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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Rossiya 1 TV Channel on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Foreign Ministry's MGIMO University, Moscow, October 20, 2019

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Question: What are the three main qualities that MGIMO gave you?

Sergey Lavrov: Probably, it gave me many more than three. The ability to work independently and

communicate with people are the first two things that come to mind. Truth be told, the ability to be a loyal friend is God-given. Sometimes, you have to deal with people who are not that interesting to you, but you have to do this as part of your work. MGIMO is a good place to learn these skills.

Friendship is the most important thing. We had discovered a new quality of friendship by the time we finished kindergarten and primary and secondary school. Immediately after admission, all the new students were sent to assist in the construction of a television centre. We dug a pit for the television centre next to Ostankino Tower, which was under construction at the time. These two weeks were a wonderful time for me. I often think about it.

Question: MGIMO Rector Anatoly Torkunov has also spoken very warmly about your adventures when you worked in the student construction teams. I presume it was the most enjoyable aspect of your studies at the university. What was the hardest part?

Sergey Lavrov: Getting yourself to start preparing for the exams during the session was probably the hardest part. The construction teams and, of course, our famous student skits were the most pleasant things. Back then, mostly young men studied at MGIMO. Our get-togethers were regular and popular. And we had girls from the Maurice Thorez Institute of Foreign Languages (MSLU) come to us. Our universities were friends.

Question: When the girls came, the atmosphere changed a lot...

Sergey Lavrov: We had female students at our university as well, and we still appreciate and love them a lot. We are still getting together and holding alumni parties. Not so often, but we do gather once a year. Back then, we invited girls from other universities as well.

Question: You wrote the MGIMO anthem lyrics, which has the following lines: "It taught us to love our Fatherland, and to share with it both pride and shame." It is easy and pleasant to share pride with the Fatherland. Have you ever had to share shame with it?

Sergey Lavrov: Every person possessing such qualities as integrity and honesty has moments when they are not too comfortable with what is going on in their country. It depends on the person. For me, there were several such moments. All of them took place when the Soviet Union was falling apart. I don't want to say anything about anyone now, but it is about how some renowned people behaved in that situation.

Question: In one of your interviews, you mentioned the ability to openly express your position and maintain warm and friendly relations with foreign colleagues as one of the diplomat's main qualities. That immediately brings to memory the Lavrov-Kerry tandem when there was a very tough negotiating position on camera and warm and friendly relations off camera. How do you manage to go so quickly from one mode to another? Does it work with all your colleagues?

Sergey Lavrov: I wouldn't say we fought on camera. Each of us set forth our own position. But each of us listened to what the other had to say. It doesn't happen often.

With regard to how you can be friends with someone who has opposing or very different political views, when I was working in New York, in January 1996, I found myself at an event with then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The news had just come in that Yevgeny Primakov had been appointed Foreign Minister. Someone asked Kissinger what he thought about this, meaning that Primakov would probably toughen Russia's foreign policy as someone known for his tough approach. Kissinger said in his incomparable tone of voice that he always preferred to deal with people who

clearly understood and clearly stated the national interests of their state. They were friends and had respect for each other. I recently met with Mr Kissinger in New York. He said he did his best to attend the events dedicated to Primakov's 90th birthday. Due to his other commitments, he was unable to do so this year, but he will definitely come next year. We look forward to this happening.

Question: Is Tolstoy's diplomacy of good still alive?

Sergey Lavrov: I wouldn't say that Tolstoy's diplomacy is an appropriate term. If you take the "slap on the cheek" as a figure of speech, you do not always have to immediately respond to a negative move against you. Sometimes, you need to analyse what stands behind it. Maybe someone just wanted you to respond in a certain way and then to use your response to set you up and to incite against you a number of states that will easily take the bait, so to say.

When your national interests and things that are of fundamental importance to you are coming under serious attack, you need to answer, no question about it. President Obama is a case in point. He slammed the door when his administration was already in agony, out of spite and in an attempt to avenge the defeat of the Democrats in the presidential election, seized our property and banished our diplomats. Back then, we did not respond immediately, because we realised that this was mainly an attempt to undermine President-elect Trump's position so that he would begin his presidency with relations with Russia in this kind of state. As you may recall, we took a pause. Later, despite President Trump's saying he wanted to improve relations with Russia and take them to the right trajectory, the US Congress simply didn't allow this to happen. When we realised that rather than the sanctions being frozen or lifted, they were expanding and deepening, we also responded and insisted that the number of US diplomats in Russia and Russian diplomats in the USA be equal. Of course, our response was to close the US Consulate General in St Petersburg after a similar move against our property in the United States.

To reiterate, we are ready at any time to resolve these issues on the basis of "zero option" and return to the normal functioning of our diplomatic missions. I spoke about this with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The other day, I saw the US Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman, who had already completed his mission. I think they have an understanding that we must return to this someday. The sooner the better.

Additional materials

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