in general. We are convinced that this information could have allowed Germany to clarify the situation in this Syrian governorate.

We are surprised that, against the background of this ignorance, Berlin allows itself groundless attacks on Russia, accusing it of targeted bombing of the civilian and humanitarian infrastructure in Idlib. We have regularly given our German partners exhaustive and objective evidence-based explanations concerning the accusations made against Russia.

Presumptuous eloquence, exclusively aimed at an arbitrary appointment of the guilty party without a search for the facts and a weighted analysis, hardly promotes a spirit of constructive cooperation and dialogue, including on Syria.

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Russia's Presidency in the UN Security Council in September 2019

On September 3, the UN Security Council members approved the work programme under Russia's presidency for September. In the beginning and middle of the 2000s many officials and politicians in Washington conceptualised the need to close the UN. This could also have become another "liberal world order" achievement if it had not been for Russia's tough position on upholding international law. The UN was subjected to many trials. There were endless information campaigns in the media and scandals involving UN employees that were ostensibly disclosed in various areas. There was even direct aggression against UN Security Council members and the very institution of the Security Council. I am referring to the US falsifications in the Security Council meeting room with test tubes when Colin Powell used the venue and authority of this body for reaching his own goals. This was an attack against the Security Council. The videos of the meeting room were shown all over the world and were later used as evidence of US lies. But Powell sat in the UN building and in the UN Security Council meeting room. Who will be taken to task for this? Who will be held accountable for undermining trust in the UN Security Council in different parts of the world? How difficult it was to restore this trust!

The work of the UN Security Council in September will be intensive, considering the start of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly and the holding of a general debate.

The UN Security Council will open a ministerial session on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations in maintaining international peace and security and on the contributions of the CSTO, the CIS and the SCO to fighting terrorism. This will be the central focus of Russia's presidency. It will take place on September 25.

Priority attention will be paid to the efforts of these organisations in countering terrorism and related phenomena in Eurasia, including drug trafficking and illegal trade in weapons, people and cultural values. Special emphasis will be placed on the situation in Afghanistan in the context of the threats emanating from its territory.

On a broader plane, the participants plan to review approaches to the further consolidation of international efforts, including in the UN, with a view to countering the global terrorist threat and establishing a large anti-terrorist front based on the universally recognised principles of international law that are enshrined in the UN Charter.

The attempts of international terrorists, as represented by ISIS, al-Qaeda and related groups, to create a network of "sleeping cells" in the broad space of Eurasia, especially in Central Asia, compel these regional states and organisations to further step up cooperation and improve mechanisms for interaction by law enforcement and judicial bodies as well as the armed forces.

The coordinated efforts of regional associations are very much needed because of the return and redeployment from Syria of foreign terrorists and militants that spread their ideology and try to

establish new strongholds. Regional organisations should also continue enhancing their cooperation with the relevant UN agencies in countering terrorism, which would also be a tangible contribution to global anti-terrorism efforts.

The second ministerial discussion of the UN Security Council during Russia's Presidency will be entitled, "Peace and Security in Africa: Partnership to Maintain Regional Peace and Security." We will organise this on September 26 in cooperation with the African members of the Security Council – Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa.

Crises in Africa and their consequences pose a serious threat to regional and international peace and security. The international community should enhance its collective efforts to prevent and settle them and to ensure a post-conflict recovery.

Despite the positive dynamics in a number of states, including the Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, there are still many hot spots on the continent. In some places, for example, in the Sahara-Sahel region or in Somalia, the situation is complicated by the heightened activity of terrorist groups.

The only way to eradicate armed conflicts on the continent is to increase the potential to fight them in the African countries themselves. The task of the international community is to fully support regional initiatives based on the "African solutions to African problems" principle. In this regard, the further deepening of interaction between the UN and the African Union based on Chapter VIII of the UN Charter seems highly relevant.

As for other important issues on the September agenda, I would like to note the following.

The Security Council will continue to work on the political and humanitarian aspects of the conflict in Syria, as well as on the country's chemical dossier. The situation in the Middle East is to be discussed. The developments in Yemen will be examined. A quarterly debate on Afghanistan is planned. Another highlight will be Libya, and we propose extending the mandate of the UN Support Mission in that country. The Security Council will evaluate the progress in stabilising Guinea-Bissau and South Sudan. It is also intended to extend the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia. An annual debate on UN peacekeeping operations will also take place.

The Russian Federation will make every effort to ensure the coordinated and effective work of the main UN body responsible for responding to threats to international peace and security, based on the constructive interaction of all its members and in the interests of creating a multipolar world order based on the norms and principles of international law and the UN Charter.

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Hurricane Dorian

Hurricane Dorian, which originated in the Atlantic Ocean, slammed northeastern Caribbean on

August 27 reaching Category 5 out of five, and Category 3 by September 3. It touched Puerto Rico's Lesser Antilles (an emergency situation was declared on August 27, with one person dead), the Dominican Republic, Cuba, the Bahamas, and the US states of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia.

Despite the evacuation of local residents and tourists from northern Bahamas, at least seven people were killed on the island of Abaco, and three more are missing, with over 13,000 buildings seriously damaged as of September 4. The hurricane brought gusty winds reaching maximum sustained speed of 250 km/h, a tornado and floods. A state of emergency has been declared in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina, and people are being evacuated from the coast. International and regional airports were closed with over 1,000 flights delayed or cancelled.

The Foreign Ministry promptly and regularly informed Russian citizens about this threat, including through the Foreign Assistant mobile app. The Russian embassies in Washington D.C. and Havana posted warnings for Russian citizens in the region on their official Twitter and Facebook accounts. Please pay attention to this.

According to many years of meteorological observations, the risk of bad weather in the Caribbean is highest in the period from late summer to late autumn.

This information should be taken into account when planning trips to that region.

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The 5th International Forum of Russian-Speaking Broadcasters

The 5th International Forum of Russian-Speaking Broadcasters will be held in Moscow on September 10–11. The forum is organised by the Russian Academy of Radio, which is an industry-specific association of major national broadcasters, with the support of the Foreign Ministry, Rossotrudnichestvo and Rospechat.

About 200 delegates from Russia, the CIS countries, Europe, North and South America are planning to attend and will share their experiences and talk about the successes and setbacks of Russian-language broadcasting abroad.

The participants will discuss Russia's interaction with international organisations in the media, development trends and the role of Russian-language broadcasting in the world, the cooperation of Russian-speaking broadcasters with Russian media outlets, and media's social responsibility.

The forum will be held at Rossiya Segodnya's press centre.

For more information about the programme, speeches and attendance see the Russian Academy of Radio's official website.

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Answers to media questions:

Question: The United States launched air strikes in Idlib Province without notifying Russia and Turkey. How, in your opinion, will this influence the agreements reached during the latest visit to Moscow by President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan? Why did the Americans launch the air strikes at this point?

Maria Zakharova: You should ask the Americans why they decided to launch the air strikes at this point.

As for our assessments, we provided them immediately. A detailed comment was posted on the official website of the Foreign Ministry (http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3767814), and our position has not changed.

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Question: Earlier, Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov did not rule out the possibility of Russia's involvement in concluding a peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. What can the format of such involvement be? Will Moscow act as a guarantor?

Maria Zakharova: So far, the completion of the ninth round of talks between the United States and the Taliban does not provide an unequivocal answer to the question of whether the sides have reached any final agreements following the negotiations. We are now expecting an official confirmation of this. So far, the Russian side knows nothing about the contents of the draft US-Taliban agreement. The media are saying a lot about this document, but, as you understand, in this case, we should not operate with media reports alone. It is imperative that we receive the relevant documents via official channels.

Judging by media leaks, principled agreements have been reached on specific parameters for withdrawing foreign forces from Afghanistan, for ending hostilities and launching intra-Afghan talks. This is the framework of the process being discussed. The Taliban movement also insists that Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and some other countries should act as guarantors of fulfilling this agreement. There have been public statements to this effect. In this case, we have summed up all the available information, but we don't have any other official data at present, but we are waiting.

The Russian side reaffirms its readiness to act as a guarantor of fulfilling the agreement, if it receives a request from its signatories, and to do everything possible in order to launch the peace process in Afghanistan as soon as possible. We will do everything in our power to facilitate this.

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Question: Are Russia and Ukraine preparing to exchange POWs? What is the current stage of this process? And what will its format be?

Maria Zakharova: As I am sure you understand, each matter should be addressed by persons who are officially authorised to do so. In this case, Human Rights Commissioner of the Russian Federation

Tatyana Moskalkova deals with issues such as the fate of prisoners and collaboration with the concerned parties. She is working very actively on these matters and regularly comments on them in the media. At this stage, only she and law enforcement agencies can comment on this issue. Today, I have nothing to add to the available information that has been made public by Tatyana Moskalkova. We will certainly comment on the matter, as soon as we obtain the required materials and assessments, or when we believe it appropriate.

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Question: The Democratic Union Party has taken a political decision to ban operations of the Kurdistan 24 in north-eastern Syria. What can you say on this score?

Maria Zakharova: Honestly, I have no notion of any motive for this decision. You know that we support the freedom of media. We believe that the media outlets that provide objective coverage of events, do not encourage terrorism and work within the framework and in accordance with the laws regulating their operations in the given country must enjoy these rights, which we support and uphold everywhere. But in this particular case we need time to scrutinise the problem. It is difficult to comment on it without getting additional information first. It will be easier when you at least find an explanation for this decision. We will certainly comment on this situation later on.

Question: What does Russia as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group think about Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan's statement to the effect that Karabakh is Armenian territory? How can such statements influence the conflict? Will this complicate the mission of Russia and the other mediating countries?

Maria Zakharova: There is the domestic rhetoric and domestic [political] narrative, which reflect the opinions of political movements and parties, provided that we are speaking about a democratic state. And there is also the peace process, which comprises the [conflicting] parties, the co-sponsors and the international efforts intended to reach a peaceful settlement. Of course, we believe that any statements made by the sides must fit into the framework of the common efforts towards a peaceful settlement.

It is very difficult to return to previous positions in a negotiating process when statements are made that can engender discord, add more questions or even disrupt the fragile negotiating process. Regrettably, such statements have been made at various levels and by all sides. We respect the internal political processes and agree that people in a democratic state have the right not only to express their opinions but also to create the political background, but we would like all the concerned parties to act for the benefit of the key goal, that is, use all the available resources to achieve a peaceful settlement as soon as possible. It is a long and complicated process. I believe that there is a general agreement on the need to accelerate it. To be able to do this, all the statements must be formulated carefully and must be conducive to the achievement of the key goal.

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Question: On August 12, Armenian serviceman Aro Kazaryan (Arayik Ghazaryan) left his combat

position under unclear circumstances and crossed the line of contact in Karabakh, ending up in Azerbaijan. The fate of this soldier, as well as the fate of Karen Ghazaryan, a resident of the Berdavan border village who is being held in Azerbaijan, remains undecided despite Armenia's unilateral humanitarian decision to release Azerbaijani soldier Elnur Huseynzade, who was detained near the village of Talish in Nagorno-Karabakh. Do you think that such problems must be settled and that this can help promote a mutual conference of the conflicting sides?

Maria Zakharova: These matters should be addressed within the established formats. I don't think I need to provide an additional political assessment right now. We have an effective mechanism of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. If necessary, they can make use of the existing mechanisms to provide additional assistance to the sides. If any of the [conflicting] sides needs additional assistance with any issue, for example, from Russia, they can use bilateral diplomatic channels.

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Question: South Ossetia has accused Georgia of masterminding a surge of tensions on the border, a situation unprecedented since 2008. Has the Foreign Ministry monitored the developments? Is Russia planning to interfere in some way and facilitate the easing of tensions between Tskhinval and Tbilisi?

Maria Zakharova: We are not only watching the developments but also published, on August 30, a special comment that was entirely dedicated to this subject (http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3767452), and we would like you to follow the developments – and our comments – for your own part.

Question (translated from English): Finland has urged the EU to improve relations with Russia. Given the criticism you have aimed today at the global liberal order, what confidence-building measures do you think possible to implement this project – I mean to improve relations between Moscow and Brussels?

Maria Zakharova: I am not in the business of criticising the liberal world order beyond the pale of reality. I said that we had never allowed ourselves to criticise some or other political systems, values or preferences chosen by some or other countries. But we will respond if faced with the events of the sort that have been just held in Warsaw, events that are ostensibly dedicated to the beginning of WWII but in fact get turned into an exercise in rewriting history and lynching Russia. We will respond to any attempts to distort history and revive the hegemony instead of displaying a realistic attitude to various political systems and their contribution to or role in the 20th and 21st centuries. What we see right now, is that just a single political system is being proposed as a global value, while the rest is being rejected. We are responding neither unilaterally nor spontaneously. We are reminding people about historical facts and realities. You cannot say that the liberal world order has brought stability and prosperity. If you do say this, you should name the specific countries, to which the liberal world order has brought prosperity, stability and freedom. You must indicate the countries that have indeed prospered during these years, as well as those that are now worse off. Certain countries are better off because others are less well off: so, there is a direct link.

I would like to stress that the only thing we do is to state the realities. We are reminding people of historical facts and are not urging anyone to criticise neighbouring countries, regions or continents. We call for cooperation and mutually beneficial interaction. We think that it is harmful and criminal to engage in criticism and historical revisions based on a current political situation. If, in the 20th century, the countries, which had gone through an immense tragedy and, despite their different views on the world system, still managed to defeat the evil and come to terms on how they interpret it, why, dozens of years later, should some obscure politicians, who have absolutely no relation to those events, think they have the right to rewrite all this and reduce it to zero? Who gave them this right?

They are doing this today – not ten or fifteen years ago – because the war veterans are dead. Because the war veterans are few and far between in this world. From the point of view of those statement-mongers in Warsaw, the time has come when the world is unable to rise to the defence of the historical truth. There are just a handful of war veterans and other participants in those events left. No one, regardless of the political system, would have allowed this sort of rigmarole 10, 20 or 30 years ago: people would come, WWII veterans, who would explain how it was in reality and would not allow anything like the macabre show that was staged in Warsaw the other day.

I do not know what Finland's appeal you are talking about. Perhaps you could quote the person that urged Europe to improve the relations with Russia. The fact that this leaves you asking questions is strange. Because it is good to cooperate; it is normal to develop relations and enhance collaboration between countries. What is not normal is to impose unilateral sanctions, pursue isolation of other countries, interfere with the affairs of other states and then claim that these actions are meant to preserve and support peace and democracy. Even when we do not agree and feel targeted by an aggressive policy of Western countries, we have never given up on the idea of cooperation. We have always been all for it.

Supposedly, we could take a different stand because over the 20th century alone we saw multiple attempts at aggressive behaviour towards our country. Still, we never got tired of saying that we will keep protecting our interests while seeking cooperation. Is it possible to defend one's own interests and at the same time support collaboration on equal terms? Absolutely. This is what international law is for, as a legal foundation of our relations. This foundation was built and there is no need to destroy it. This base allows countries to promote their own interests while cooperating, developing and competing, in a normal and honest way, in various activities such as the economy, finance, development, science and so on. This is normal. What is not normal is to dismantle the foundation, to isolate countries, to use the rule of force in the 21st century when we have come to the understanding of law's dominance in the life of a state, a nation and individuals. If you tell me who made the statement I will be able to be more specific with my comment. This is a very general response.

Question (retranslated): It was an article in The Financial Times. Finland currently holds presidency in the EU and is urging for the improvement of ties with Russia, according to an article published

today.

Maria Zakharova: This is a result of today's reality, wishes of people and businesses. All that is stopping the EU and Russia from developing normal cooperation is an attitude of a number of politicians and representatives of the political establishment – and not the European one. As we understand, the push is coming from the United States. Do not forget that Brussels imposed sanctions against Russia only under US pressure. Representatives of both Brussels and the United States admitted to this fact. I can quote specific White House representatives who revealed that only after Washington directly put pressure on Brussels, the latter resorted to the anti-Russian sanctions. This is the only hindering factor. Everything else is along the lines of Russia-EU cooperation. It seems obvious to me. The biggest proof is the EU's losses caused by artificially stalling cooperation with Russia.

Question: Armenia declined the invitation to take part in commemorations in Poland, and Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan made a statement of principle to this effect. In your opinion, is there an immediate need to hold major international events across the post-Soviet space to mark the common victory in the Great Patriotic War?

Maria Zakharova: Of course I believe initiatives of this kind to be of immediate interest. I saw the statement by the Foreign Minister of Armenia and support it, just as all our colleagues do.

We are working on this matter. A statement on this topic was adopted at the level of CIS heads of state (<http://www.cis.minsk.by/news.php?id=117111>). I read it out at one of the preceding briefings. We have always stressed that victory cannot be partitioned neither by factions within countries of the former USSR that are now sovereign and independent nor by World War II allies. We see, however, what is going on with our allies.

I fully support this statement by the Foreign Minister of Armenia. We also took note of the disengaged and special position adopted by Ukraine. We are aware of the processes unfolding in that country in connection with these matters and who directs them. But regarding other CIS member states, I believe that they fully share the idea whereby it is unacceptable to partition or rewrite history.

It is satisfying and essential that this applies not only to the statement but to specific policy initiatives in these countries. These efforts include looking after monuments, supporting veterans' associations, holding roundtable discussions and conferences, and publishing books. Every country has its own nuances and developments that its people and historians view as being of extreme importance for the history of the country and its people. However, there are also unassailable facts in the context of World War II. The outcome of the Nuremberg trials must serve as the primary reference point.

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