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## Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions during a joint news conference following talks with Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva, Moscow, October 21, 2019

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Ladies and gentlemen,

We have held detailed talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria Ekaterina Zaharieva. It is symbolic that this is our Bulgarian colleague's first visit to Russia and that it has taken place this year, which marks the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between our countries.

We welcomed the increasingly active political dialogue. A series of important meetings was held this year, including those at the top level. I am talking about Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's official visit to Bulgaria; the participation of the Bulgarian President Rumen Radev in the St Petersburg International Economic Forum and his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin; and Speaker of the Bulgarian National Assembly Tsveta Karayancheva's visit to Russia. In addition, Dmitry Medvedev and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov met on the sidelines of the First Caspian Economic Forum in Turkmenistan in August 2019.

The joint efforts to promote political dialogue have brought results, which is proved by the improvement of our trade and economic relations. We commended the results of the meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation that took place in Varna this September. We also agreed to assist in the implementation of the decisions that were made during the meeting in a variety of spheres, from trade and transport to education and sports.

Our energy cooperation is improving and bringing results. Our Bulgarian colleagues informed us that the construction of the infrastructure for gas deliveries via the second line of the TurkStream pipeline has begun. As Ms Zaharieva said, the launch ceremony took place today with the participation of Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and Russian Ambassador to Bulgaria Anatoly Makarov. Our partners emphasised that the works will be concluded by 2020, as scheduled. At the same time, the Bulgarian Cabinet of Ministers is taking concrete steps to resume the construction of the Belene Nuclear Power Plant. The Bulgarian authorities are currently selecting the project's strategic investor. Russia's Rosatom State Corporation, which is the manufacturer of nuclear reactors and the owner of technology, will take an active part in this process.

We expressed satisfaction with Russian-Bulgarian cultural and humanitarian cooperation. We also thanked the Bulgarian Government for its efforts to create conditions for the study of Russian, which has been the second most popular foreign language in Bulgaria over the past 10 years. It is gratifying that Bulgarian young people demonstrate a significant amount of interest in studying at Russian universities. This academic year, 230 Bulgarian students have been enrolled at Russian universities and their tuition fees will be paid from the federal budget. At the same time, several hundred Russian citizens are studying in Bulgaria.

We have agreed to encourage tourism. Last year, over half a million Russians visited Bulgaria. We would like to see this figure increase. We would be glad also if more Bulgarian citizens visited Russia.

We have agreed to intensify our efforts to improve the contractual legal framework of our relations. The documents to which we attach priority importance include an intergovernmental agreement on licence relations and an intergovernmental programme of cooperation in culture, education and science, as well as an intergovernmental agreement on military graves.

I have delivered the documents on the state registration of the right of permanent (perpetual) use of the Bulgarian Embassy site in Russia to my Bulgarian colleague. We hope that our partners will reciprocate in the settlement of problems with Russian state properties in Bulgaria.

We exchanged views on current international topics in a constructive and trust-based manner. We focused on the Balkans, where the situation is, regrettably, far from simple. Russia is against viewing this region as a scene of geopolitical confrontation. We are interested in stabilisation and sustainable development there. In particular, we firmly proceed from the premise that a settlement in Kosovo must be based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and that the situation in Bosnia must develop in keeping with the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement.

We discussed our cooperation within the framework of the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), where Bulgaria presided in the first half of 2019. We also talked about the current and future relations between Russia and the EU, including in the context of the recent reshuffle in the European Commission.

We exchanged views on the developments in Ukraine after the presidential election. We reaffirmed our commitment to the Minsk Package of Measures for a settlement in eastern Ukraine.

Madam Minister kindly invited me to come to Bulgaria on a reciprocal visit. I accept this invitation with pleasure and gratitude.

**Question (for both ministers, retranslated from Bulgarian):** Have you discussed energy issues? Are you going to develop joint projects in this area? Have you reached specific agreements?

**Sergey Lavrov (speaking after Ms Zaharieva):** We think we have very good prospects for developing trade and economic ties. As was already mentioned today, in September Varna hosted a regular meeting of the Russian-Bulgarian Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation that mapped out further steps to promote economic cooperation that are bound to increase trade.

Speaking about specific projects, Ms Zaharieva mentioned that the modernisation of two energy units at the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant has been completed quite recently. Their service life was extended, and they are functioning effectively. Rosatom is ready to take part in the bidding for a contractor to resume the construction of the Belene Nuclear Power Plant. We hope our corporation has good chances to win it, considering that it produces reactors and owns the technology. As Minister Zaharieva said, today's event – the launching of the construction of Balkan Stream – is a big step towards expanding the second leg of TurkStream to European consumers. It will obviously enhance Europe's energy security.

Today, we also spoke about transport projects: resumption of ferry service and projects that are under review in the multilateral format by the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (OBSEC). There are promising agreements to promote the format of a single customs window which will simplify trade procedures and the decision made last May to form a common marine agenda. The sides are also discussing the formation of a leading group to promote a very promising project that will not only facilitate the sustainable socioeconomic development of the Black Sea area but also create better conditions for ensuring political stability in the region. We appreciate Bulgaria's active role in this project and will support it.

**Question:** Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu revealed the details of the meeting between President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Sochi. Turkey wants to discuss the situation in the districts of Manbij and Ayn al-Arab after the Syrian Army established control over them. Erdogan's advisor believes that if the Syrian Army defends the Kurds,

it will be an open declaration of war on Turkey. Do you think it is necessary to start implementing the Adana agreement and revise its details to address the concerns of both sides?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I will not comment on what an advisor or some other official said. We have a position that we are openly promoting and consider optimal in the current situation. According to it, the goal is to make all Kurdish structures legal in the Syrian Arab Republic and conform with the Syrian Constitution so that there are no illegal armed units in Syria and there is no threat from its territory to the security of the Republic of Turkey or any other states. To reach this goal, and we believe this is the only correct way of resolving the current situation, it is necessary to maintain a dialogue between the Kurds and Damascus. We are going to encourage this dialogue in every possible way. Both sides are interested in Russia's help with it.

Of course, it is necessary to maintain dialogue between Turkey and Syria, in which we are also willing to facilitate and encourage direct contacts. Obviously, dialogue between Ankara and Damascus should rely on the 1998 Adana agreement. This is the existing international legal foundation that was recently confirmed by both sides, including in the context of the latest developments. If during their contacts the sides decide it is necessary and mutually acceptable to clarify or change this agreement, that will be up to them. We will of course accept and support their decision.

**Question:** Last week it was reported that Russia plans to hold a Syrian-Turkish meeting in Sochi. Will it really be held and at what level?

**Sergey Lavrov:** A representative of the Presidential Executive Office has already commented on this issue. We do not plan to have such contacts.

**Question (retranslated from Bulgarian):** As we understood, you accepted the invitation of Foreign Minister Zaharieva to visit Bulgaria. When is President of Russia Vladimir Putin expected to come to Sofia?

**Sergey Lavrov:** As you understand, I receive an invitation from the Minister and respond to it. Top-level contacts are the domain of the relevant agencies – presidential executive offices. President of Russia Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borissov are in regular contact. I am sure when there is a real opportunity for this, they will take advantage of it.

## Additional materials

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### Photos



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