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## Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to questions at a meeting with the students and faculty of MGIMO University on the occasion of the new academic year, Moscow, September 2, 2019

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Friends,

Mr Torkunov,

Mr Yakovenko,

As your rector has said, these annual meetings at our alma mater have long become traditional. First of all, I would like to congratulate the first-year students who have enrolled at this wonderful school after a very challenging competition, as it has been said here, which included a high Unified State Examination result, as well as very serious and difficult additional trials. But you have no time to relax, for there are years of hard work ahead. I am confident that apart from intensive high-pressure studies – the quality of education is very high here, thanks to the MGIMO faculty, which I would like to commend once again – you will also have an opportunity to have fun as well. One of the traditions at MGIMO is students' loyalty to this school, which Mr Torkunov and I helped develop. It was a long time ago, but the tradition has taken root, which is very nice.

You have everything you need here. MGIMO meets the highest requirements set to modern universities. Over the past 75 years, it has become famous as the main centre training top-class experts in international relations. Thousands of MGIMO graduates are working in many fields, from state governance to business – all around the world.

It is only in a very few countries, one or two at the most, that a MGIMO diploma is no longer considered a pass into adult life, where MGIMO graduates have been persecuted and fired. This is

why I appreciate the courage of our foreign students. I am sure that when you get back to your countries and start working there, the years you have spent studying here will provide an additional impetus to the efforts we are taking now to prevent international relations from falling into the abyss of chaos and confrontation. This is a challenging job, in doing which we rely also on the expert potential of MGIMO and the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry. I would like to welcome once again Mr Alexander Yakovenko, the new rector of the Diplomatic Academy. He is a well-known person who held responsible posts at the central office of the Foreign Ministry and also outside Russia.

Regarding the theme of our meeting today, it is a time when global politics is running a high fever and when we see a new trend in the activities of our American colleagues, which includes the destruction of the strategic stability and arms control system, withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal and disregard for many decisions of the UN Security Council, in particular on the Middle East settlement. Under these conditions we must make the best possible use of our intellectual potential. I would like to repeat that we expect contributions to these efforts from our colleagues at MGIMO and the Diplomatic Academy.

The situation in the sphere of arms control is really negative. Following the withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in the early 2000s, the United States terminated yet another vital instrument, the INF Treaty, several weeks ago. The future of the New START Treaty, which will expire in February 2021, is up in the air. We have called for extending this treaty for another five years, as it is stipulated in the treaty itself. We do not see a clear US reaction to this proposal yet, but we keep working.

In addition to alarming trends in arms control and strategic stability, we are seeing attempts by the US and its closest allies to prevent the objective historical process of forming new centres of economic power, and financial and political influence. Our Western colleagues are not just ignoring these objective trends but are resisting them. Of course, their conduct is anti-historical and aimed at artificially preserving Western dominance that has lasted for over five centuries in the modern history of civilisations. These artificial attempts are creating additional tensions, all the more so since the Western leaders are not stopping at methods of unfair competition, but also pursue unilateral illegal sanctions, overt protectionism and trade wars.

Our Western colleagues are also trying to prevent the creation of a multi-polar world (an objective process, I reiterate). They try to avoid legitimate international structures and replace international law, which is based on the UN Charter, with a kind of an order based on some rules, which are invented on a case by case basis depending on political expediency. There are plenty of examples of this. If you have any questions about this, I will be ready to answer them later on during the interactive part of our meeting.

There are attempts to replace collective work in internationally recognised and legitimate universal structures with formulas unrelated to the UN, to create special interest clubs, and reach agreements in their own circles and impose these agreements on the rest of the international community as ultimate truth.

I believe that more people are realising that an order based on one centre of decision-making as promoted by our Western colleagues cannot be effective by definition. As I said, this doesn't take into account the appearance and consolidation of new world centres that do not want to be token money in somebody else's game. These people are primarily guided by their own national interests. They show a willingness to take an active part in forming and implementing the international and regional agendas.

A realisation of the cardinal changes in the geopolitical picture of the modern world was recently reflected in a colourful statement by President of France Emmanuel Macron at the meeting of French ambassadors where he bluntly predicted the end of Western hegemony in international relations and emphasised the need to develop cooperative work with the involvement of Russia, China and other leading countries of the modern world. Of course, we can only welcome such initiatives and their implementation. The main point is for them to develop into practical actions and help maintain an equitable dialogue aimed at reaching practical agreements based on equality, mutual respect and a culture of consensus.

Russia is the largest Eurasian power. We will continue to contribute to the consolidation of international and regional security in all dimensions, from military and political to economic and energy, and others. We will work on eliminating any dividing lines that, unfortunately, are still there after the end of the Cold War, contrary to all assurances and promises; they remain in Europe, and are even moving closer to our borders, cutting "deeper," as they say.

We will continue to uphold the values reflected in the UN Charter, will actively use our position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, will employ the UN General Assembly and other bodies, as well as the capabilities of other groups such as the G20, BRICS, and the SCO. These are groups where decisions are not imposed by a big brother, but are based on a balanced consensus.

Strengthening the legal framework for international relations is one of our priorities. I have already said that this is often being tested and attacked now. We will uphold the fundamental norms of international law, including the sovereign equality of all states, the unacceptability of interference in their internal affairs, the need to settle disputes peacefully, the non-use of force or the threat of force, and respect for everyone's right to choose their development path – a right that all UN member states are naturally entitled to. With this understanding, we are always ready to work out agreements based on a balance of interests, which is always possible when the partners show goodwill. Ways of doing this need to be considered separately of course, as well as another major task – to comprehend what is happening in the field of strategic stability and arms control, which I briefly mentioned above, and in this context, find a way to ensure the interests of the Russian Federation to the highest possible extent, including the international aspects of this problem, and the need to understand how realistic a dialogue would be in this situation.

Again, we are counting on the expertise of our colleagues from MGIMO University and the Diplomatic Academy. We will strongly rely on your research potential and creativity, as we did before, and continue to do, in the development of our foreign policy initiatives. We welcome this kind of

initiative.

We will certainly continue to cooperate with our allies and neighbours in the framework of the CSTO, the CIS, and the EAEU. Once again I will say: we are doing everything to protect our national interests. We are always open to an equal dialogue with our Western partners in a variety of formats. We should all focus on one common goal – to prevent the world from sliding further into chaos. Ideally, of course, we would like the political declarations of a new and promising architecture of peace, equal and indivisible security and broad economic cooperation in the Euro Atlantic and Eurasia, adopted by the OSCE over the past 30 years, to be translated into action. There is a demand for this, which was vividly confirmed during President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to France and his talks with President Emmanuel Macron at Fort de Bregancon.

A very urgent task is to develop these approaches to our common architecture, where there will be no leaders or followers and everyone will see that their interests are reliably provided for. An important step in this direction would be to implement President Vladimir Putin's initiative to form a Greater Eurasian Partnership with every country, without exception, on our common Eurasian continent, including the EAEU, the SCO, or ASEAN countries. Prospectively, this process should be open to the EU member countries if they are interested. I think the consistent implementation of this large-scale approach, which is not preprogrammed but would be implemented as the member countries see the benefits for themselves, would not only promote the progressive growth of national economies but would also substantially enhance predictability and stability in the vast space from Lisbon to Jakarta.

I would like to stop here and move over to the interactive part of our meeting. I am ready to answer your questions.

**Question:** Are there any grounds to be optimistic about the prospects for complying with the terms and conditions of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for the Iranian Nuclear Programme (JCPOA)? Does the international community have any alternative to this crisis?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Of course, this situation causes concern. The JCPOA, which entered into force in 2015, was described by all members of the international community as an outstanding achievement of international diplomacy in recent decades, not only in terms of calming the situation surrounding Iran and the Persian Gulf, but also in terms of its importance for strengthening the non-proliferation regime. When the United States unilaterally ceased to comply with this agreement, everyone was seriously concerned. But the United States did not stop there. They told the other countries not to implement the JCPOA, even though it was binding for all members of the UN according to the UN Security Council resolution.

This situation led to a crisis, as the plan was based on a balance of interests and concessions. This is a major compromise, an integral part of which is Iran's right to enrich uranium to a certain degree for the purposes of their nuclear energy programme and to produce heavy water within certain limits. But, most importantly, this package included Iran's inalienable right to trade with the outside world, primarily in oil, and to be paid for it. When the United States told everyone not to buy Iranian oil or

make any bank transfers in dollars as payment for goods delivered from Iran, the vast majority of countries (primarily, companies) found themselves in a difficult situation. They depend on the US market and the dollar, which, in the wake of these actions, is losing its reputation in the eyes of the international community. Of course, Washington undermined the dollar's position as the international payment currency not only by its decisions on Iran, but also with other sanctions, under which dollar transactions were disallowed for a particular country if it was run by a government that the United States found objectionable. Having said that, I would like to emphasise once again that Russia, along with the other parties to the deal on the Iranian nuclear programme, invariably confirms its commitment to this programme. We held two meetings last year at the foreign minister level of the countries participating in the programme without the United States, and worked out agreements according to which the Europeans pledged to coordinate and launch a mechanism that allows settlements with Iran in circumvention of US-controlled channels. This mechanism is not operational yet.

I mentioned President Macron's initiatives, which he discussed with President Putin at Fort de Brégançon a couple of weeks ago. One was designed to overcome the crisis around the implementation of the JCPOA. You can learn more about it from the media, so I will not dwell on it now. This process is still underway, and I do not want to make any predictions now. We hope that the actions of France and its President will bring results. President Putin supported the thought that President Macron shared with him. I will be talking with Foreign Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif right after this meeting. During the talks, we will have a chance to better understand how realistic it is to achieve results based on the initiatives put forward by the President of France.

**Question:** Russian correspondents have often been discriminated against by the French authorities. What is the situation with RT France and Sputnik France journalists at this point?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The situation is not very positive. If nothing has changed over the past few days, then RT France and Sputnik France journalists still have no accreditation at the Elysee Palace. I touched on this issue during President of Russia Vladimir Putin's visit to France. We had a separate conversation with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Presidential Advisor Emmanuel Bon. I reaffirmed that this attitude towards journalists runs counter to the rules of civilised behaviour as well as many agreements adopted by the OSCE among other organisations. According to them, all citizens of any OSCE country have the right to unimpeded access to information both from inside the country and abroad. The states agreed not to place obstacles in the way of the free flow of information in compliance with these political documents. Unfortunately, our Western colleagues, who will respond ardently to events in Russia related to the regulation of democratic processes, are taking steps in the opposite direction. Some time ago, France adopted a law on elections and covering them, which envisioned a fast-track court procedure involving only one judge without lawyers to decide whether to ban media from covering the election campaign in France, within 48 hours, if a regulator decides that this involves alleged intervention in domestic affairs, without giving any reasons. This is a very nontransparent procedure. This law was highly criticised in France. I hope that now the National Assembly will review possible steps to allow this democratic country to

refrain from such undemocratic methods.

France is not the only country with problems like this. Recently the Global Conference for Media Freedom was held in London, but RT was not allowed. The invited Russian representatives were not at a level that implies equality and democratic ways when addressing problems. We ask these questions to the Council of Europe and the OSCE. On a positive note, I would like to say that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media, Harlem Desir, (by the way, a French citizen) has been recently paying more attention to providing an equal review of the situations in different OSCE countries. But we still have a lot to do.

**Question:** What issues on the international human rights agenda is Russia planning to focus on in the activities of the UN Human Rights Council in 2021-2023?

**Sergey Lavrov:** First we have to be elected to the UN Human Rights Council, because right now we are not a member. We are actively working to be elected for 2021-2023. However, our current observer status allows us to take part in the meetings, work with delegations and promote our initiatives.

We are consistently promoting the rights of national minorities – language and religious rights – in the UN Human Rights Council and other international organisations that work with these issues, primarily the OSCE and the Council of Europe, especially today and in recent years. Our interest was caused by the actions of Ukraine's previous leaders, the Petr Poroshenko regime. With his administration's support, the Verkhovna Rada adopted many laws that flagrantly violated Ukraine's international commitments on ensuring the rights of ethnic minorities and the Ukrainian Constitution. This applies to the law on education, and the law on the Ukrainian language as the state language, which crudely discriminates against any minority language versus Ukrainian. In response to criticism by the Council of Europe and other human rights agencies in Europe and the UN, the Ukraine leadership under Poroshenko began to promise that it would supplement these laws with a provision to exempt the EU languages. If this goes through, the Russian language would be the only one subject to discrimination. Considering this, we urged our EU colleagues to not even review these provocative statements that are literally aimed at bribing the Europeans and meeting their concerns over the use of the Hungarian, Romanian and Polish languages in Ukraine. In this way, Ukraine wants to wash its hands and discriminate against the Russian language, the prevailing language which is spoken by millions in Ukraine alongside with Ukrainian. We will promote any relevant initiatives in the UN General Assembly, its Third Committee that deals with human rights, the OSCE Council of Ministers and the OSCE in general. As for the UN Human Rights Council in 2021-2023, I hope this question will be settled before that, since it is urgent. But if necessary, this issue will be a priority for us in the UN Human Rights Council after, I hope, we are elected.

**Question:** Some analysts believe that creating the Constitutional Committee on Syria, as important as it is, does not guarantee success. What steps do you think should be taken for this body to function most effectively?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The Constitutional Committee is called upon to start implementing a critically

important provision laid down in UNSC Resolution 2254, namely, to initiate constitutional reform. Like all other countries without exception, we are convinced that this is an integral part of any effort to achieve a sustainable settlement of the Syria crisis. Unfortunately, not everyone likes the fact that the Constitutional Committee is being formed primarily upon the initiative of the Astana troika, which proposed the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi in February 2018 which, in turn, laid the foundation for the efforts to create the Constitutional Committee and outlined the principles for forming it. The decisions taken by the congress were approved by the UN. There are countries which see the efforts around the Syria crisis not as an attempt to calm the situation and to ensure Syria's sovereignty and the right of its people to determine their future, but as an opportunity to carry on their geopolitical games. If our Western colleagues were pursuing goals which were more or less in line with the interests of a settlement, the Constitutional Committee would have become functional in late 2018-early 2019. Despite artificially created obstacles, our Astana format partners - Turkey and Iran - and we are doing our best to make Constitutional Committee membership suitable for everyone. We need to put a couple more people on it and it will become fully operational. Frankly, it is ridiculous to split hairs over a couple of names out of a list of 150 people in a situation where decision-making in this kind of committee (this has already been agreed to) will be based on the principle of consensus or, in case it is impossible to achieve this, on the requirement to obtain 75 per cent of the vote. That is, any Constitutional Committee member, be it from the government, the opposition or civil society, will be able to block unwanted decisions. In such a situation, making a big deal over one or two names is rather an insignificant approach.

You said that, according to some analysts, creating the Constitutional Committee does not guarantee success. I agree. But until we begin, we will not be able to understand how much headway this committee can make in developing constitutional reform that will be generally acceptable to all Syrians. Only those who do nothing never make mistakes. If you are afraid to take important steps, you will not achieve positive results. In this particular case, there is no need to be afraid, because this is provided for by the UN Security Council resolution, which must be implemented.

**Question:** How do you assess the work to rally international efforts to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons? What difficulties are there? How can they be overcome?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Regarding specific steps to facilitate the return of the refugees, the difficulties are mainly related to most Western countries' insufficient efforts to create the conditions on the ground for the return of refugees and displaced persons. Only Russia, and our Indian colleagues and Chinese partners to a certain extent, are actually doing anything. But the West categorically refuses to invest in efforts to bring life back to normal so Syrian citizens can return to their homes, claiming they cannot begin this work until there is clarity in the political process. When that process begins and progresses, they agree to think about how to invest or not invest in facilitating the return of those who had to flee their homes.

At the same time, they deliberately keep the criterion of progress vague enough to be able to further manipulate the issue. We consider this approach to be counterproductive and biased. There are some



eloquent examples. First, they say they cannot invest, because it would mean promoting Syria's economic development, and this is not allowed until it is clear how the political process will end. It is forbidden by EU decision, which, as you understand, is unilateral and highly controversial. But the point is, it is not about building factories or other industrial facilities, but rather providing the most basic shelter, water, electricity, basic medical and education services – nothing more. This fits perfectly with the criteria for humanitarian assistance, which is not prohibited even by EU decisions.

Another example: the Americans are working energetically on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, which is not controlled by the Syrian government, trying to play the Kurd card, which naturally causes discontent in Turkey. Turkey and the US are in talks about preventing the Kurds from settling in lands where Arab tribes traditionally lived, as the Americans want. There is a whole tangle of conflicting interests there. But on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, the Americans are not only allowing other countries to invest in building infrastructure, but even stimulate such investment. We see this as an attempt to challenge and question the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Such an attitude, based on blatant double standards, does little to implement UN Security Council resolutions.

The third circumstance that indicates the West's tendency to hamper the return of the refugees was yet another conference on assistance to Syrian refugees in Brussels a few months ago, where it was announced that the participating countries were ready to make voluntary contributions of 7 billion euros. But the lion's share of these amounts is intended to help the countries currently accommodating millions of Syrian refugees. Not to create conditions for their return, but to improve their accommodation in refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, that is, in fact, to perpetuate the situation with Syrian refugees staying in camps outside their country.

What is the idea behind this strange distribution of resources? Is it possible that our Western colleagues, who just like everybody else must abide by the UN Security Council resolution that provides for the holding of elections, prefer keeping as many Syrian refugees as they can in camps abroad, hoping that there they will vote in the "right" way? I am not saying that this is so – this may be one of the reasons, but it is very difficult to find another reason. But if this is so, it means the goal of achieving peace is substituted by a geopolitical game aimed at achieving the much-hyped regime change. The West has repeatedly resorted to this approach and is still doing so. I do hope that the previous failed attempts to orchestrate such revolutions in the region through outside interference will be a lesson for the West to change its stance.

Many countries understand that the refugee issue needs to be addressed quickly. We are ready to help. Russia is enthusiastically promoting the return of refugees to the Syrian Arab Republic, in particular from Lebanon and Jordan. Our military, deployed there at the invitation of the legitimate government and President Bashar al-Assad, are involved in preparing the necessary conditions in the corresponding communities. We inform the Syrian refugees abroad which territories are suitable for return.

The flow of returnees from Lebanon and Jordan is quite large – more than 1,000 people daily. Since

July 2018, about 400,000 people have returned to the Syrian Arab Republic. If we take the entire conflict period since 2011, about 1.5 million refugees have returned. This means that the rhetoric about the Syrian government not doing enough to create conditions for their return is biased and politically motivated. Our Western colleagues have questioned several laws adopted in Syria regarding the property rights of returnees, the criteria on which they can be conscripted for military service and a number of other issues. We have brought to the attention of the Syrian authorities all the comments and issues that international refugee structures had with their legislation, and all the requests and comments are being taken into account in the legislation they adopt. If there are any other factors still preventing the refugees from returning faster, we will work with the Syrian government while keeping in contact with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

**Question:** The development of ICT is compelling companies and states to deal urgently with both military and civilian security. Every state is developing its own tactic and strategy for cyber security. We understand that countries continuously wage cyberwars, as our international partners have shown more than once. But regardless of their ethnic origin, cyber criminals and cyber terrorists are a global issue. Do you think we should talk about the creation of a global system for information security? What difficulties do countries face when cooperating on this issue?

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is a very urgent issue and it didn't just appear yesterday. Over the past couple of years it has been significantly aggravated by the attempts to accuse some states, in part, Russia of hacking into US resources during the presidential election. Not a single accusation was confirmed with a convincing fact but this myth continues to circulate in the US and other Western media and is raised in speeches by some Western politicians. All this is taking place against the backdrop of our numerous proposals to set up working groups for a substantive discussion on specific grievances against each other with every Western country, the EU, NATO or any other agency. We also have even more solid grounds to suspect our Western colleagues of paying too much attention to our internet resources. This has been seen more than once. Representatives of the Central Bank of Russia, Sberbank and other government agencies have talked about this.

Many years ago Russia was the first country to raise the issue of international information security at the UN in the context of ICT influence on the military-political security of each UN member. These discussions took place with varying degrees of success. At one time our Western colleagues said it was pointless to review this issue because it could be regulated by the current international law. We didn't agree and quoted specific facts. At one time three or four years ago there was a consensus on adopting a resolution for this. A group of government experts was established. It presented a good report and made proposals on drafting rules of responsible conduct in ICT. At the 73<sup>rd</sup> UN General Assembly last year, our American colleagues, supported by their closest allies, began to object to the continuation of this work. Their argument was simplistic: Russia is interfering in the elections and other political processes in the Western countries, trying to cover up its unseemly line by promoting ostensibly valid and noble resolutions in the UN. If there is something to discuss, we should sit and discuss it, but it is not proper to accuse someone of non-existent plans. At any rate, the resolution on the responsible behaviour of states in the information space was adopted by an overwhelming

majority vote. In accordance with this, a UN General Assembly working group was established. Any member state can become a member of it since it is an open group. It will discuss the substance of the Russian proposals supported by all SCO countries on creating rules of responsible conduct in the information space. In parallel, a US-initiated resolution on creating a limited group of experts was adopted. Its tasks are to determine to what extent the current norms of international law may be applied for regulating the cyberspace. I mentioned that in our opinion additional legal standards should be adopted for this purpose. The West is out to prove that nothing should be done to regulate this area.

You also mentioned cybercrime and cyber-terrorism. Apart from the issues on the security of countries, this is a very urgent problem as well. We are trying to draw everyone's attention to it. Yet another UN General Assembly resolution was adopted at our initiative. It is against cybercrime – terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering and other violations of the law. This resolution invited all countries to share their opinion on this problem with the UN Secretary-General.

In principle, Russia and many of its partners in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) suggested that the ITU should regulate the internet on a broader plane many years before this discussion was launched in the UNGA. You understand what I am talking about. We are convinced that the forms and methods of regulating the internet should be accessible, transparent and understandable for all countries. Nobody should have a monopoly on regulating the global web. For the time being this issue is still under discussion. Obviously, there is a small group of countries that objects to these discussions, but they continue nonetheless. This is a very important area of diplomacy.

**Question:** What is the most valuable and useful piece of advice you have ever received?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I don't know exactly which one of all the tips, requests or instances of moral teaching have particularly helped me in my life. Always be honest. Most importantly, do not betray the people you work with or your friends. And then study, study and study.

**Question:** The Russia-Africa Summit will be held in Sochi on October 24. This is the first event of this level in the history of relations between Russia and Africa. Should we expect a significant breakthrough in relations between Russia and the countries of that region?

**Sergey Lavrov:** You have, in fact, formulated the answer. Indeed, this is the first Russia-Africa Summit in history. We have had very close and, in many respects, allied relations with most of the African countries during the decolonisation of Africa. The Soviet Union initiated these processes at the UN. We mark the anniversaries of this era, both the ones dedicated to freeing every African country, and the one dedicated to adopting the landmark UNGA document which is the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Politicians and lawyers, including judges at the UN International Court of Justice, still refer to it noting that there are several more territories that have not yet been freed from the colonialists as stipulated by the declaration I mention.

For obvious reasons, when the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Russia found itself in a completely different situation with 25 million Russians left abroad overnight; we didn't have properly equipped borders with our neighbours, because we used to be a single state, and there were huge financial debts and many other problems. Of course, relations with many foreign countries have faded into the background compared with the challenges the country had to deal with in order to preserve its statehood. As we regained our statehood and control over the country, and the economy and the social sphere began to develop, Russian businesses began to look at promising projects abroad, and we began to return to Africa. This process has been ongoing for the past 15 years. This return is taking the form of resuming a very close political dialogue, which has always been at a strategic and friendly level, as well as resuming people-to-people, cultural, and educational ties: 15,000 Africans are now studying in Russia, and about a third of them receive scholarships provided by the Russian state. Of course, our return includes the economic sphere as well. Our African partners are interested in Russian business working more actively there. This provides greater competition between the companies from Western countries, China, and Russia. With competition for developing mineral resources in Africa, it is easier and cheaper for our African colleagues to choose partners.

We always try to conduct business - and tell our companies to stick to such behaviour - so as to fully take into account the goals of the African countries' national economies. This applies to the production of hydrocarbons and other mineral resources, as well as energy, including nuclear energy. We are discussing such projects with a number of African countries.

Overall, we are, of course, far from the absolute figures characterising trade and investment cooperation between the African countries and, say, China. However, our trade grew by 17 per cent over the past year (which is a sizable number) to over \$20 billion and it continues to grow.

To reflect and consolidate these trends and in order to draw up plans for expanding our partnerships with the African countries, President Putin initiated the Russia-Africa Summit last year during the BRICS summit in Johannesburg. The initiative was strongly supported. It will be implemented under the co-chairmanship of the heads of Russia and Egypt, since this year Egypt is heading the African Union. Over 40 heads of state and government, heads of eight regional and subregional organisations in Africa and the president of the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) have already confirmed their participation in the Africa-Russia Summit in Sochi. The summit will be preceded by an economic summit, where the heads of state and government, along with corporate leaders from Russia and Africa, will hold discussions. Then, a political summit will be held on October 24. Documents are still being drafted. More details will be available as the talks are completed.

I think this is a very important event, indeed, which will draw a line under our current stage of partnership and outline ways to deepen it across all areas.

**Question:** Could the US' withdrawal from the INF Treaty lead to the end of the existing system of maintaining global strategic stability? What steps will Russia take in this context?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The US terminated the ABM Treaty and now it has walked away from the INF Treaty

under a far-fetched pretext. These are done deals. The US has already tested a medium-range ground-based missile using a facility that it claimed was only capable of launching anti-missiles. We said the opposite, and now the Americans have proved that we were right. Their actions show that they do not intend to return to the treaty. Demands and preconditions are being made on what to do with medium- and shorter-range missiles. The main precondition is the participation of the PRC in future talks. China has said that the scale of its nuclear potential is incomparable to the US and Russia's and for this reason its participation cannot be supported. But the US continues to insist on it and asks us to persuade the PRC to take part. We are not going to do this. If the US gets the PRC's consent, we will be ready for talks. But in my opinion compelling Beijing to do this against its will is not right and inappropriate.

There are other nuclear powers. As President Vladimir Putin has said more than once, we are ready to meet in any format. The Nuclear Five format is one of the main ones. We are working on a daily basis in the UN and in other capitals. Depending on the consent of the relevant countries, we are ready to meet in any format. Let me recall that despite the termination of the INF Treaty by the US we have made a very important political gesture. Vladimir Putin said that even though the INF Treaty does not exist, we will only take reflective measures. If the US starts developing relevant weapons we reserve the right to do it as well. If the US tests these weapons, we will have the right to follow suit. But the President emphasised that we will not deploy medium- and shorter-range missiles in regions where US made weapons systems are not deployed. If the US does not deploy them in Europe or Asia we will not do it either. This is a serious proposal, in fact, it is a moratorium that we have announced for NATO. We have proposed that NATO join it collectively. For now, they haven't expressed their consent.

As for the termination of the INF Treaty, does it mean the complete end to arms control? We still have the START III Treaty, that is, the 2010 Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms that will expire in February 2021. The Russian Federation has already expressed its willingness to extend it for up to five years. We are waiting for Washington's response. President Vladimir Putin spoke about this with US President Donald Trump when they met at the G20 summit in Osaka last June. We have not yet received a response. There are certain questions regarding the implementation of this treaty today. I think dialogue on this important issue is necessary in any event. We would prefer its extension for another five years to be the main goal of the dialogue.

**Question:** I am an author at MGIMO's student publication *Mezhdunarodnik*. This year, the first children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, born in 2001, are MGIMO students for the first time. Do you think international relations will improve with the advent of a new generation of diplomats, or will past grievances and squabbling with other countries remain as they are?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Mr Torkunov and I also worked at *Mezhdunarodnik*, but back then it was not a print publication (not in the sense of "unprintable"), but a hand-made one. We literally laid out a dozen sheets of Whatman paper; we used gouache and ink; we wrote articles, poems and songs by hand and drew caricatures. Thank you for keeping *Mezhdunarodnik* alive. This is a very good student

project.

Opinions vary with regard to the children of the new century and to what extent their arrival at the university, and then in politics, business and other areas of life will affect relations between countries. One opinion is often expressed by some political scientists who call themselves realists, not wanting to be known as pessimists. It consists of the fact that a generation that has not only not seen war, but for the most part was no longer brought up by those who survived the war, will lose the fear of war and of the negative phenomena that are piling up in international life. Primarily, this concerns the real threat of another arms race, which they are trying to impose on us, but in which we will not get involved, as President Putin has said on several occasions.

This point of view is legitimate. Therefore, it is important to preserve historical memory, not to allow it to be buried, or to impose an interpretation of history that is openly designed to humiliate our people and their achievements during the Great Patriotic War (a high-profile controversial discussion is underway both in our country and in the West). But the facts are on our side. When we defend our point of view on the history of World War II, we are not hiding a single fact. Our Western colleagues, as we saw from events in Warsaw in connection with the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, are trying to selectively present facts to their people and public opinion, keeping silent about the chapters that do not reflect well on either the Western countries, or on Poland. This is a problem. A solution can be found in open and candid discussions between historians. The politicians must be guided by international legal frameworks and standards which can be found, first, in the verdict of the Nuremberg Tribunal, which clearly defined who should be punished for the WWII atrocities. Second, these standards are stipulated by the UN Charter, which in one article states that everything that was done by the victorious powers is not subject to revision. This is one group of opinions.

Another group of opinions, which does not contradict the logic of the first, is that the new generation which is free of the confrontational manifestations of the Cold War, which accumulated in recent years in relations between Russia and the West, will be better positioned to rise above these disagreements and focus on ensuring that all young people, who are becoming more mature and entering adulthood, put common threats to humanity at the forefront. This includes climate warming (it is clear to everyone that something has to be done about this), terrorism, drugs, which is taking vast numbers of young lives and other forms of organised crime, as well as food security. No wonder the 16-year-old girl from Sweden, Greta Thunberg, is promoting her fight for a clean climate. Perhaps, a young and responsible citizen of our planet will start a movement for peace against the confrontation that is now hurting everyone.

If you have initiatives like this, please do not hide them from the public; express them openly.

I will end my remarks with what I mentioned at the beginning. The fact that students from many foreign countries are here creates a small but very important element of efforts to build mutual understanding between people. Where there's mutual understanding between people, it will be easier for nations to agree.

Thank you.

## Additional materials

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### Photos



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