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Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answer to a media question at a news conference following Russian-French ministerial-level talks in the 2+2 format, Moscow, September 9, 2019

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we have met in the 2+2 format, in keeping with the agreements by Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron, including those reached during their recent meeting at Fort de *Brégançon* in August.

The Council for Security Cooperation – this is what our format is called – has not met for a long time. Today, we expressed our common opinion that the decision by the two presidents was made at a good time. We had very productive talks.

The 2+2 format offers a good opportunity to analyse key current issues in their entirety, from the diplomatic, military and political perspectives, and also to try to agree on joint or coordinated efforts wherever possible. Today, we have identified a number of areas where we believe progress can and must be made.

We gave special attention to security issues in the Euro-Atlantic area. One cannot currently be satisfied with the developments there. We described our perspective of what was behind this situation, which is the destructive policy of a number of Western countries, primarily, the United States, to basically contain Russia and move the delimitation lines closer to Russian borders as part of NATO's headlong expansion [eastwards] for the sake of the so-called strengthening of the alliance's eastern flank.

We listened attentively to France's perspective of the current situation in the Euro-Atlantic Region, including the ideas expressed by President of France Emmanuel Macron in recent statements, in part, at the meeting of the French ambassadors in late August, which include building a European security system in cooperation with Russia rather than without it or against it. For our part, we expressed a willingness to work together in creating a space of peace, security and broad and equitable cooperation based on the relevant decisions of the heads of state and government at the OSCE summit in Astana back in 2010. Understandably, any discussion of the practical aspects of security need to be based on the OSCE-stated precept of "equal and indivisible security" according to which not a single state should enhance its security at another's expense.

We reviewed in detail the situation in the field of strategic stability, which took shape after the US withdrawal from the INF Treaty. Our position on this is well known and was repeatedly reaffirmed by President Vladimir Putin: we will not deploy such systems in regions where similar systems of US make do not appear. We proposed signing an agreement to this effect with our NATO colleagues, but for now, NATO has refrained from responding to this.

We discussed the situation with the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the preparations for the regular NPT Review Conference that is due to be held next year. There are serious risks in all of these areas. Obviously, the nuclear powers should be fully aware of their responsibility for preventing further aggravation in strategic stability.

Russia is particularly concerned about the prospects of moving the arms race to outer space. The US

has already expressed this possibility in its doctrines. Today, we asked our French partners to explain to us the provisions of the French military doctrine for space, adopted on July 25 of this year. In the context of the space issue, we urged our colleagues to show responsibility during the discussions that are unfolding at the UN, the Geneva Disarmament Conference, and with respect for proposals by Russia, China and many other countries to sign a legally binding document on preventing the deployment of weapons in space.

We have discussed the situation at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We shared our concerns about attempts to give its Technical Secretariat functions reserved exclusively for the UN Security Council in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We have agreed to continue our dialogue on this.

We have discussed the developments in the Middle East and North Africa, including the lack of an alternative to a political settlement in Syria based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress. We have agreed to continue coordinating our efforts against terrorists remaining in Syria, as well as in solving humanitarian problems, helping refugees return and launching a political process based on the establishment of the Constitutional Committee.

We have discussed the developments in Libya, where our positions are very close. We are in favour of talks between all the parties, above all those led by Prime Minister of the Syrian Government of National Accord Fayez al-Sarraj and Marshal Khalifa Haftar.

We have agreed to cooperate in the Central African Republic, where French and Russian military officers work in coordination with the CAR UN mission.

We have agreed to continue our cooperation in order to keep intact the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme. We both believe that there is no sensible alternative to the JCPOA. We welcome (which was reaffirmed in the telephone conversation between President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of France Emmanuel Macron yesterday) the initiatives taken by France and the French president in order to find agreements that would allow us to fully preserve the JCPOA while providing for Iran's lawful economic interests envisaged by it.

We both wish to lower tensions in the Persian Gulf. Russia's initiative in the form of a concept of collective security in this strategic region provides for addressing all the tasks via dialogue. As far as we understand, our French colleagues also promote ideas aimed at organising a diplomatic process involving all the interested parties. This is where we can also cooperate.

We compared notes on other current issues on the global and regional agendas, including Venezuela and the Korean Peninsula.

We reviewed the situation in Ukraine in terms of the unconditional necessity to implement the Minsk Agreements in their entirety. We expect the new authorities in Kiev to display political will and promptly implement Ukraine's commitments including those under the Normandy format and the Contact Group. The Russian side noted the positive approach of Ukrainian President Vladimir

Zelensky's statement that he is interested in resolving the issues of pulling the forces and equipment back from the line of engagement, starting with the areas agreed on three years ago by the Normandy format leaders and following the rest of the line through the Normandy format and the Contact Group. This fully meets the expectations of everyone interested in the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. We expressed hope that President Zelensky's position would move his country towards a settlement in Donbass and that recent statements from some of his team about Kiev's disagreement with various aspects of the Minsk Agreements were legally and politically inapplicable.

Regarding bilateral Russia-Ukraine relations outside the Minsk Agreements and Donbass, we all expressed satisfaction with the 35-35 prisoner exchange the day before yesterday. This event had extensive media coverage and was welcomed by all our partners and Ukraine's partners without exception. We hope this is a good sign that will allow us to expect Russian-Ukrainian relations to normalise along with a settlement in Donbass, and that will allow the unilateral and aggressive anti-Russia decisions taken by the Poroshenko regime to be reversed so our relations can embody mutual respect and support for the ethnic minorities in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation.

We are satisfied with the work we have accomplished. The foreign ministers and the defence ministers had separate meetings prior to the 2+2 format meeting. Jean-Yves Le Drian and I discussed bilateral relations including current economic cooperation, preparations for the 2020 Russian Seasons festival in France as well as the cross years of Russian-French regional cooperation in 2021. We touched on some problems regarding the operation of the diplomatic missions and our cooperation in the legal area.

Question: Last week, the new head of the Pentagon, Mark Esper, said during his meeting with French Defence Minister Florence Parly that Russia posed the main threat to international security and called on Russia to behave like a "more normal country." Please comment on this.

Sergey Lavrov: If he did say this, I must note that he called on us to behave like a "normal country" and not like the United States. Because otherwise, if we had behaved like the United States, we would have been expected to bomb Iraq or Libya in flagrant violation of international law, allocate millions of roubles from the state budget to interfere in other countries' affairs, the way Congress did when it tasked the State Department with spending \$20 million a year to "promote democracy" in Russia, and, probably, back anti-constitutional armed coups, the way the United States and its closest allies did in February 2014 when, under pressure from radicals, or neo-Nazis, the Ukrainian opposition denounced the agreement signed by the respectable European Union member-countries.

It is important to understand what our American colleagues, in particular Mark Esper, mean when they speak about normal behaviour. Mark Esper is a new colleague of Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu. The minister may add a few words. I know that when our two countries' chiefs of staff spoke on the phone, the American general said that Mark Esper was interested in establishing contact with his Russian colleague.

I want to congratulate RT on being referred to as journalists earlier today.

Additional materials

Photos



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