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## Briefing by Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, August 28, 2019

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### **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's meeting with Atul Khare, the Under-Secretary General for the UN Department of Field Support**

On August 30, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will meet with Atul Khare the Under-Secretary General for the UN Department of Field Support who is in Moscow at the invitation of Head of the Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsiya) Alexander Neradko to attend the MAKS, the 2019 International Aviation and Space Salon.

The agenda includes a discussion on Russia's cooperation with the United Nations Secretariat on air transport provisions for UN peacemaking activities and also on Russian providers of goods and services that participate in the UN procurement system.

### **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to speak at the Primakov School and meet with the students and professors at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations**

On September 2, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will speak at the autonomous non-profit Yevgeny Primakov School as part of Knowledge Day.

On the same day, per tradition, he will meet with the first-year students and professors at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and the Diplomatic Academy of the Foreign Ministry. His speech will be broadcast by national TV channels and posted on the Foreign Ministry's website as well as on Foreign Ministry social network pages.

We presume that Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's speech will be followed by a question and answer session, which will add interest to the discussion.

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### **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's talks with Foreign Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif**

On September 2, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Moscow. They are expected to discuss current issues related to bilateral

cooperation as well as items on the regional and international agendas, including JCPOA, developments in the Persian Gulf area and other matters.

Comprehensive Russian-Iranian relations continue to develop based on the principles of a neighbourly approach, mutual respect and aspirations to further expand mutually beneficial cooperation in various areas, in particular, in trade and the economy.

Russia is interested in continuing a confidential dialogue with its Iranian partners in line with the agreements between the presidents of Russia and Iran, who regularly meet and discuss various issues.

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### **Meeting of the Russian-French Security Cooperation Council with foreign and defence ministers**

On September 9, a regular, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Russian-French Security Cooperation Council with foreign and defence ministers will take place in Moscow.

The re-establishment of contact with our French partners in this format after a pause of several years (as a reminder, the last meeting was held in Paris on October 31, 2012) is the result of the positive dynamics in bilateral relations set by the two countries' presidents, which fully complies with Russia and France's ambition to develop and expand the political dialogue on current issues on the international agenda.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defence Minister General Sergey Shoigu will hold talks with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly in a bilateral format, followed by the plenary session of the council.

The discussions will focus on security in Europe and strategic stability as well as the situations in Syria, Libya, Venezuela and Ukraine, with an emphasis on issues related to the non-proliferation of armaments in space. The ministers will discuss developments in Iran, including Russia and France's efforts to preserve the JCPOA, the Korean settlement process and the situation with the OPCW.

The ministers will also talk about key issues of bilateral relations.

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### **Ethiopian Foreign Minister Gedu Andargachew's visit to Russia**

On September 9-11, Foreign Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Gedu Andargachew will pay a working visit to Moscow.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with him on September 10. They are expected to

discuss current issues on the further promotion of bilateral cooperation in the political, trade, economic and humanitarian areas, including the implementation of joint projects in Ethiopia. They will also conduct a detailed exchange of views on international and regional issues of mutual interest with an emphasis on preventing and defusing crises in Africa, primarily the countries on the Horn of Africa and the Middle East.

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### **RIA Novosti Ukraine editor-in-chief Kirill Vyshinsky's release from custody**

We welcome today's decision by the Kiev Court of Appeal to release editor-in-chief of RIA Novosti Ukraine Kirill Vyshinsky from custody, changing his pretrial restrictions. Vyshinsky's release from custody is the first step towards justice for the Russian journalist, who spent more than 400 days in a Kiev prison solely for doing his job.

We count on the prompt and full acquittal of Vyshinsky on all of the trumped-up charges brought against him.

We hope that this example (I am talking about today's release) will serve as a starting point for rectifying the critical situation with the rights of the media and journalists in Ukraine.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the specialised international bodies and NGOs both in Russia and abroad, in particular OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Desir for his principled position on Vyshinsky's case.

Not all of them stepped in immediately; many did think at first that it was really about someone who might have violated the law or been involved in some activity incompatible with professional ethics or applicable laws. But after some time, everyone stepped in. That was valuable and important. It is an example of how people can actually find common ground where glaring injustice is happening, regardless of their differences on other matters.

Once again, I would like to say: we are certain that in the future, we will be able to count on real cooperation on other issues, based primarily on respect for the law and all human rights, rules and agreements that have been developed by the international community over the past decades.

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### **Update on Syria**

We generally consider the situation in Syria to be stable. The Idlib de-escalation zone remains the main hotbed of tensions. Recently, the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorist alliance has actually turned this zone into a bridgehead for attacking Syrian government troop positions, including civilians, from

nearby locations. This month alone the militants have launched over 20 attacks on these positions, killing more than 140 and wounding about 230 Syrian soldiers. Several dozen civilians were injured as well. In addition, the militants continue attacking Russian military facilities in Syria. The terrorists launched rocket attacks at the Khmeimim air base four times in August alone. They continue attacking the base with assault drones as well. In view of the incessant provocations by the terrorists and to reduce the threat to civilians, the Syrian Army had to take counter measures. It is important to emphasise that all these measures are taken strictly within the limits of the demilitarised zone that was supposedly established a year ago in conformity with the Sochi Memorandum of September 17, 2018.

At the same time, the Russian and Syrian militaries are trying to achieve the broadest press coverage of the real situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone. On August 26 over 20 Russian and European media correspondents visited the town of Khan Shaykhun in the southeast of the Idlib Province, which was liberated by Syrian troops. The journalists saw for themselves how the terrorists had used civilian facilities for military purposes and the complex network of fortifications.

Persisting instability in northeastern Syria is a source of concern. Despite the announced rout of ISIS, the terrorists are continuing their subversive activities and have invigorated a vast network of so-called “sleeping cells.” The situation is aggravated by continuing clashes between Kurdish units and the Sunni Arabs that traditionally lived in these areas. In this context the Russian position remains the same – we support restoring Syria’s territorial integrity and sovereignty as a guarantee of ensuring the national security of its neighbours and achieving regional stability.

The general humanitarian situation in northeastern Syria remains grave. This is obvious from what is happening at Al-Hawl, a camp for IDPs on territory beyond the control of the Syrian authorities. According to UN humanitarian agencies, including the WHO, the camp is overcrowded and suffers from a chronically acute shortage of drinking water, food and basic necessities. This combination leads to the further degradation of disease control. As a result, the spread of acute gastrointestinal infection remains high – about 600 cases per week. The rates of typhoid fever, flu, measles, rubella, TB, cholera and many other diseases are growing as well. The death rate of hospitalised patients from acute malnutrition has reached 4 percent. Indicatively, the UN targeted programme for helping Al-Hawl remains underfunded since the donors allocated less than 40 percent of the required amount.

Russia and the Syrian government continue working to disband the Rukban camp for IDPs in the zone illegally occupied by the US and to relocate these people. These activities are coordinated with the relevant international humanitarian agencies. In the latter half of August, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent conducted a census of the civilians that want to leave the camp: about 16,000 people total. They will be released from the camp during the next month. In all, about 18,000 refugees have left the camp since March. After evacuation, practically all of them returned to places of their permanent residence in Damascus-controlled areas.

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### **Update on the Republic of Yemen**

We note that, in keeping with the agreement reached with the Ansar Allah movement in early August, the UN World Food Programme has resumed operations in Yemen. This is all the more important because, according to the UN, the country is living through the gravest humanitarian crisis of the modern times.

We expect humanitarian aid being delivered to Yemen to be distributed among the entire population, regardless of who is controlling a particular area at the moment. We are again calling on all the parties to the conflict to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of humanitarian aid workers.

We are concerned about the reduction in supplies of essential goods, primarily food, from Aden to the country's northern provinces where tensions are still running high following clashes between the supporters of the Yemen government and those of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) on August 7-8.

Hopefully, the talks between Yemen's authorities and the STC, which began through the mediation of Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, will allow the parties involved to overcome existing disagreements. It is important to prevent a new large-scale armed confrontation in Yemen, which will further strengthen the position of terrorist groups. This threat is extremely serious and must be warded off.

We strongly believe that any progress in resolving the numerous problems Yemen is plagued with, including its territorial and state structure, is only possible through a dialogue based on respect for the interests of the country's all major political forces.

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### **Update on Venezuela**

The United States continues to show complete indifference to the problems and needs of the people of Venezuela. Washington's unilateral steps, which are contrary to international law, are creating even greater difficulties for the delivery of socially important items to the country, something that clearly worsens the situation for all Venezuelan citizens regardless of their political preferences. Once again, we urge them to abandon their unlawful policies for the sake of improving the humanitarian situation in Venezuela.

Contrary to human logic (meaning logic that should be focused on the interests of the people of Venezuela), the Trump administration announced new ways to step up pressure on Caracas, threatening the country with a naval blockade. Has Washington learned nothing from the failed

experience of more than half a century of the Cuban embargo? I assure you that we will never tire of repeating that such illegal unilateral actions deserve the widest international condemnation.

In turn, radical forces in Venezuela, whose ambition is to overthrow the legitimate government, are playing along with their curators, continuing to artificially fuel the possibility of a confrontation of force. Evidence of this is the National Assembly's decision to reinstate Venezuela's participation in the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance. I don't dare to judge the legitimacy of this step now – this matter requires in-depth analysis, I think. As for its goals, they do not just raise questions, but they leave one downright dumbfounded. For those who do not know, this is about the so-called Rio Pact, a 1947 mutual defense agreement signed by the countries of the Western Hemisphere. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this agreement was denounced by a number of countries in the region including Bolivia, Venezuela, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. However, the Venezuelan opposition is now planning to use it for political campaigning, calling for the formation of an international coalition for “humanitarian intervention.” In our estimation, this is an extremely disruptive step and a very dangerous precedent for the entire region. Rather than inviting foreign soldiers to help, they had better think about a compromise settlement scenario for Venezuela, and address the most pressing issues, with socio-economic problems, to start. This would be a way to show true patriotism and concern for freedom and democracy.

For our part, we express hope that the intra-Venezuelan dialogue to work out a political and diplomatic way out of the crisis will continue. The next round of negotiations between the government and the opposition largely depends on the support of the international community. We have all seen how sanctions and their approval by the opposition can affect the negotiation climate. We urge all states that have any influence to work towards creating a constructive atmosphere around the Oslo process.

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### **Another package of anti-Russia sanctions**

On August 26, the United States imposed another package of unilateral sanctions. This decision, which Washington announced in early August, can only be regretted. It is a pity that the United States has sacrificed the remnants of the former Russian-American partnership for domestic considerations ahead of elections. This time the pretext was Russia's alleged use of chemical weapons in the city of Salisbury. So, another package of measures to contain Russia has been imposed. We all remember the high-profile story about Washington, based on Salisbury fairy-tales, taking a decision on Russia. The story about ducks left no one indifferent.

The White House has taken a regrettable step in a move to harm our country's financial and high-technology sectors. The Russian economy has proven its viability on more than one occasion while under external restrictions. As you know, a number of measures have been taken to adapt to these



strange, destructive and illogical steps by the Western countries. Our measures to adapt to these unfavourable, artificial and external factors are seamless.

We believe as ever that the US sanctions are an unlawful tool that is used to bring pressure to bear not only on our country but, as it is, on all countries against which this mechanism is used. The only result of the sanctions is that it becomes increasingly more difficult to bring bilateral cooperation back to normal. This is not in the interest of any country or nation. This is clear.

I want to repeat what we have said many times before for those who might consider taking similar steps in the future: Russia will never accept rules of conduct designed by someone else and imposed on it. The sanctions and any other kind of restriction will change nothing in this respect. Nothing is to be gained by speaking the language of ultimatums with Russia.

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### **Statements by US senators**

Yesterday morning Senator Ron Johnson said he was denied a Russian visa. His words were accompanied by strange and aggressive statements regarding Russia. The situation continued to develop in the evening. Johnson was joined by Senator Chris Murphy. Both accused Russia of disrupting their visit to Russia with a delegation of lawmakers from the US. Let's have a revelation session because these men need to be put in place. I will tell you what actually happened.

The US tentatively raised the issue of a possible visit by a group of US lawmakers in early September. There were no specific agreements on how this would be organised or any submission of documents, not to mention visa applications. There were no requests for official meetings in Moscow or the issue of entry visas by the Russian diplomatic mission in Washington, DC. I am saying this for those who like to talk in understatement or use vague wording. The Americans took no action that usually accompanies the visits of politicians, senators, diplomats or political scientists.

One gets the impression that the senators simply wanted to create a scandal over nothing. Why? They probably wanted to attract attention to themselves or maybe pursue some other goal. It is difficult to say.

I would like to emphasise that these US senators know well they are on the Russian list of persons that are denied entry to this country, precisely in response to the unjustified US restrictions on many members of the Russian Federal Assembly.

I would also like to draw your attention to circumstances that the US senators are trying for some reason to conceal from their own voters, supporters, those who trust them and give them their political mandate. I would like to focus on what is deliberately hidden from the American audience. We have offered Washington the opportunity, more than once, to lift all restrictions on visits by members of the legislative bodies of the two countries. This would remove at least one irritant from

our bilateral relations. We were shocked yesterday by Senator Johnson's statement, all the more so since Russia was the first to make a goodwill gesture by issuing him a visa last year, by way of exception, for a visit to Moscow and St Petersburg with a delegation of US Congresspersons, which was led by Senator Richard Shelby. Or has Johnson forgotten that he is on the stop list that was introduced in response to the restrictions on Russian representatives? During the meetings last year the US senators supported the Russian initiatives to unblock the interparliamentary contacts that have been frozen by Washington. Moreover, this is very important. I would like very much to draw the attention of the US media to this fact that is apparently concealed from the US public. The American senators promised to facilitate the implementation of these initiatives. So what do we see instead? In practice we see that, first, they have done nothing and, second, we saw a circus performance based on the manipulation of public opinion with false information.

We know that the Russian MPs are ready for a dialogue with their US counterparts but only based on equality and reciprocity. There can be no talk of "diplomatic games" of which Johnson is accusing us. If such statements have been made, we would like to see, read or hear the facts. We'd like to hear the explanation.

The sooner all this information is revealed to the US public, the sooner we will understand the absurdity of the policy conducted by many representatives of the US establishment.

As for Senator Johnson's attacks on Russian leaders and our foreign policy, I would leave this issue to his conscience, assuming he has one.

We hope that US lawmakers will display a more professional approach as regards foreign countries. After all, they are engaged in international activities among other things.

But for now, they are apparently more engaged in disinformation, the manipulation of public opinion, and the dissemination of fabricated stories, things they supposedly fight. In this case, I am not worried so much about yet another fake piece that is being spread in the US. We know how to counter fake stories like this and can respond promptly to them. To be honest, I am more concerned about the fact that it was produced not just by some political scientists or experts but by the people whom their voters entrusted with the right to decide the destiny of their country. It would be appropriate if the information on these senators' manoeuvrings reached those who delegated them this right.

We are willing to provide detailed explanations on this issue if there are additional questions or statements. Believe me, we will not just give up on this issue.

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### **Recent statements on the Northern Sea Route by Western politicians**

We have noted a number of statements over the past few days highlighting concern for the Arctic

environment and the impact of the Northern Sea Route. There have been many events dealing with this matter and involving officials, including President of France Emmanuel Macron, who met with the business community. At the meeting suggestions were made to protect the Russian North from anthropogenic impact and not to use the Northern Sea Route. And we are talking about French companies, some of which rank among the largest global merchant marine carriers. At any rate, this is what I read in the media. If media outlets have distorted the position of Paris, we will be happy to take this into account, provided they tell us about the official French viewpoint on this score.

I would mostly like to focus on the Northern Sea Route and to discuss its prospects, which are obvious. This is an optimal distance along the Europe-Asia route. As compared to the Suez Canal, there are no restrictions on its capacity, and the route guarantees relative navigation safety. Each year, the Northern Sea Route is becoming more and more popular due to more active operations by gas and oil companies in the Arctic region, including the Yamal Peninsula.

Russia strives to develop the Northern Sea Route. By the way, this question was asked at a briefing during my meeting with participants of the Mashuk 2019 Forum last week. I promised Forum participants that I would provide detailed information on this matter.

There are plans to ensure its year-round operation by 2025 and to expand the route's annual freight traffic volume to 80 million tonnes. Russia has unique experience of organising uninterrupted work in high latitudes, and it plans to continue expanding the port infrastructure, navigational and hydrographic capabilities of this transport artery and to improve the search and rescue system.

We are interested in expanding interaction with other states regarding the use of the Northern Sea Route. The International Public Council of the Northern Sea Route, now being established by Rosatom and due to include representatives of all Arctic states, is called on to involve big business in expanding the infrastructure of this transport artery.

At the same time, we should realise that the Northern Sea Route is a Russian national transport artery. As a littoral state, Russia is responsible for operating this route in full conformity with international law, and it will do its best to ensure the safety of shipping and close attention to the extremely fragile ecosystem of the region.

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### **Statement by the European Commission on the “Europe-wide day of remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes”**

We have noted the statement made on behalf of the European Commission by its First Vice President Frans Timmermans and European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Vera Jourova in connection with the so-called “Europe-wide day of remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes.”

We note with regret that this document is an example of the short-sighted policy of falsifying and rewriting European history, which was adopted by the Brussels-based EU structures. The idea that the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany, signed on August 23, 1939, “opened a dark chapter in European history” has again become a key element of this document. As in previous years, the document does not say a word about the aggressive and misanthropic plans of the Nazi regime, the importance of the victory over German Nazism in World War II and the Soviet Union’s role in it.

By releasing this document the European Commission has again made it clear that the EU is not going to give up the misguided practice of making historical suppositions and equating the USSR, which liberated Europe from Nazism, to Nazi Germany. Nobody wants to remember the Munich collusion and what happened in Europe in the late 1930s. So we will do this. We like reminding everyone of everything, explaining everything and citing specific facts.

The “dark chapter in European history” began not on August 23, 1939 but much earlier – when the Western capitals chose to appease Hitler’s regime and rechannel its aggressive aspirations to the East. The 1938 Munich collusion was the culmination of this policy. The European Union, which is trying to do everything to prevent the future generations from finding out the truth about this chapter of their own history, has made regular attempts to obscure this fact, if not bury it altogether.

It is strange to make such a reminder. Our generation knew this but current experts on international affairs forget for some reason that the Munich collusion was aimed at appeasing Nazi Germany and redirecting it to the East. The partition of Czechoslovakia was a manifestation of its absolute inhumanity and utter futility.

Incidentally, non-aggression declarations similar to the Soviet-German non-aggression pact were signed with Germany by Britain and France a year earlier and by Warsaw with Berlin as far back as 1934. However, these facts do not interest the European Commission. Nobody wants to recall them or remind anyone of them although this is strange since these countries are EU members and could be given due attention.

The signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact was a forced step for the Soviet Union because the Western powers were reluctant to support its proposal to establish a collective security system. However, the EU officials prefer not to recall this.

We consider unacceptable the attempts to draw parallels between the USSR and Nazi Germany. The decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal draw the bottom line on this issue. They make it absolutely clear who was on the side of the good and who fought for the evil in World War II. We believe the recognition of all results of World War II that are fixed in the UN Charter and other international documents are an imperative for everyone, including the EU.

Attempts to rewrite history for the sake of opportunistic political interests may have dire consequences. We see the results of the liberal treatment of historical facts in a number of European countries, where the propaganda of Nazi ideas and values is conducted in the open and where national radicals are raising their head. All this not only insults the memory of the millions of victims

but also threatens the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights. We urge the EU not to repeat the mistakes of the past, not to ignore these dangerous trends and to give a consistent assessment of all of their manifestations.

It will be too late if Nazism and fascism return to Europe.

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### **2nd international conference “Countering illegal arms sales in the context of the fight against international terrorism”**

On September 5–6, the 2nd international conference “Countering illegal arms sales in the context of the fight against international terrorism” chaired by Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov will take place at the Moscow World Trade Centre. The conference will cover current issues related to the coordinated efforts of countries to prevent weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists, export control, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the legal aspects of international antiterrorist activity. The list of participants includes representatives from over 30 countries and several international organisations including the UN, the SCO and the OSCE, as well as senior officials and experts from Russian ministries and agencies.

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### **Youth Circle discussion session at the AQDAR summit**

On August 29–31, Youth Circle discussion sessions for young people, organised by the Foreign Ministry’s Council of Young Diplomats and the Youth Council of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, will be held at the AQDAR World Summit as part of the City for Education Moscow Global Forum.

For the first time, representatives of the two countries’ youth councils, students and high-level guests will meet in this format and discuss issues related to the development of youth diplomacy, collaboration of young diplomats of the two countries, the fight against extremism among youth and economic diplomacy’s opportunities to develop cooperation between young people.

Call 8(915)195 1802, 8(965)107 8509 for accreditation.

Preliminary registration on the City for Education forum official website is required:  
<https://moscowglobalforum.ru/en/press>

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## **Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Alexander Yakovenko appointed Rector of the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy**

Recently, a document was signed on appointing Alexander Yakovenko the new head of the Diplomatic Academy of the Foreign Ministry. He has completed his work as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in London. Before that, he was a Deputy Foreign Minister and the Director of the Information and Press Department, and dealt with multilateral diplomacy at a Vienna platform. Mr Yakovenko holds a Doctor of Science degree, is an expert in space law and has authored many monographs and research papers. He has received many awards, insignias and titles.

Mr Yakovenko taught at many leading institutes, in particular the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. Law certainly was part of his academic pursuits.

I believe that Mr Yakovenko will not give up his hobby of speaking with journalists both in his free time and in the course of his work.

We proceed from the notion that the Diplomatic Academy will also embrace the traditions of openness which characterised it in the past as well.

I believe that we will have an opportunity to arrange a separate meeting with journalists, which we will dedicate to the Diplomatic Academy's plans and international ties.

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### *Answers to media questions:*

**Question: Taliban representatives hope that Russia will be the guarantor of a peace agreement with the United States. Earlier, Presidential Special Representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said that the Taliban would like to see Russia among the guarantors of compliance with the agreements with the United States. What, from the Russian point of view, should this international mechanism for ensuring a peace agreement in Afghanistan look like?**

**Maria Zakharova:** As far as we know, the next, ninth round of talks between US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban's political office, which began on August 22, has not yet been completed.

At the Doha talks, reaching an agreement on a ceasefire, the beginning of direct talks between the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan, and breaking the Taliban's ties with terrorist organisations, primarily Al-Qaeda, are also being discussed, in addition to the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

Russia is ready to witness the signing or be the guarantor of the implementation of the agreement between the United States and the Taliban, if we receive the relevant request from the parties involved. At the same time, we believe that the international mechanism for ensuring agreements should be negotiated during talks between the parties themselves – the United States and the

Taliban – involving appropriate consultations with potential international guarantors.

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**Question:** After last week's meeting with President Vladimir Putin in the French president's summer retreat at Fort Bregancon, Emmanuel Macron made several memorable statements. In particular, he said that the era of Western hegemony is drawing to a close, that the attempt to divide Europe and Russia is a "strategic mistake" and that capitalism has gone mad. The Russian and French foreign and defence ministers are scheduled to meet in the 2+2 format. What is your opinion of these statements? Is France really turning towards Russia? Will the EU follow in its footsteps?

**Maria Zakharova:** I would say that it is a turn towards common sense, not Russia. We pointed out the destructive character of the policy of isolation not only towards Russia but also towards any country. For many years – and even decades, judging by real politics – the world has been working to implement the policy of globalisation, which includes the connection and intertwining of relations in the economy, finance and industry. Proposing a policy of isolation regarding not only a major state but also countries that are not so closely involved in the international process goes beyond the logical and legal context and the immediate interests of the countries that make such a proposal.

I would like to remind you that these terms have not been used in the Western press for the past two years. But three or four years ago the word "isolation" and calls for isolating [Russia] were used several times a day. They sound absurd now. In other words, this is not a change in relations with Russia but the revival of logic in the actions and statements made by many Western leaders and politicians. This concerns not only heads of state but also the expert community, which can see the results of several years of the policy of isolation, which has thrown the world back and has created problems that will not be settled in the near future.

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**Question:** Does the Russian Foreign Ministry see an increase in Europe's political independence from the United States?

**Maria Zakharova:** Europe is yet to cover the path towards full independence in international affairs. What we see now is a limited European sovereignty. As for whether it is US domination or the European politicians' weakness that is most to blame, it is for the historians, political analysts and experts to decide. We only state facts.

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**Question:** The Norwegian Foreign Ministry has reported talks with Russia regarding the fate of Norwegian citizen Frode Berg, who is serving a prison term in Russia on espionage charges. What can you say about these talks? Are they complicated?

**Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov plans to visit Norway in late October for the anniversary of the liberation of north-eastern Norway from Nazi occupiers. Can Berg's problem be settled before this trip?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I don't know what the Norwegian side describes as "talks." I cannot provide any specific description of the developments. We have maintained contact with our Norwegian colleagues on the problem with Frode Berg since the very beginning of this story. But I cannot describe this as actual talks.

In April of this year, the Moscow City Court sentenced Frode Berg, who was arrested in Moscow in December 2017 on charges of espionage for Norway, to 14 years in a high-security prison. The sentence has taken effect.

Frode Berg has access to all the rights that are stipulated in the Russian legislation, including consular meetings with representatives of the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow.

As for the media reports regarding the Norwegian authorities' intention to bring Frode Berg home soon, I don't know what this means. I believe it would be logical to request comments from the Norwegian authorities. Maybe they will explain the situation. I don't know any details about this.

I can tell you that, while preparing for today's briefing and taking into account media reports, we have requested information from our experts on these developments. They assured us that the ministry had not received any official requests regarding this from the Norwegian side. Since this information was reported by the Norwegian and other regional media, we can assume that it was provided by the Norwegian side. So, you should ask them what they meant.

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**Question:** Will you comment on the termination of the intelligence-sharing agreement between Japan and South Korea? Will Russia do anything to reduce the tension between the two countries? How will this decision affect the situation in Northeast Asia?

**Maria Zakharova:** The matter concerns relations between two countries, and so I see no reason for commenting on this. Our priority in the region is stability.

It is very difficult to comment on a situation that concerns two other states. But in this case the [situation in this particular] region is very important for us, because Russia borders on a number of states that are active players on the international and regional stage. We wholeheartedly stand for maintaining and strengthening stability, and we support any initiative towards this end.

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**Question:** Kiev links the release of Kirill Vyshinsky with the fact that he was included on the exchange list. Is this true? Will such an exchange take place and when? If his release is not associated with this list, can Ukraine count on "reciprocal steps"?

**Maria Zakharova:** It is strange that you are asking about "reciprocal steps." All these years we've been saying that we need real steps across an entire range of issues. We have been expecting this from Kiev for five years now. Even if the issue was about a half-step or a desire to take a step in line with the stated goals and objectives, namely, the settlement of the intra-Ukraine conflict given the involvement of a number of countries in facilitating its resolution and the factor of the Minsk



Agreements, this has been supported by Russia. Our position remains unchanged.

Regarding the exchange, it was repeatedly commented upon by Russia's leadership, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. These comments remain valid to date. The work is carried out by professionals, namely, human rights commissioners and law enforcement agencies given the upcoming work in the legal field. So far, there has been neither the need nor the opportunity to provide comments or political assessments. Any and all constructive steps taken by Kiev or the Ukrainian authorities towards resolving the intra-Ukraine crisis and making progress towards implementing the Minsk Agreements are duly noted and always encouraged.

Now, humanitarian issues; everything that is connected with people's lives is a priority for us. We have always noted that it is unacceptable to manipulate people and use them as tools for addressing political problems. We have repeatedly discussed this subject with you remotely and in this room. This position remains valid as well. As soon as we can come up with any specifics, we will certainly do so. I shared my assessments with regard to Kirill Vyshinsky.

Prior to the briefing, I appeared on a live programme where people from Ukraine, who call themselves experts in modern Ukrainian realities, provided an assessment of what happened today regarding Mr Vyshinsky. They discussed "whose court the ball is in now", "who has the better reputation now" and "who will benefit from this step," and so on. If all these experts had used this kind of fervour with regard to the people behind bars, if they had used even a millionth of their present-day eloquence in the context of freeing people or preventing violations of their rights, we would not have been forced to appeal to justice or use numerous high tribunals to address international institutions from the perspective of Russia's executive branch. I'm not in a position to offer advice to anyone (especially civil society or members of the public in other countries). What I can do is ask you to use present-day eloquence and the desire to discuss this matter whenever the issue concerns the people who have not yet received the long-awaited freedom that Mr Vyshinsky finally got today. Perhaps, then justice will not cost us so much. Above all, it came at a high price for Mr Vyshinsky who was incarcerated for 400 days for nothing. Millions of other examples could be cited, but this man spent 400 days behind bars without any reason, without any actual charges or without any evidence at all, simply for writing articles.

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**Question:** Based on the results of the Riga City Council meeting on August 22, 2019, members of the National Bloc said the council's specialised committee had unanimously supported their proposal on abolishing Russian-language education in Latvian preschools. Later, it turned out that the deputies had merely discussed the relevant matters but had passed no decisions so far. But the Latvian language is increasingly being used in preschool education, and in late 2018, the government of the republic adopted regulations governing the kindergarten education system. Under these rules, it will be possible to communicate with children over the age of five only in Latvian while playing with them. What does the Russian Foreign Ministry think of this?

**Maria Zakharova:** We have an extremely negative opinion of this. First of all, this runs counter to all

human rights obligations that the state, as well as members of the European family [the EU], have assumed. I am talking about overall policies that are marked by such actions and steps, rather than only this specific example. Second, this step is extremely foolish. Apart from running counter to the law [no one has exempted Latvia from its human rights obligations], this is an extremely foolish act. We are talking about members of the country's population who want to be able to use a language that they consider native and which was used as the main language by numerous generations of their ancestors. There should be no restrictions in this case and in connection with obligations that have been assumed absolutely voluntarily by this state. This is a foolish decision because any efforts to restrict people's desire to promote their national identity and traditions makes them embittered and makes it impossible to build harmonious relations in society in general. There are more than enough examples of this.

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**Question: I have a question about the murder of a Chechen national by a certain Russian citizen in Berlin last week. According to some German media outlets, Russian agencies are allegedly involved in this murder. Some stories note this.**

**Maria Zakharova:** What stories contain these allegations that serve as a pretext for your information agency to ask this question without checking the facts?

**Question: We have heard about this from our bureau in Berlin. We will certainly request additional details and explanations from them.**

**Maria Zakharova:** It would be great if you could also provide us with details after checking the facts. So far, this sounds like part of a media campaign.

**Question: Did the Russian Foreign Ministry have any contact with German authorities on this score? Do you know the circumstances of this case?**

**Maria Zakharova:** The Russian Embassy in Berlin now maintains contact with the German law enforcement agencies. We have already reported this. It is strange that you paid no attention to this, and that you have not heard such rumours from your bureau.

The details of the arrest are being clarified. I did my best to find out whether anyone had seen documents confirming that this person is a Russian citizen. So far, they are using copies of his documents. Our representatives have not seen any real documents yet. Initial information is being obtained and requested, and all necessary actions are being made in line with the standard procedure. Russian diplomats are doing what they should when they receive a report that a Russian citizen or an alleged Russian citizen has been detained somewhere and he or she is in need of consular assistance. We also must find out all the details and circumstances of the arrest.

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**Question: My question is about Kashmir. Curfew in India-occupied Kashmir has entered its third week and the world is observing a huge humanitarian crisis there. International media reports a worsening**

**situation in the occupied valley. Indian forces are involved in human rights violations of the Kashmiri people. What is Russia's reaction to this grave situation?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We have commented on this situation more than once, and we have also discussed it with the Pakistani side. I would like to remind you that on August 14 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had a telephone conversation with his Pakistani counterpart, Mr Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

The Russian minister highlighted the importance of easing tension and noted that there was no alternative to a bilateral political and diplomatic settlement of any differences between Pakistan and India. We consistently uphold this approach in the work of our Permanent Mission to the UN in New York.

I would like to remind you that Russia firmly stands for the normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan. We sincerely hope that any differences between them will be settled politically and diplomatically through bilateral efforts based on the 1972 Simla Agreement and the 1999 Lahore Declaration.

As you know, this issue has been discussed by the Russian and Indian foreign ministers in Moscow, as it was reported today at the news conference following those talks. The Russian minister explained Russia's position of principle on this matter, which I have repeated here.

We will welcome any actions that can ease tension in relations between these two states.

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**Question: What do you expect from the meeting on Monday with the Iranian Foreign Minister? Diplomatically there has not been a breakthrough in the situation for quite a while. What can Russia do to force a breakthrough?**

**Maria Zakharova:** You ask what Russia can do to force a breakthrough. I don't think we need to force a breakthrough. What we need is a settlement and the use of political methods, primarily talks, for this end. The first thing to do, as we have said more than once, is to stop escalating the situation in the region. Instead of considering how to force a breakthrough, we must admit that we must stop turning up the heat or do anything else that can inflame tension in the region.

You know that a series of provocations has been staged in the region, and that it was very difficult for everyone to overcome these problems. Therefore, the first thing to do, as we keep telling our partners, is to stop fuelling tension. Second, we must return to the legal framework. No matter how boring and old this may sound, nobody has invented a better method yet. There are agreements that were prepared together, that is, collectively, on the basis of respect for mutual interests and for the concerns of a huge number of countries and political forces. These agreements were effective, at least for the first few years. We can revive them. The only thing that is hindering this is the lack of political will on the part of some players. This is yet another method.

I believe there are practical ways to apply at least these two methods. As you understand, all of this can only be discussed behind closed doors. However, we will provide detailed information on the

outcome of such discussions.

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**Question:** We followed the altercation between the Danish government and the Trump administration over the “purchase” of Greenland. Are such purchases possible at all in the modern international situation and system of relations?

**Maria Zakharova:** This is a global question. On the one hand, politicians have the right to put forth any ideas and proposals, in particular when they have a business background and continue to use business terms, such as a “deal.” Besides, a new election cycle has begun in the United States. We will hear many more interesting statements connected with election strategies and moves.

What is interesting is not the altercation itself but the reaction of the Danish authorities and political establishment to this exotic idea. What did we hear? It could be anything, considering the fundamental position of the European family of countries, that is, the EU member states and the non-members who support the territorial policy of Brussels. Imagine our surprise when we heard many of the leading Danish politicians and members of the royal family, who are responsible for safeguarding the values and traditions of the country, say something that was completely new in the context of the European policy. They said that the future of the island must be decided by the islanders themselves. This brings me to the next question: Why didn't we hear them say so five years ago? It would have been great to learn about this strategy, this concept and this stratagem not in 2019 in the context of US-Danish relations, but on the global scale, including with regard to other regions.

I have checked and re-checked the Danish response. It has turned out that it was not a fake. Moreover, I have heard it repeated by members of the Danish political establishment. Where have they all been before? Such a wonderful and extremely interesting and profound statement!

This situation has attracted my attention in the context of your question. Any two sovereign states are free to make any offers to each other, and they have the right to respond to them as they wish, either accepting or rejecting them.

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## Additional materials

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### Photos



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