



17 January 2020

№ 66-17-01-2020

## **Foreign Ministry's answers to media questions for a news conference on Russia's diplomatic performance in 2019**

*(When quoting, reference to the ministry's site is required)*

**Question: There is a persistent threat of terrorism. Radicals continue staging bloody raids around the world. What is Russia doing in this connection?**

**Answer:** Terrorist activity indeed presents a serious, if not the main threat to international peace and security. Following its military defeat in Syria and Iraq, ISIS has morphed into a ramified underground terrorist network and is moving its operations to other regions. This terrorist organisation has not abandoned its plans to recreate the caliphate and is trying to spread its influence into Central and South Asia, build up its presence in the Asian Pacific region and promote interaction with Islamist groups in North and West Africa.

We are especially worried about the problem of foreign terrorist fighters, who often leave the areas of armed conflicts not to save their lives but to stage terrorist attacks around the world. In light of their commitment to radical ideas, combat experience and connection to the terrorist “international”, they pose a serious risk to security because they are planning acts of violence and recruiting new members. Their destructive actions could promote a serious aggravation even in the regions that are free from terrorism.

We believe that systematic efforts must be taken at the bilateral level and on international platforms, primarily the UN, to prevent and combat the threat of terrorism based on the solid international legal framework. We would like to point out that the UN must play the central, guiding and coordinating role in the international efforts in this sphere based on the UN Charter, the norms and principles of international law, UN Security Council resolutions and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, as well as universal antiterrorism conventions and protocols.

For our part, we have been traditionally focusing on in-depth discussions of a wide range of counterterrorism topics at the UN, including with a view to boosting international efforts in this sphere. For example, in September 2019 two events were held at the initiative of Russia's presidency of the UN Security Council – ministerial debates on counterterrorism cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organisations, including the CSTO, the CIS and the SCO, as well as a meeting on promoting cooperation with African countries in the name of regional peace and stability.

We believe it is important to enhance the effectiveness of practical operations and make more active use of the potential and instruments at the disposal of the ad hoc agencies of the UN Security Council, including the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and the 1988 (Taliban) Committee, as well as the 1540 Committee when it comes to preventing terrorists from getting

hold of weapons of mass destruction.

It goes without saying that a key role in the revamped UN counterterrorism system is played to the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). In 2019, we continued to contribute to the UNOCT's efforts aimed at providing relevant technical assistance through projects and activities with a particular focus on Central Asian countries, including when it comes to the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. We also helped to prepare a new UNOCT project, to be implemented jointly with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to cut short arms deliveries to terrorists. We hope this project will be launched soon, again with a particular focus on Central Asia.

We are extremely concerned about the possible proliferation of terrorism from the Middle East to Central Asia via Afghanistan, where ISIS is increasing its control over an ever larger territory. I would like to point out in this connection that in May 2019 the UN Security Council adopted sanctions against the Islamic State's Afghan branch, ISIS Wilayat Khorasan, at the Russian-US initiative. We hope to be able to continue this cooperation with a view to adding other regional ISIS "branches" to the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list. We also hope to be able to carry on a committed and substantive discussion on this subject, as well as on the other potential joint Russian-US counterterrorism actions within the framework of the relevant bilateral dialogue.

**Question: What about Russia's efforts to ensure international information security and fight cybercrime?**

**Answer:** In 2019, we vigorously promoted Russian approaches to ensuring international information security at international platforms.

In June, the UN Open-ended Working Group on international information security was established at Russia's initiative, the most important mechanism on these issues at the UN.

During the 74th session of the UN General Assembly a resolution on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security was adopted by a majority vote, essentially a compromise and a non-confrontational text welcoming the launch of the UN Open-ended Working Group. But the voting results showed that the vast majority of countries share Russia's logic.

Breakthrough results have also been achieved in promoting our initiatives at the UN to combat cybercrime. The UN General Assembly largely approved the Russia-sponsored resolution on countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes. It calls for the creation of an ad hoc open-ended intergovernmental committee to develop a comprehensive universal convention on this matter.

A number of major related regional events have been organised at Russia's request including the Central American forum on cybercrime and international information security in Guatemala on May 28-29, and an international forum on the use of ICT for peaceful purposes in Havana on July 8-10.

A joint statement was adopted by the Presidents of Russia and Turkmenistan on cooperation in the field of international information security, and a corresponding bilateral intergovernmental agreement was signed.

Russia held a range of other bilateral negotiations and consultations on this matter and participated in various international forums and conferences.

**Question: The situation in Syria, Russia's contribution to the defeat of terrorism in that country and efforts to achieve an inter-Syrian settlement through the Astana format - how would you evaluate the**

**Constitutional Committee's work? What are the prospects for rebuilding Syria? What is Russia doing in this area?**

**Answer:** Syria noticeably stabilised in 2019. That was achieved thanks to the conclusion and implementation of the Russian-Turkish agreements on Idlib and northeastern Syria – the memorandums of September 17, 2018 and October 22, 2019. That actually curbed the bloodshed on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, and also moved the country closer to establishing a long-term security based on the restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. In Idlib, we are taking steps to neutralise terrorist activity and prevent a surge in tension. It is obvious, however, that we cannot turn a blind eye to the aggressive attacks by terrorists, as those cannot remain unpunished indefinitely.

On the political track, Russia has continued to work on promoting an inclusive political process consisting of and led by Syrians with the support of the UN, as provided for in UNSC Resolution 2254. An important achievement of the Astana format was the formation and launch of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva last October in accordance with the decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. That gave the Syrians their first opportunity during the years of the crisis to engage in a direct dialogue on their country's future without outside interference. At the end of 2019, members of the Committee encountered some difficulties while working to reach agreement on an agenda for their future work. We consider this natural, especially at the start of negotiations.

A strengthening of comprehensive international assistance to Syria with humanitarian aid provided to all without politicisation, discrimination or preconditions would be of great help in creating a stable political process. We are also confident that there is no alternative to mobilising assistance for a voluntary, dignified and safe return of Syrian refugees and IDPs to their homes.

Our position in support of humanitarian assistance under international humanitarian law and our opposition to politicising the humanitarian dossier was reflected in the discussions at the UN Security Council on extending UN operations delivering humanitarian aid across the Syrian border to civilians. The adoption of Resolution 2504 marked a transition towards resolving humanitarian aid issues in coordination with the Syrian Government, with unconditional respect for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

**Question: What are the prospects for the Middle East settlement and the intra-Palestinian reconciliation? What about the Middle East issues at the UN Security Council? Could you give an assessment of the “deal of the century” promoted by the US?**

**Answer:** The current state of the Middle East settlement process remains critical. The Americans continue to add fuel to the fire by trying to make the existing international legal framework for the Palestinian settlement less clear.

We fundamentally disagree with the US's recent decision to stop considering the Israeli settlement activity a violation of international law, hence recognising “the real situation on the ground.” We regard this as another example of the wretched practice of legitimising the policy of *fait accompli* aimed at undermining the internationally recognised framework for the Middle East settlement process, along with such US steps as recognising Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and moving its embassy to Jerusalem.

In these conditions, it is as important as ever for the international community to step up its efforts to support the legal framework for the Middle East settlement, which includes the corresponding UN Security

Council resolutions, the Madrid Principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and provides for the establishment of an independent, sovereign, territorially united Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with the capital in East Jerusalem.

It is important to preserve the solidarity on the Palestinian issue at the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. In this context, we note the resolution condemning the US statement on the Israeli settlements adopted at the extraordinary session of the Arab League Council of Foreign Ministers on November 25, 2019.

The quartet of international mediators – Russia, the United States, the EU and the UN – is the universally recognised mediation format for the Middle East peace process. However, for the last two years it was in fact paralysed by Washington's unilateral steps to promote the “deal of the century.” We are ready to search for ways out of this situation both as part of the mediation quartet and in coordination with other partners with a constructive attitude and MENA countries. In particular, we discussed this during the talks with UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov and EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Susanna Terstal held in Moscow in December 2019.

We can see how persistently and methodically Washington makes efforts to break the recognised international legal framework for the Middle East settlement. By developing its “deal of the century” – by the way, its political aspect has not been voiced yet and a lot of speculation has already grown around it – the Trump administration is trying to do away with the notion of the two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and replace it with unclear palliative economic support measures for the Palestinians. This means a conceptual revision of the peace process's basic principles as well as the groundwork done by the international community over many years.

The attempts to take the search for a durable political settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict off the table are counterproductive. The only reliable way to overcome all the existing disagreements is via direct talks between the parties. It is dangerous to refuse to resume them, also because the unsettled Palestinian issue continues to fuel extremist sentiments in the region and beyond, and radicalise the young generation of Palestinians. The Israeli settlements and the demolition of Palestinian buildings remain a constant irritant. Sometimes skirmishes break out around the Gaza Strip and tensions escalate in Jerusalem, which are more difficult to ease every time.

It is obvious that the existing split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip plays into the hands of those opposing the two-state solution. The key condition for the resumption of the direct Palestinian-Israeli talks is the consolidation of Palestinians at the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Until then, Israel will continue to avoid resuming the dialogue under the pretext that none of the Palestinian political organisations represents all the Palestinians.

We are actively cooperating to overcome the intra-Palestinian split. With this in mind, Moscow hosted the third meeting between the main Palestinian political parties and movements in February 2019, after which most of its participants adopted the Moscow Declaration reaffirming their intention to restore national unity as soon as possible.

In this regard, we welcome the readiness to take part in the general elections confirmed by all the participants (elections for the post of president and to the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestinian

National Council) based on the previous intra-Palestinian agreements. We hope that the elections will take place as scheduled in all the Palestinian territories.

We believe that this positive intention must receive active support. We believe it is important for all the responsible players to use their influence to secure the progress and help the Palestinians overcome their spit.

**Question: What do you think about the situation in the Persian Gulf? What are the prospects for advancing the Russian concept to maintain security in the Persian Gulf zone? How do the concerned players perceive it?**

**Answer:** In the spring and summer of 2019, a chain of events took place in the Persian Gulf zone and drastically escalated the already high tension in this strategically important region. We consistently advocate a thorough and objective investigation of the then attacks on civilian vessels and non-military facilities.

At the same time, we are concerned over Washington's hasty and categorical statements that unequivocally blamed Iran for the attacks. Obviously, the United States was primarily guided by its own domestic policy considerations. It probably believed that it would therefore become possible to persuade Tehran to make concessions, to renounce its missile programme and to stop the alleged interference of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the domestic affairs of other countries by ratcheting up pressure on it.

We have the same critical opinion of Washington's idea to establish a naval coalition and to authorise it to maintain shipping safety in the Strait of Hormuz. We assume that such steps will only formalise the existing demarcation lines and expand the regional conflict potential still further.

We consider the January 3, 2020 US operation against Qasem Soleimani, the Commander of the Quds Special Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and his associates in Baghdad to be a deliberate act that undermined security and stability in the region. The act was perpetrated on the territory of a sovereign UN member state without its prior consent. We are urging all parties to act in a restrained manner, to display common sense and to prioritise diplomatic means.

Under these conditions, the Russian concept for establishing a collective security system in the Persian Gulf zone is becoming even more topical. Unlike confrontationist plans being suggested by Anglo-Saxon countries, we are offering a constructive unifying agenda to the region, and we suggest establishing mechanisms that would help jointly respond to the challenges and threats.

By the way, the Hormuz Peace Initiative, suggested by Iran, hinges on similar principles. However, its potential participants do not include states located outside the region. At the same time, the Russian concept calls for involving the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, as well as the European Union, the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in practical steps to implement it.

On the whole, members of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf have responded positively to our proposals. However, some states still consider it premature to raise the question of launching their practical implementation. They believe that the relevant conditions are not yet ripe because Iran and its Arab neighbours allegedly harbor profound mutual mistrust. One can hardly agree with this logic. We remain convinced that it is possible to overcome accumulated disagreements solely by launching mutually respectful dialogue that would heed the concerns of all the parties involved. The earlier the talks get underway, the faster real chances for changing the current situation for the better would appear.

To be honest, the current explosive situation in the region is a direct consequence of the fact that the

Persian Gulf states have so far failed to streamline effective communications channels. We consider it to be our job to help them in this respect.

First, we decided to hold a roundtable discussion at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow in September 2019. The discussion involved members of political analysts' circles and the academic community from various countries of the region and other countries. We are ready for further collaboration on this subject.

**Question: I would like to ask about Russia's contribution to resolving the domestic Libyan conflict. With what external players does Moscow work for these purposes?**

**Answer:** Efforts to facilitate the attainment of a Libyan peace settlement remained a high-priority task of Russian diplomacy in the North Africa region throughout 2019.

Russia has always opted for well-balanced approaches and has not sided with any party to domestic Libyan processes in the hope of obtaining any special dividends and preferences. It has maintained smooth relations with all of the country's influential public-political forces.

This principled position allowed us to obtain an objective assessment of Libyan developments, to better understand the motivation of the main Libyan protagonists and to plan our actions accordingly.

Regarding the latest escalation of the armed confrontation in this country, we maintained constant contacts with the warring parties since its beginning in April 2019. As consistent advocates of resolving any contentious matters by peaceful methods, we insistently urged them to stop bloodshed and to sit down at the negotiating table. Russian representatives focused on the Libyan peace settlement, while meeting with Fayez al-Sarraj, the Head of Libya's Government of National Accord, and the Government's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Siala on the sidelines of the Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi in October 2019, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Libyan Interim Government in the Eastern Region Abdelhadi Al-Huwajj in Moscow in December 2019, during contacts with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, Commander of the Libyan National Army, and other influential Libyan figures.

We coordinated our approaches with influential regional and international players involved in Libyan affairs. President Vladimir Putin regularly discussed the Libyan peace settlement matters with President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, President of France Emmanuel Macron, the Prime Minister of Italy Giuseppe Conte and other foreign leaders.

Russia was invariably involved in collective international efforts aiming to overcome the Libyan crisis, with the leading role of the UN. We readily responded to the German initiative on holding a summit on Libya in Berlin. We are actively involved in preparing for this forum. At the same time, we are convinced that, while helping the Libyans to resolve their problems, the international community should not impose any ready-made options on them. The unsuccessful experience of all the numerous earlier multilateral meetings on the subject of Libya show that this approach has no future.

**Question: What are the prospects for resolving the domestic political crisis in Ukraine? How could Russia help solve this problem? What comments would you make concerning the steps taken by the authorities in Kiev to limit linguistic and educational rights and freedoms?**

**Answer:** Unfortunately, the change of power in Ukraine during the summer of 2019 did not lead to

progress in resolving the conflict in Donbass. Having proclaimed the cessation of war in the southeast of Ukraine as one of its priorities, the country's new leadership is in no hurry to deliver on its promises. The situation remains complex and tense. Although the truce declared in July was supposed to be unlimited, it has not yet led to a complete ceasefire. The draft amendments to the Constitution on decentralisation, submitted in December to the Verkhovna Rada, really concerned not decentralisation but the reform of the administrative-territorial structure with strengthening the central government's powers.

At the same time, President Vladimir Zelensky, unlike his predecessor, managed to achieve the implementation of the decisions of the Normandy format summits of 2015-2016 on the disengagement of forces on three sections of the line of contact and written fixation of the Steinmeier Formula. This allowed for holding the next, fifth Normandy format summit on December 9 in Paris. Its main result was unanimous confirmation that there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements as the basis for resolving the crisis in Ukraine. The four states' leaders made clear recommendations to the Contact Group on specific areas of the settlement. The first steps have already been taken. The Verkhovna Rada extended the law on the special status of Donbass until December 31, 2020, and on December 29, 2019, an exchange of some detained persons took place.

Yesterday, on January 16, the Contact Group met for the first time this year in Minsk. We hope that its participants will continue constructive work to find compromise solutions to the existing problems.

We presume that the crisis in Ukraine can only be overcome by political methods through a direct dialogue between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. We are ready to facilitate this. Russia will do its best to ensure that all the provisions of the Minsk agreements are implemented in their entirety and sequence, including a ceasefire, the disengagement of forces, the withdrawal of hardware, an amnesty, the lifting of the economic and humanitarian blockade, and the granting of constitutionally guaranteed special status to Donbass and the holding of local elections there. The keys to all the doors to the settlement are in Kiev.

The establishment of lasting peace in Ukraine meets our interests and should have a positive effect on our bilateral relations.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly commented on numerous facts regarding human rights violations in Ukraine, primarily in the linguistic, educational and religious fields. We draw attention at all international venues to the policy of forced Ukrainisation, which is carried out by the authorities in Kiev. We are talking about millions of Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine and representatives of national minorities.

The country continues to attack the Russian language, which suffers double discrimination – in relation to the Ukrainian language and the languages of the EU countries. At the same time, the heroisation of Nazi criminals Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych is underway, with torchlight processions held in their honour. The symbol of Victory in WWII – the St George ribbon – is banned in Ukraine. Monuments are desecrated, history is being reviewed, books and films from Russia are banned, and soon people will be fined for using the Russian language. There are calls to cleanse Ukraine from Russian-speaking children. All this happens in the country that declares that its goal is to join the European Union. Even Kiev's Western curators find it harder to turn a blind eye on what is happening there. There are more calls for the local authorities to implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe on amendments to the laws on education and the state language and to bring them in line with international human rights obligations.

The settlement of the Donbass conflict is connected with the language issue. One of the key elements of

the Minsk agreements, the inevitability of which was confirmed by the Normandy format summit held on December 9, 2019 in Paris, is the right of this region to linguistic self-determination. Actually, the attempt of the Maidan authorities in 2014 to abrogate the law “On the foundations of the state language policy,” according to which Russian had the status of a regional language in certain areas, was one of the factors that provoked the crisis.

We urge international human rights agencies not to ease the pressure on official Kiev so that the rights of the Russian-speaking population and the national minorities are properly ensured. This is in the interest of Ukraine itself, since peace and harmony in society are the key to stability.

**Question: Eurasian integration. How is EAEU cooperation with other countries and integration associations developing?**

**Answer:** In 2019, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) turned five. Its member states are using supranational institutions and universal rules in a variety of economic areas in order to address their development tasks. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the integration project is a success and is bringing favourable results to all of its participants as well as partners that established close mutually beneficial contacts with the EAEU.

Last year was especially important in terms of the Union's international activity. The result of our countries' fruitful work was the EAEU entering into free trade agreements with Singapore and Serbia in October. They are aimed at building up trade and creating more beneficial conditions for Eurasian goods on foreign markets.

We would like to note the great significance that we attach to the implementation of the Interim Agreement now in effect, which leads to establishing a free trade zone between the EAEU and Iran. On this occasion, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani attended the EAEU summit held in Yerevan on October 1, 2019. This agreement will serve as the basis for expanding trade and economic cooperation with Iran.

Tangible progress has been made in EAEU-Egyptian talks on trade liberalisation. Experts are to agree on mutual tariff commitments and finalise some systemic provisions. We continue our work to draw up a free trade agreement with Israel and plan to launch a similar process with India this year.

Work is underway to align the EAEU and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. We regard the implementation of the EAEU-Chinese Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation as well as last year's Agreement on Customs Information Exchange as practical steps in this area.

Interaction between the EAEU and ASEAN has been making great strides. In 2019, they approved the programme of cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Commission and ASEAN as a follow-up to the Memorandum of Understanding on economic matters between the Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat. Free trade agreements between the EAEU and Vietnam are being put into practice, and a similar agreement with Singapore will become effective this year. Work is underway in line with the memorandums with the governments of Cambodia and Thailand, and a similar document was signed with the Government of Indonesia last year.

The EAEU also puts great effort into cooperating with the SCO member countries. The Union concluded two previously mentioned agreements with China and a preferential agreement with Iran, and intends to start talks with India. We welcome the willingness of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the SCO

Secretariat to formalise their bilateral dialogue.

The alignment of the EAEU and the Belt and Road Initiative as well as the integration of the EAEU with ASEAN and the SCO are in line with the formation of a new integration association – the Greater Eurasian Partnership, which is to harmonise the cooperation between multilateral entities being established in Eurasia and unite the potential of the countries in the region. Our understanding is that the partnership will be open to be joined by all interested countries and will be based on the principles of openness and mutual respect.

The EAEU and its members are facing ambitious tasks to develop common supranational regulations. We count on the efficient work of the members of the new EEC Board headed by Mikhail Myasnikovich, whose experience leading the Belarusian government and the upper chamber of parliament is much needed to develop integration and perform the functions vested by member states in the EEC, to begin this February.

We also wish good luck to our Belarusian partners who will chair the Union bodies in 2020.

**Question: Is there progress in implementing President Vladimir Putin's initiative to establish the Greater Eurasian Partnership?**

**Answer:** Last year can be rightfully considered a breakthrough in the implementation of the idea of the Greater Eurasian Partnership.

It is significant that President Vladimir Putin's initiative was actively supported by our strategic partner, China. The relevant provision is included in the Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and People's Republic of China on the development of their relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation entering a new era, signed on June 5, 2019 following the state visit of President of China Xi Jinping to Russia.

In addition, the Russian and Chinese leaders agreed on parallel and coordinated promotion of the initiatives of the Greater Eurasian Partnership and China's Belt and Road Initiative, which will help develop regional associations as well as bilateral and multilateral integrational processes for the benefit of the nations on the Eurasian continent. In order to implement this agreement, the two governments were instructed to develop concrete ways of coordinating work in this sphere following the 24<sup>th</sup> regular meeting of the prime ministers of Russia and China (St Petersburg, September 17–18, 2019).

The agreement on trade and economic cooperation between the EAEU and China signed on May 17, 2018 remains the foundation for practical cooperation in the area of coordinating the EAEU development plans and the Belt and Road Initiative. The document came into effect on October 25, 2019. We regard embarking on its practical implementation as a crucial current task, which includes the establishment of the mechanisms envisaged in it.

The Russian-Chinese Working Group on aligning the EAEU development plans and the Belt and Road Initiative is addressing the issues concerning the comprehensive coordination of the integrational initiatives. Moscow hosted its sixth meeting on December 19, 2019, which the parties regarded as very productive.

The initiative to establish the Greater Eurasian Partnership is among the EAEU's priorities, as recorded in the decision of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council dated October 1, 2019, On Main Areas of the International Activities of the EAEU for 2020, which sets the task to build new cooperation formats. It is emphasised that the implementation of projects in the area of coordinating the EAEU development plans and the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the promotion of cooperation with key regional economic associations and the largest national economies in Eurasia, remain its important elements.

The idea of “integration of integrations,” of establishing a common economic space in Eurasia, is gaining new supporters. The participants in the fourth Meeting of Speakers of Eurasian Countries' Parliaments (Nur-Sultan, September 24, 2019) announced their support for this concept in their final statement.

The Greater Eurasian Partnership is being established objectively on the continent in the form of a wide network of free-trade zones. For example, on October 1, 2019 the Agreement on Free Trade between the EAEU and Singapore was signed on the sidelines of the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Yerevan. On October 25, 2019, such an agreement was signed between the EAEU and Serbia and the Interim Agreement on the establishment of a free-trade zone between the EAEU and Iran came into effect. A decision was made to launch talks on drafting a preferential trade agreement between the EAEU and India.

We believe that Greater Eurasia has a great future. This area will remain a priority on the agenda of the EAEU and Russia in 2020.

**Question: What are the main results of the CIS activities in 2019?**

**Answer:** The consolidation of traditionally close partnership in the Commonwealth of Independent States remained Russia's foreign policy priority.

The CIS is successfully resolving its tasks and continues dynamically developing as a modern regional organisation. The members of the CIS are displaying increasing interest in this structure. In 2019, the highest CIS charter-based bodies adopted a solid package of documents aimed at deepening economic, cultural, and humanitarian and law enforcement cooperation.

The CIS summit in Ashgabat on October 11, 2019, adopted a Declaration on Strategic Economic Cooperation of the CIS member countries. It is designed to make fuller use of the socioeconomic potential of each CIS country and the CIS as a whole, expand equitable, mutually beneficial and comprehensive cooperation, promote economic ties and enhance the competitiveness of national economies.

In 2019, the CIS countries signed a Convention on Cooperation in the Digital Development of Society with a view to creating conditions for introducing modern information and communications infrastructure and new technology.

Despite foreign pressure, the CIS countries managed to preserve their positive dynamics in trade. In the three quarters of 2019, their foreign trade amounted to \$762.8 billion, which is a 0.2 percent increase over the corresponding period of 2018.

The signing of a programme of action on invigorating partnership between the foreign ministries of the CIS countries is a concrete result of their diplomatic activities.

The CIS countries promoted their coordinated positions on urgent global issues at international venues. In 2019, the CIS adopted at our initiative a joint statement on support for practical steps to prevent an arms race in outer space.

In 2019, the CIS presidency was held by Turkmenistan. We believe it not only successfully coped with this task but also displayed a proactive approach in this regard, setting a high bar for its successor. I am convinced that fruitful versatile cooperation in the CIS will continue under the presidency of Uzbekistan, which assumed this role in January for the first time.

Humanitarian cooperation made steady headway. It remains a serious unifying factor that is aimed at meeting the interests of the people, improving their wellbeing and creating a healthy and positive atmosphere in

society and interstate relations.

Large-scale projects in this area were successfully carried out. The number of their participants is constantly growing. These are events under the project "Great Victory Achieved Through Unity," the forum of the creative and academic communities, the Cultural Capitals of the Commonwealth interstate programme (Brest received this status in 2019), and many others including those related to the thematic Year of the Book announced in 2019.

This year will be the Year of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. Therefore, during the past year we focused our humanitarian cooperation on preparations for the celebrations of this date and working with our partners to preserve historical memory and prevent any falsifications of history. Russia has issued anniversary medals devoted to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in the 1941-1945 Great Patriotic War and will forward them to other CIS countries for awarding war veterans.

We consistently promoted the positions of the Russian language in the CIS space as a unifying cultural factor and one of the basic instruments of integration in the post-Soviet space.

A certain impetus was provided for cooperation in sports. The Games of the CIS Countries were established. The first Games will be held in Kazan next August.

Emphasis was also laid on expanding cooperation in fundamental sciences and university education, including the CIS Network University, which unites 38 leading universities from nine CIS states.

The CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly were involved in active cooperation aimed at countering new challenges and threats. Respected international agencies are joining it as well. The second conference on countering international terrorism was held with success in St Petersburg in April 2019. The work on improving the legal and regulatory foundation of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly continued.

**Question: Concerning the 2019 CSTO presidency. Russia's priorities for the CSTO presidency.**

**Answer:** The CSTO, having considerable force and means at its disposable continues to display its efficiency, its ability to properly and timely react to a changing world.

The results of CSTO activities in 2019 were summed up at the CSTO Collective Security Summit in Bishkek on November 28, where a significant package of documents was adopted, including the CSTO Heads of State joint statement for enhancing international and regional security.

Countering new challenges and threats has remained a major focus of interaction, primarily countering international terrorism. The CSTO's weighty contribution to this area was noted by the UN during the central event of Russia's presidency of the Security Council last September.

Special attention was paid to Afghanistan. We regularly compare notes with our allies on the situation in that country under the framework of the Special Task Force within the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers. The Collective Security Council adopted a number of extra measures targeting de-escalation along the Afghan-Tajik border areas. Also, a joint statement by the CSTO member-states is in the making on the situation in Afghanistan.

Russia will continue its role as the Organisation's president until the next session of the CSTO Collective Security Council. We have proposed to our partners a substantial schedule of events in all areas of CSTO activities.

The efforts of Russia's presidency will be targeting a consistent implementation of the CSTO Collective Security Strategy until 2025, thwarting and decreasing threats to collective security.

Among Russia's priorities is the stepping-up of the CSTO's combat potential, improving combat training and alignment within the CSTO Collective Forces and boosting their mobility. To this effect, the CSTO 2021-2025 military cooperation plan is being drafted, which will be put up for approval at the next summit.

The Organisation's streamlining of its crisis management system will continue during Russia's CSTO presidency, basically through doubling down on the CSTO Crisis Response Centre's activities. It has among its priorities analysis and forecasting of the military-political situation, while taking into account possible new "hot spots" emerging near the CSTO borders.

Russia is set to boost its joint fighting against terrorism. The practice of holding joint operations to identify and liquidate terrorist groups will continue in the CSTO space, as well as identifying terrorist bases and their financing sources. Included in this is a plan to increase the capabilities of the collective security system forces and means for resolving anti-terror issues and to use the Russian Army's experience in Syria for training them. Anti-drug cooperation within the CSTO will be stepped up. Work is underway on the five-year CSTO Anti-Drug Strategy (2021-2025) which will contain a list of specific measures to curb drug manufacturing and trade and strengthen the border regime.

Great attention will be devoted to expanding the CSTO's peacemaking potential. Its legislative foundation will be amended, which will allow CSTO contingents to participate in UN peacekeeping operations.

Strengthening cooperation with all interested international organisations and states is also one of Russia's priorities. In the context of ensuring security in the Eurasian space, the CSTO aims to enhance contacts with the CIS and SCO with emphasis on countering the terrorist threat. The CSTO will maintain dialogue with the UN and OSCE in areas of mutual interest. During the Russian presidency, new opportunities to establish CSTO's interaction with third countries are emerging in connection with the introduction of the status of CSTO observer and CSTO partner nation.

A crucial area of activities will be the joint celebration by CSTO member countries of the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. The CSTO drafted a joint schedule of anniversary events. President Vladimir Putin has invited all CSTO leaders to take part in the celebration in Moscow on May 9, 2020. Following the decision of all CSTO defence ministries, the member countries' military units will take part in the Victory Parade on Red Square.

**Question: Russian-Belarusian relations. Prospects of cooperation within the Union State.**

**Answer:** Belarus is our closest ally and partner, and our relations with it, as President Vladimir Putin noted in his speech at the sixth Forum of the Russian and Belarusian Regions held in St Petersburg in July 2019, are built on the principles of neighbourliness, mutual respect and consideration for each other's interests.

Last year, December 8 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty on the Establishment of the Union State. A lot of things have been accomplished over the years, above all to provide equal rights to Russians and Belarusians.

To date, work aimed at deepening the integration of Russia and Belarus is still underway. A Programme to implement the Union State Treaty was drafted and initialed by the Russian and Belarusian prime ministers in September 2019 in Moscow.

Work on industrial “road maps” is underway and is focused on their implementation. There are 31 road maps in total, which embody the trajectory of the further integration of our countries in almost all areas economic life: finance, industry and so on.

Talks between the presidents of Russia and Belarus held on December 7 in Sochi and December 20, 2019, in St Petersburg were dedicated to integration as well. These talks followed consultations between the prime ministers and key ministers of the two countries.

Cooperation between foreign ministries, as is traditional, is developing effectively. Another Programme of Coordinated Actions in Foreign Policy for 2020–2021 was signed at the joint meeting of the Boards of the Russian and Belarusian foreign ministries. It will ensure cooperation on topical issues of the global agenda and promote the initiatives at the UN, OSCE and other multilateral platforms.

Of course, there are areas of dispute in our bilateral relations. Everyone has heard about them. This is natural considering the intensive nature of the Russian-Belarusian trade and economic ties. The main thing is that we have a constructive and professional dialogue, one aimed at achieving mutually beneficial solutions with long-term positive effects on the economies of both countries.

**Question: Russia-Georgia relations. Developments around Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Geneva discussions on the South Caucasus.**

**Answer:** Despite the absence of diplomatic relations, Russia remains Georgia’s second largest foreign trade partner and the main importer of its goods. In the first ten months of 2019, bilateral trade amounted to \$11.1 billion.

Regrettably, the process of normalisation in bilateral relations was negatively affected by the provocation of Georgian radicals in June, in response to which we had to temporarily suspend flights between Russia and Georgia. We hope Tbilisi will learn its lesson from this.

A meeting of the Russian and Georgian foreign ministers took place on the sidelines of the 74<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in New York. This was their first meeting in 12 years. The ministers had a frank talk about bilateral issues. However, Tbilisi’s comments on the results of the conversation were somewhat disappointing.

We remain interested in the consistent normalisation of bilateral relations.

We have actively facilitated the development of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as modern democratic states, as well as the expansion of their international ties, socioeconomic progress while promoting their security.

Political dialogue was actively developed at the highest level: Vladimir Putin held working meetings with President of Abkhazia Raul Khadjimba and President of South Ossetia Anatoly Bibilov. Last April Sergey Lavrov conducted talks with Foreign Minister of Abkhazia Daur Kove.

Bilateral inter-governmental commissions on socioeconomic cooperation were involved in effective work. The Russia-South Ossetia commission held its 20<sup>th</sup> session and the Russia-Abkhazia commission conducted its 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. The sides expanded the legal and regulatory foundation of their relations, including the implementation of the Russia-Abkhazia interstate agreement on alliance and strategic partnership of November 24, 2014, and the Russia-South Ossetia agreement on alliance and integration of March 18, 2015.

Russia is an active participant in the international Geneva discussions on security and stability in the South Caucasus. Four regular rounds of this unique negotiating format took place last year. This format ensures

direct dialogue between Georgia on the one hand, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the other. It is important to treat it with care. There is no alternative to it for the time being.

The situation near the border between Georgia and South Ossetia was complicated last year. The deployment of a post of Georgian security agencies near the South Ossetian village of Tsnelis became a destabilising factor. The response of Tskhinval was excessive as well. We are urging both sides to show restraint and review disputable issues in a constructive manner in the framework of Geneva discussions and the mechanism of presenting incidents and responding to them. The Tsnelis crisis confirmed the need to start dialogue on delimitation and demarcation of the border between Georgia and South Ossetia. The Russian and South Ossetian delegations continue reminding the other side about this.

We believe NATO's accelerated activities on Georgian territory are a real threat that can escalate tensions, and the main challenge for regional security in the South Caucasus. We are seeing the buildup of advanced political and military-technical cooperation between NATO and Washington, on the one hand, and Georgia, on the other. We hope the United States and NATO will take our warning seriously and stop pushing Tbilisi toward confrontation with Moscow.

**Question: How did Russia-Armenia relations develop in 2019?**

**Answer:** The past year proved to be fairly intensive and fruitful for Russia-Armenia relations. After a certain pause that was linked with the reform of Armenian government institutions, we continued our traditionally friendly and versatile cooperation.

Political dialogue was intensive. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had six meetings with President Vladimir Putin and four meetings with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. The sides agreed in principle to step up cooperation between the heads of different departments in order to use more fully their available potential.

Exchanges between MPs, regions, public organisations and media were expanded as well as military-technical, scientific, educational and cultural contacts. Russia has remained Armenia's major foreign trade and investment partner. Six joint working groups were active in the framework of the inter-governmental commission on economic cooperation.

The sides productively coordinated their efforts at different global and regional venues and in common integration associations. We would like to make special mention of Yerevan's efficient presidency of the Eurasian Economic Council.

**Question: How did Russia-Azerbaijan relations develop in 2019?**

**Answer:** Last year our strategic partnership with Azerbaijan steadily developed in all major areas. Open and trust-based dialogue between President Vladimir Putin and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev largely facilitated the promotion of bilateral cooperation. In 2019 the two leaders met three times: on the sidelines of the One Belt One Road forum in Beijing on April 26, at the Valdai Club on October 36 and on the sidelines of the informal CIS summit in St Petersburg on December 20. First Vice-President of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva paid a visit to Moscow (November 20-25, 2019). Government and parliamentary contacts made steady headway. Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko paid an official visit to Baku in April.

Russia is one of Azerbaijan's main trade partners. In January-October 2019 trade amounted to \$2.5 billion, which is a 25 percent increase over the relevant period in 2018. Five roadmaps are being successfully implemented. They are aimed at raising our bilateral strategic partnership to a fundamentally new level.

Relevant departments started drafting a new additional map on cooperation in innovative development and the digital economy. At present, 950 joint ventures operate in Azerbaijan. Russia's investment in Azerbaijan reached \$4.5 billion, and Azerbaijan's investment in Russia amounts to \$1.5 billion.

By tradition, joint cultural, humanitarian and educational projects are being carried out at a high level. Days of Russia's Culture in Azerbaijan were held in 2019. Days of Azerbaijan's Culture will soon be held in Russia.

We are successfully cooperating with Baku in different international venues.

**Question: Russia's efforts on Nagorno-Karabakh settlement.**

**Answer:** There were no noticeable changes in Nagorno-Karabakh settlement. There is some progress in the adoption of "small steps" for which the foreign ministers set parameters at a meeting in Moscow on April 20 following the agreements reached by the President of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister of Armenia in Vienna in March 2019. The situation on the border and contact line remains relatively calm. There is a hotline between Yerevan and Baku. The exchange of journalists was held. Zaven Karapetyan and Ilvin Ibragimov were released. Talks on other prisoners are underway. The ICRC is involved in them. We believe these facts testify to the intentions of the sides to make specific steps to prepare the population for peace.

However, no progress has yet been made on the substance of this settlement. This issue was discussed during Mr Lavrov's recent trips to Yerevan and Baku. There is hope that the sides will resume substantive discussion of the issue in the foreseeable future. For our part, we will provide necessary assistance together with our French and American co-chairs of the Minsk Group.

**Question: What is the current state and prospects for Russia-Moldova relations? The Transnistria settlement.**

**Answer:** Significant changes have occurred in Russia-Moldova relations following the peaceful transition of power and the formation of a new ruling coalition. The second half of the year was marked by the unprecedented dynamics of different level contacts between our countries and by important events. The tone was set by our presidents, as before. Vladimir Putin and Igor Dodon met six times in a bilateral format and on the sidelines of multilateral events.

The new Moldovan technocratic government of socialists confirmed in November 2019 outlined its commitment to further boosting diverse Russia-Moldova cooperation. The Moldovan Prime Minister's visit to Moscow, the first after a long break since 2012, laid favourable foundations for such cooperation. A number of inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary contacts took place as well as talks by foreign ministers.

We note with satisfaction that Chisinau made a turnabout in its position towards practical exploration of observer status at the EAEU and more active involvement in CIS affairs.

Important decisions were taken in trade and economic cooperation following a meeting, after a long recess, of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation and the Second Russian-Moldovan business forum. There are obvious grounds for steady progress in pragmatic Russian-Moldovan interaction in trade, the economy, humanitarian and other areas.

The situation on the Transnistrian settlement track, despite the positive changes of the last several years, remained uneasy. Basically this is due to electoral and post-electoral processes on the right bank of the Dniester, where there have been three governments changes within the past year. Contacts between political

representatives of the parties to the conflict in the 1+1 format have vanished. The number, and the quality, which is key, of the meetings between Moldovan and Transnistrian experts have decreased. Some aspects of the dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol have suffered setbacks. As a result, the parties were unable to approve the final protocol at last year's only official meeting in the 5+2 format in Bratislava on October 8-10, 2019. Subsequent efforts to sign it on the sidelines of the Bavaria Conference on confidence-building measures in the Transnistria conflict also failed.

However, the future of the negotiating process should not be dependent on whether a formal protocol has been signed. Even though the list of steps and their timeframe are impossible to formalise, there is work to be done in the Transnistrian settlement. Some outstanding issues remain and they were listed in the draft protocol, which, even though unsigned, remains a baseline of the work to be done for both parties.

**Question: Developments around the Korean Peninsula. Russia's efforts to reduce tensions and implement the Russia-China roadmap.**

**Answer:** Recently, military activities in the sub-region were substantially reduced owing to the DPRK's moratorium on nuclear tests and launches of long-range missiles and the renunciation of large-scale military exercises by the United States and the Republic of Korea. The inter-Korean dialogue was resumed, ties between the United States and the DPRK, including top level, began to develop. On the whole, the situation has developed in conformity with the first and second stages of the Russia-China roadmap for the Korean settlement. However, later on the settlement process of the peninsula ground to a halt, largely because the sides were not ready to meet each other halfway in practical terms or to carry out the agreements reached.

Regrettably, last year contacts between Seoul and Pyongyang were reduced to naught because, to the great disappointment of the North, the South did not rush to develop practical cooperation with the North and offered only symbolic measures of inter-Korean rapprochement, such as joint celebrations of memorable dates and other humanitarian steps. This was obviously contrary to the 2018 Panmunjom and Pyongyang Declarations whereby both sides promised, among other things, to develop economic cooperation, and renounce the arms race and militarisation of border areas. Needless to say, in this context Pyongyang failed to understand Seoul's decisions to retain anti-North Korean restrictions, equip its Air Force with the latest US fighters and other hardware and continue conducting joint exercises with Washington, even if on a limited scale.

The US-North Korean dialogue also had its ups and downs. After making a joint statement in Singapore on June 12, 2018, US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un failed to develop permanent working contacts. In February of the past year they tried to repeat the success of their first summit but without success. Their meeting in Hanoi ended ahead of schedule and with no results. Finally, the two leaders agreed in Panmunjom on June 30, 2019, to establish a permanent working group but its first session in Stockholm on October 5, 2019, did not produce any results.

We think the main reason for such failures is the desire of both Washington and Pyongyang to resolve all of the region's problems in one go. These problems are indeed closely interrelated and must be resolved as a package. However, it is always necessary to start with one single issue and plan the succession of specific steps in advance. The Russia-China roadmap reads in clear terms that the United States and the DPRK must primarily normalise bilateral relations, and Pyongyang agrees with this in principle. It demands that Washington should take steps aimed at enhancing mutual trust and give up its policy of hostility. Without openly objecting to this,

the Americans continue imposing sanctions on North Korea and refuse to make promised concessions unless North Korea starts its unilateral disarmament. Naturally, due to the lack of trust Pyongyang is not ready for this.

Despite these expected difficulties there are no grounds to say that we had no success in the Korean settlement during the past year. One example is how Russia substantially consolidated its cooperation with all the parties involved. We continue working shoulder to shoulder with China in this area. Indicatively, both the DPRK and the Republic of Korea have increasingly often shared our positions on different issues and are vitally interested in deepening dialogue on the sub-region's issues. Despite all the problems in bilateral relations, even the United States openly declares its intention to continue coordinating efforts with Russia on the Korean issue and admits that it borrows many of our ideas.

During the past year the situation in the sub-region was generally calm and the sides emphasised their commitment to political and diplomatic dialogue. So we have grounds to say that our efforts were not in vain. Obviously, the number of reasons for concern is not decreasing in the new year. I am referring, in part, to recent reports that the DPRK does not see any point in maintaining a moratorium on nuclear tests and long-range missile launches because the United States is simply marking time and is not reducing its pressure on North Korea. Nonetheless, judging by deeds rather than words, the states involved continue displaying reasonable restraint and are not interested in the sharp aggravation of the situation. For our part, we will continue motivating our partners to keep up this spirit and encourage them to take further constructive steps.

Apart from other benefits, permanent work with other countries is helping us understand better their positions and find points of contact with them. It is on this basis that Russia and China have drafted a new document that develops the roadmap, that is, a plan of action on the comprehensive settlement of the problems of the Korean Peninsula. This document formulates principles of further joint work, which are common for all sides, and proposes responses to major military, political, economic and humanitarian challenges. A whole package of measures has been elaborated. Their parallel implementation will allow the sides to move forward together on the basis of a stage-by-stage approach and reciprocity. Let me add that the United States, the DPRK and the Republic of Korea have put into gear a plan of action. In 2019, they set forth their preliminary considerations regarding this plan and Russia and China took them into account in the updated version of the document that was disseminated among their partners in late November.

Finally, we hope that similar regular contacts with the countries involved in the Korean settlement will allow us to launch in the future the third stage of our roadmap. I am referring to the development of a full-scale multisided discussion of all the problems in the sub-region and their resolution, in accordance with the plan of action, because they can be only settled by common efforts and with due respect for each other's lawful interests and concerns. As we see, attempts to do this by two or even three countries do not produce results.

**Question: Cooperation in the SCO. Priorities of Russia's presidency in the organisation.**

**Answer:** Priority areas of Russia's foreign policy activities in 2019 included promoting and enhancing interaction in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. These efforts received additional momentum and were taken to a new level when Russia took on the responsible mission of the presidency in this alliance last June. It required comprehensive re-evaluation of the work done and a thorough analysis of existing opportunities and accumulated experience in cooperation.

It can be said without exaggeration that today the SCO has actually grown into an influential and

efficient inter-state association with a consistently increasing role in global and regional affairs. The organisation is seen as a stable and predictive partner open for mutually beneficial and equitable cooperation, which is acknowledged even by our opponents.

The SCO is firmly committed to those fundamental principles and norms of international law that are enshrined in the UN Charter, and consistently advocates equitable and respectful cooperation with all interested states. It is no coincidence that today the SCO space boasts impressive geographical scope as well as massive political, economic, civilisational and human potential. This has resulted in an ever-growing interest in our organisation, which is evidenced by a substantive list of countries willing to join the SCO in some form or other, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Syria, Israel, and others.

In this context, Russia views consolidating the SCO, as well as boosting foreign policy coordination, primarily in the UN, as a high-priority task of its presidency. The SCO's role was acknowledged at a ministerial-level debate on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations in maintaining peace and security and contribution by the CSTO, CIS and SCO in counterterrorism efforts, which Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov presided over and in New York in September 2019.

Joint efforts by the SCO member states with active involvement of the SCO Secretariat resulted in a third high-level special event held between the UN and the SCO entitled Cooperation to Promote Peace, Security and Stability: Preventing the Linking of Terrorism with Organised Crime and its Financing Through Drug Trafficking, which took place in New York in November. All SCO member states were co-authors of the UN General Assembly's resolution against the glorification of Nazism, which was adopted in December.

For the first time, consultations between foreign ministries were held on the prevention of an arms race in outer space and biosecurity. We appreciate our partners' support of Russia's proposals.

We believe that developing parliamentary work in the SCO would be of particular importance for advancing political dialogue. In this context, Russia's Federal Assembly is considering convocation of a meeting between heads of legislative bodies.

Active and efficient joint work is underway on security issues. The efforts of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) are producing positive results. Given the obvious link between terrorism, drug trafficking and trans-border organised crime, the Russian side, using RATS as a foundation, is developing a concept for a multifunctional centre to address new challenges and threats, which will be presented to partners for their consideration. In June, the joint exercise of competent bodies of SCO member states Sary-Arka-Antiterror 2019 was held in Kazakhstan; the Spider Web international anti-drug operation took place in July, and the events of the first stage of the joint border operation Solidarity were carried out between June and August. The main stage of the Centre 2019 strategic command-and-staff exercises in the Orenburg Region involved some 120,000 servicemen from all SCO member states.

Economic development remains an enduring priority. In this context, systematic work has to be launched based on the Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation of the SCO Member States, approved by heads of government in Tashkent in November, with a focus on the implementation of projects in food, transport and energy security, as well as innovation, high technology, and development of remote and rural areas in the digital era. We expect that developing direct contacts between the regions of SCO member states will bring practical results. The first SCO Forum of Regional Heads is scheduled for May 2020 in Chelyabinsk.

We deem the alignment of national development strategies and multilateral integration projects, including the development of the EAEU and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as promoting the initiative of Greater Eurasian Partnership with the aim of creating an expansive space of open, mutually beneficial and equitable cooperation, as extensive and prospective areas of cooperation.

The SCO is distinguished by its shared commitment to boosting links in the cultural and educational sphere. Efforts are being made to strengthen cooperation in healthcare, culture, tourism, education, science, and technology. People-to-people contacts are also being actively promoted, particularly those between young people, as well as inter-civilisational exchanges. One of next year's landmark events is the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the victory over Nazism in WWII. The caring attitude of SCO member states toward the memory of the heroic deeds of all our countries will be enshrined in the leaders' joint statement.

Work as part of Russia's presidency in the SCO is being implemented in accordance with the tasks and goals set by President of Russia and based on a plan that includes over 90 events. Active efforts are being undertaken to execute these tasks, yet there is much to be done.

**Question: I would like to ask about the 2019 BRICS results and the key areas of Russia's chairmanship in the Organisation in 2020.**

**Answer:** Cooperation in the BRICS format was steadily growing in 2019. The government of Brazil supported its momentum, allowing for progress in the three key areas – the political, economic and people-to-people dimensions. We believe that our Brazilian partners' work is worthy of high praise.

BRICS has turned into a powerful factor in international relations. Our association is not a closed elite club but rather a living system which reflects the interests of a wide range of developing countries and states with emerging markets. The 11th BRICS Summit in Brasilia on November 13-14 attests to this. Its overarching theme was protecting sovereignty and supporting multilateral approaches to world affairs. BRICS nations stood up against the unacceptable practice of protectionist and unilateral measures bypassing the WTO and UN, and the illegitimate extra-territorial application of national legislation. They called for strengthening the multilateral system, including the UN, WTO and IMF, and confirmed their commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Accord.

A significant practical result of BRICS in the past year was the agreements on enhancing cooperation in trade, investment, science, innovation, healthcare, energy and joint counterterrorism efforts.

Russia assumed BRICS chairmanship on January 1, 2020. Taking the baton from Brazil, we naturally aim to maintain the existing rate of interaction and even to speed it up in some areas. The key goal is to raise the standards of living and the quality of life of the BRICS peoples through deepening strategic partnership. The priorities of our chairmanship were announced by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin during the BRICS Summit in Brasilia.

The motto of Russia's chairmanship is BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth.

Among the key issues is the steady consolidation of the BRICS countries' coordination on international platforms. We intend to deepen counterterrorism cooperation, including drafting the BRICS Anti-Terrorism Strategy. We will pay due attention to fighting money laundering, corruption, transnational crime in general.

Among the priorities of the economic area of our chairmanship is the implementation of the Strategy for

BRICS Economic Partnership and building up the potential of the New Development Bank.

Over 50 projects totalling \$15.1 billion have been approved since the New Development Bank was launched. Thus, in December 2019, the Bank decided to issue a loan on renewing the Russian Railways locomotive fleet and establishing advanced engineering schools at 30 Russian universities and colleges. The Bank's management is striving to reach a project financing level of \$8-10 billion per annum in the near future. The Bank has begun lending in national currencies, and the first bonds were issued in the financial markets of China and South Africa. The plans include opening regional branches in Moscow and India. The possibility of increasing the number of the New Development Bank stakeholders is under discussion.

We are determined to increase BRICS countries' coordination on the G20 agenda. Other priorities are the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, integrating national payment systems, establishing cross-border payment infrastructure, and stepping up cooperation in energy, competition and customs regulations. We plan to work hard together on protecting the environment and responding to emergencies and accidents.

There is an expanded programme within the BRICS people-to-people dimension, in particular, in sports and youth contacts and interparliamentary cooperation. We are set to further develop the BRICS Network University. We will continue the practice of holding the BRICS Games, film festival, and the academic, civic and media forums, as well as meetings between twin cities, young diplomats and young scientists.

The schedule of Russia's BRICS chairmanship contains about 150 events, including 20 ministerial meetings. The 12th BRICS Summit will be held in St Petersburg in July 2020, and an informal summit will take place on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Riyadh. Meetings of the BRICS Foreign Ministers and the BRICS National Security Advisors are set for June in Moscow. BRICS meetings of various levels will be hosted by about 15 Russian cities.

**Question: What are the current state and prospects of cooperation in the RIC format?**

**Answer:** Last year cooperation between Russia, India and China got a new boost. At the meeting held as part of the G20 summit in Buenos Aires in November 2018, the three countries' leaders agreed to meet on a regular, annual basis on the sidelines of various international forums. This agreement is already in effect: Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping met in June 2019 during the G20 summit in Osaka.

RIC is not an organisation, structured international forum or a bloc aimed against someone. RIC is a dialogue mechanism based on the member states' coinciding and close approaches to addressing key current problems. Let's elaborate: this means recognising the shared responsibility for the way the world develops: towards a balanced multipolar architecture or a universal dictate. First of all, Russia, India and China speak in favour of the unconditional supremacy of international law and universally recognised norms of interstate communication, and all countries' respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and principles of free trade. They do not accept heavy-handed methods and illegitimate unilateral sanctions as well as any unfair business practices. RIC reaffirmed that such solid common ground exists at the previously mentioned meeting in Osaka.

In addition to contacts at the highest level, the RIC foreign ministers also meet regularly. Last year, such a meeting took place in Wuzhen, China, when the ministers adopted a detailed joint statement with their assessments on a wide range of global and regional problems. This year, Russia, which chairs RIC now, is preparing to host the next meeting of the ministers. We have many things to discuss, considering fairly

disturbing trends unfolding in the world.

We would like to note such a significant element of cooperation at RIC as contacts between the three countries' young diplomats (aged 25–35). Last October, we received young diplomats from India and China, who toured Tver and the Tver Region in addition to Moscow. We believe such ties to be especially important, because they focus on those who will lead national diplomacy in the near future. It is essential that at the very beginning they realise the significant opportunities and high demand for close cooperation between Russia, India and China in order to ensure peace, stability and equal, mutually beneficial cooperation at the global and regional levels.

Business contacts have been established between the financial monitoring services. Exchanges between other agencies, including defence ones, are being discussed. The academic dimension of RIC is also noteworthy: the three countries' political analysts have been meeting annually for 17 years. We believe that events must not be forced in the development of cooperation within RIC. We will move with the speed and in the areas which equally meet the needs and capabilities of all the participants.

**Question: What about strategic stability, including in the context of the US withdrawal from the INF Treaty, the prospects of extending the New START, and US activities in deploying a global missile defence system. What steps is Russia going to take in this connection?**

**Answer:** The situation in international security and strategic stability is invariably deteriorating. The main reason is the US' actions: they are trying to achieve total domination and are promoting the ideas of "peace through strength." In doing this, they are revising such basic principles as indivisible security, equality, parity, mutual consideration of interests and reliance on binding and verifiable agreements.

The United States is purposefully destroying the system of bilateral control and disarmament regimes in order to get rid of their limitations. We have repeatedly mentioned the Americans' destruction of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002. Since then, they have been building up their global missile defence and deploying anti-missile systems in various regions of the world. The United States claims that they do not recognise any restrictions in this area, although it is evident that their actions continue to have an extremely unfavourable effect on the international and regional strategic balance, security and stability. Washington has also been focusing of late on the formation of a space-based anti-missile group, actually declaring their intention to place strike forces in orbit. This is a very dangerous plan.

On August 2, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the INF Treaty. As a result, it expired. What's most outrageous is that they justify this by referencing a violation of the treaty allegedly committed by Russia. The United States has not presented any evidence to support their accusations against us because there is no and could not be such evidence. However, under the guise of the blatant anti-Russian propaganda campaign, they got rid of the international treaty that did not suit them. The Pentagon is now publicly saying that they intend to start deploying ground-based short- and intermediate-range missiles as soon as possible and are accelerating the pace of developing such weapons. Their flight tests have already begun.

We have taken measures to maintain stability and leave open the possibility of a dialogue. It was declared at the top level that Russia will not deploy its ground-based short- and intermediate-range missiles in the regions where the US-made weapons will not be. In his September 18 address to the leaders of a number of countries, the President of Russia suggested considering the possibility of imposing a reciprocal moratorium by

the United States and other NATO countries. We are ready for a dialogue on all the relevant matters. Meanwhile, we see no interest in this from our Western colleagues.

As for the prospects for the START Treaty, it expires in February 2021. Russia deems it necessary to extend it. This treaty is the last international legal instrument that limits the nuclear missile potential of the two largest nuclear powers on a reciprocal basis. It makes their activities in this area predictable and verifiable. The Russian President made it abundantly clear that we support the extension of this treaty without any preconditions and we suggest that the United States do the same without any artificial delays. The Americans were sent the relevant official proposal but they do not seem to be in any hurry to explain their position. We will continue working with them in this area. There is not too much time for decision making.

In the modern world it is impossible to achieve military supremacy that will make it possible to dictate one's will to others. Russia is always open to equitable and constructive cooperation with the United States as well as with other countries and international organisations. We will do all we can to restore the dynamics of arms control and fill it with substantive content. We fully realise our responsibility for maintaining and consolidating peace, security and stability and intend to consistently counter destructive trends in international affairs.

#### **Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)**

Persistent attempts by some Western countries to subordinate the work of multilateral intergovernmental non-proliferation agencies to their geopolitical interests and erode the independent status of their secretariats are a source of concern.

The situation in the OPCW is the most graphic example of this. Using their numerical advantage in this organisation, the United States and its allies are purposefully trying to replace international law with their own "rules." In the process they are violating the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and giving the OPCW Technical Secretariat the functions that are the exclusive prerogative of the UN Security Council.

One of the reports by the Fact Finding Mission on Chemical Weapons Use Allegations in Douma, Syria on April 7, 2018, resulted in a scandal. After this incident, the United States, Britain and France dealt a missile strike on Syrian territory. This is why the report was made to order in the anti-Syrian vein. Both Russia and Syria provided the OPCW with information about the fraudulent nature of this incident. International experts share this opinion. Further tangible evidence of bias was provided by a series of publications on the Wikileaks website, which point to the juggling of facts and manipulation with the conclusions of the mission's members. However, the heads of the OPCW Technical Secretariat are ignoring all these facts and refusing legitimate requests to publish expert evaluations or organise meetings with members of the mission. Such actions lead to the further degradation of this once authoritative organisation and the destruction of its prestige.

#### **Open Skies Treaty**

We consider this treaty to be an important confidence building measure for enhancing transparency in the military area. We are aware of its significance and the necessity for it being fully functional. In connection of the information we have on the US' potential withdrawal from the treaty, we would like to note that Russia will do all it can to maintain it. We rely on the common sense and wisdom of our partners. We deem it necessary to settle existing differences on the treaty's implementation at talks with due consideration for the concerns of all sides. We are ready for joint practical work with all participants in the treaty.

At the same time, US withdrawal from the treaty will deal a serious blow at the entire system of European security and will compel us to take appropriate steps.

**Question: Regarding the situation around the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme, what can be done to maintain this agreement? What is our country doing to safeguard the commercial and economic interests in Iran?**

**Answer:** The decisions taken by Iran on January 5 regarding it being forced to extend the suspension of its voluntary commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on its nuclear programme are the result of the controversies that have piled up under the agreement, so all current member countries need to work hard to resolve them. We see no other effective solution to the issue of salvaging this nuclear deal.

We believe the efforts to maintain these comprehensive agreements and ensure continuous implementation should remain the priority objective for all parties. We are calling on all parties involved to be guided by these considerations and to not give rise to more tensions and uncertainties regarding the prospects for the Iran nuclear deal, which remains a global asset.

We appreciate Iran's official assurances that the suspension stage they have announced is a concluding one. We expect the IAEA to confirm this.

We attach even greater importance to Tehran's willingness to promptly return to honouring the requirements of the deal in full as soon as its legitimate concerns regarding non-compliance with the provisions of the Iran nuclear deal by other parties to the deal are lifted. As for this, gaps do exist and they have been discussed many times. Hopefully, the necessary solutions will be found in the long run. Much in this respect hinges on our European partners.

Iran's statement to the effect that it no longer considers itself bound by any restrictions in the JCPOA should be considered in the context of everything that has been happening around the agreements since the US unilateral pullout in May 2018. Washington's ensuing massive attack on the Iran nuclear deal and the countries that continue carrying out the agreements approved by UN Security Council Resolution 2231 has become a serious obstacle to the efforts to implement the deal. This is where the original causes of the current crisis around the Iran nuclear deal are rooted. They are well known and clear to all members of the international community, so nobody stands a chance of shifting the blame to Iran.

Tehran's refusal to observe the restrictions imposed under the JCPOA on the development of their facilities and their technological capability to enrich uranium does not of itself pose any threat, in terms of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Iran closely cooperates with the IAEA and all its activities are under the agency's constant monitoring. We note the commitment pledged by Iran to cooperate with the agency and its willingness to maintain cooperation at the previous level, which is unprecedented in terms of the scale and the intensity of inspections.

We emphasise that the temporary suspension applies to the items in the Iran nuclear deal that are not covered by the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement. Iran agreed to this in 2015 in order to reach a compromise as it proceeded from the balance of interests and the principle of reciprocity built into the deal. It was not Iran's fault that this balance was upset.

The Russian side remains fully committed to the Iran nuclear deal and the objectives set in it, and we are ready to continue working to achieve them. The challenges that the international community faces as the

comprehensive agreements are being carried out require political will and a resolute collective answer, primarily, from the main participants in the Iran nuclear deal. We believe that when these challenges are dealt with the Iranian side will have no reason to digress from the agreed upon requirements. We urge all our partners to not veer from the path designated by the JCPOA and to create conditions that will help resume a sustainable way to implement it.

The development of trade and economic cooperation is one of the priorities in the diversified relations between Russia and Iran. Unfortunately, economic ties are not keeping pace with the high level of the political dialogue, however, there is huge untapped potential in this area. According to preliminary estimates, in 2019, trade between the two countries exceeded the figures for 2018 significantly, reaching over \$2 billion.

We worked hard to develop measures that would minimise the impact of the US sanctions on our trade and economic cooperation with Iran. In this context, we worked to use national currencies in trade on a larger scale. In particular, in 2019, the Russian rouble accounted for over 40 percent of all currency payments for goods and services made under transactions between Russia and Iran.

The work to carry out major joint projects facilitated by a Russian government loan continued, including the construction of the Sirik Thermal Power Plant and the project to electrify the Garmsar - Ince Burun railway line.

Ministers of Energy Alexander Novak and Reza Ardakanian, who are co-chairs of the Permanent Russian-Iranian Intergovernmental Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation, cooperated effectively. The latest meeting of the commission took place in Tehran and Isfahan on June 16-18, 2019. The ministers coordinated specific plans and projects to help promote bilateral business relations.

A Temporary Agreement for creating a free trade zone between Iran and the EAEU, which went into effect on October 27, 2019, is to provide additional impetus to trade. We have paved the way for developing a valid agreement on creating a free trade zone. We expect the work of the experts from all sides to be well coordinated.

**Question: In 2019, Russia and China celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations whereas during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia the leaders announced that bilateral relations had entered a new era. What are the reasons for the success of this cooperation?**

**Answer:** In 2019, the year of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations, Russia and China continued to successfully develop comprehensive partnership relations declaring that they had entered a new era. Russian-Chinese strategic interaction has taken on strong and consistent momentum in terms of development, and today it can be described as the best it has ever been.

Our cooperation is rooted in the generally accepted norms of international law; it is devoid of ideological blinders and is not directed against any third party. We do not impose our approaches and values on each other, nor do we interfere in internal affairs. Our partnership with China is determined by the underlying interests of our peoples and that is why they are self-sufficient and not prone to external opportunism.

We have managed to phase out the sensitive issues of our common past and have left them to the discretion of historians. The borderline issue has been completely settled. Today, Russian-Chinese dialogue is a mutually respectful and trust-filled communication between two equal entities. This makes it possible to not only maintain positive achievements but also to expand cooperation and solve the most complicated issues that

inevitably arise with such a large number of contacts. In a sense, it is a new type of interstate relations marked by flexibility and stability with a creative and long-term nature.

A broad and long-term bilateral contractual legal framework is based on the *Treaty of Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation of July 16, 2001*. A multi-level architecture of interaction was established with a top level dialogue as a key component. Thus, the leaders of the two countries met several times in 2019 including during the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in April, Xi Jinping's state visit to Russia in June, and the BRICS summit in Brasilia in November. The ultimate level of mutual trust between our leaders certainly influences all other levels of bilateral contacts.

The mechanism of regular meetings between prime ministers plays a coordinating role in expanding cooperation in trade, the economy and in the humanitarian area. Five intergovernmental commissions headed by deputy prime ministers as well as several dozen subcommissions and task groups successfully operate within this framework. Most major ministries and agencies have established direct communication.

This institutionalised dialogue in practical areas produces a solid practical result. China is our largest trade partner. In 2019, bilateral trade reached yet another record, exceeding \$100 billion. The first trans-border Russian-Chinese gas pipeline has been launched. Investment interaction, cooperation in hi-tech areas and agricultural trade are expanding.

Regular meetings between parliament speakers, the Russian President's Executive Office and the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, annual consultations of high representatives for strategic security and public security, justice and law enforcement are also important elements of the system of multilevel relations.

Ties are also growing at the local administration level. These ties saw a significant boost with the successful 2018-2019 Cross Years of Russian-Chinese inter-regional cooperation. Another important, large bilateral project starts in 2020-2021: the Cross Years of scientific and technical and innovation cooperation. Strong exchanges are underway in the cultural and humanitarian areas and in public affairs.

We enjoy a united front with the PRC, which makes it possible for us to effectively defend our common interests, increase the authority of the multilateral associations we are part of, and positively impact challenges both globally and regionally, which includes substantial contributions to facilitating peace processes in "hot spots."

Sergey Lavrov and his counterpart State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi maintain constant contact; last year they met six times and have regular telephone conversations.

**Question: Russian-Indian relations in 2019.**

**Answer:** We prioritise our relations with India. They are self-contained, do not depend on the internal or international political situation and meet the core national interests of both countries.

The Russian-Indian political dialogue was very intensive last year. We interact within the United Nations, BRICS, RIC, the SCO, and the G-20. We successfully coordinate our approaches on the current international agenda, including a settlement in Afghanistan, stability in the Middle East and North Africa and the building of a new security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region.

We highly appreciate the results of the annual Russian-Indian summit in Vladivostok held on September 4, 2019. The talks between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have confirmed the

maturity of our countries' special and privileged strategic partnership and the continuity of our course toward stronger bilateral relations. We have signed important documents expanding the legal framework for cooperation in a variety of areas and adopted the joint declaration, "Reaching New Heights of Cooperation through Trust and Partnership."

Our leaders repeatedly coordinated their positions at many multilateral fora: the SCO Heads of State Council in Bishkek (June 13), the G-20 meeting in Osaka (June 29) and at the BRICS summit in Brasília (November 13).

Our Security Councils, foreign ministries, as well as defence and economic agencies have held productive meetings.

The co-chairs of the Intergovernmental Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Cultural Cooperation as well as the Intergovernmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation held meetings.

Our bilateral trade is stable and maintained at a high level. Hydrocarbon supplies from Russia to India are increasing. We have signed a comprehensive Action Strategy for advancing bilateral trade, economic and investment cooperation. We are drafting an updated intergovernmental agreement on the encouragement and mutual protection of capital investment. Consultations on the removal of trade barriers and the increased use of national currencies in our transactions are held regularly. We have succeeded in organising joint events on the sidelines of the St Petersburg International Forum and the Eastern Economic Forum. The Russian-Indian strategic economic dialogue is ongoing. Interregional exchanges are also actively maintained.

Our interaction in energy, primarily in the "atoms for peace" area, is advancing as planned. The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant project is on schedule. The trilateral interaction involving Dacca in the construction of a nuclear power plant at Rooppur (Bangladesh) is being stepped up efficiently.

Our cooperation in the military and military-technical areas is growing stronger. We have signed intergovernmental contracts on AK-203 assault rifle production in India, as well as on the manufacture of parts for Russian (Soviet) weapons and military equipment. Major contracts for S-400 Triumph air defence missile systems with New Delhi and the building of Project 11356 frigates for the Indian Navy are being carried out. In December, we conducted the Indramulti-service military exercise.

Much progress is observed in the joint development of the Indian manned space flight programme and the reciprocal deployment of GLONASS and NavIC tracking stations catering to the national satellite systems.

Contacts in science, education and culture are expanding. An intergovernmental agreement was signed on joint audiovisual production. We also continue consultations on some draft intergovernmental agreements to promote reciprocal recognition of academic and scientific degrees in the general and the medical professions. A festival of Indian culture took place in Russia in September through December, 2019. Tourist numbers in both directions are also increasing.

**Question: Russian-Japanese relations in 2019. Prospects for signing the peace treaty.**

**Answer:** The positive dynamics in our relations with Japan was maintained in 2019. The pace and direction were set by bilateral summit meetings in Moscow in January, on the sidelines of the G-20 meeting in Osaka in June, and at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September.

We maintained effective contacts between the heads of the security councils, between the foreign ministers, in the "two plus two" format involving the heads of the foreign ministries and ministries of defence,

within the framework of the strategic dialogue at the level of deputy foreign ministers , within the dialogue on strategic stability and other consultations between our foreign ministries.

Ties between our defence and law enforcement agencies have expanded. The Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy visited Japan for the first time in 18 years in November 2019. At the end of November, we held consultations on the implementation of the 1993 Intergovernmental Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas beyond the Territorial Waters. The anticorruption agencies have begun practical interaction.

Interparliamentary and interparty exchanges also made progress. A delegation of the Federation Council headed by Deputy Chair Iliyas Umakhanov attended the Japanese Emperor's enthronement ceremony in Tokyo in October. A number of meetings at the Federation Council and Japanese Parliament leadership level as well as meetings under current consultation mechanisms and coordination groups were held in September-November.

The Russian and Japanese Council of Governors resumed deliberations after a nine-year break (Moscow, May).

Special attention was given to building up trade and economic cooperation. Work was underway on Russian priority projects and the Japanese Eight-Point Cooperation Plan using the current mechanisms of political dialogue. Meaningful achievements in the last year included major Japanese corporations working in the Arctic LNG-2 project, arrangements on the construction of a methanol plant in Volgograd, agreements for establishing a Russian-Japanese Center for Preventive Medicine and Diagnostics in Khabarovsk, and Russia's first center for the treatment of cancer with heavy carbon ions in Obninsk.

Meanwhile the issue of mutual trade recovery growth continues: in 2019 a downward trend in mutual trade was recorded again: the decrease was 2.3 percent in January-October against the same period in 2018; it totaled \$17.16 billion.

We expect that the results of the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Russian-Japanese Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Affairs (Moscow, December) will contribute to promoting the comprehensive development of ties, a task set by the leaders of both countries, and will bring a new quality.

Humanitarian exchanges also increased. 2019 marked the conclusion of unprecedented projects like the Cross-Year of Russia and Japan, which comprised about 700 events by both parties in a broad range of areas, including the economy, culture, science, education and exchanges between defence agencies. Russian-Japanese cross-years will be continued: 2020-2021 have been declared the years of interregional and twin-city exchanges.

Pursuant to the summit understanding on expediting talks on the peace treaty based on the Joint Declaration of 1956 (Singapore, November 2018) we had three rounds of dialogue at the foreign ministerial level (Moscow, January 14 and May 10; Munich, February 16) and relevant talks between deputy foreign ministers (Moscow, March 21).

The talks showed that substantial differences in the parties' positions persisted. Given this, we see no alternative to a lasting and detailed effort to bring Russian-Japanese relations to a new level that will allow engaging in an efficient search for mutually acceptable solutions to sensitive bilateral issues.

Russia's position of principle on the problem of the peace treaty is consistent and invariable: its resolution must be based on Tokyo's recognition of the outcome of WWII in full, including the indisputable sovereignty of the Russian Federation over the South Kuril Islands. At the same time, it is necessary to develop

practical cooperation in an all-round manner, work out measures of confidence building in the military-political area and bring our positions in international affairs closer together.

To this end, a special emphasis was made on launching joint economic activities involving Japan, on the Kuril Islands in the five areas approved by our leaders – aquaculture, greenhouse facilities, wind-power engineering, tourism and waste treatment. A number of pilot programmes were carried out, including a test tour of Japanese citizens to the Iturup and Kunashir islands. We deem it important to continue the search for mutually beneficial plans of cooperation, which will meet the commercial interests of the companies involved, the goals of socio-economic development of both countries' neighboring regions and finally make a real contribution to stronger trust and neighborly relations between the Russian and Japanese peoples.

**Question: Developments in Afghanistan. What Russia has done to promote the national reconciliation process.**

**Answer:** Conditions in Afghanistan remain difficult: the active operations of ISIS, an international terrorist group, have further aggravated the serious military and political situation in recent years.

We believe that there is no alternative to settling the Afghan conflict through political and diplomatic means. In order to do this, it is necessary to recognise the Taliban as an essential part of the Afghan nation. We firmly believe that international efforts must contribute to an immediate and successful conclusion of the US-Taliban talks aimed at ensuring the gradual withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, as well as the launch of inclusive intra-Afghan peace talks.

In order to fulfil these tasks, Russia is taking steps to promote the Afghan national reconciliation on the regional platform: as part of the Moscow consultations format, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the SCO–Afghanistan Contact Group. A regular meeting of this group took place in Bishkek on April 19, 2019, and the Contact Group Roadmap was signed at the SCO Heads of State Council Meeting on June 13–14, 2019, in Bishkek. Last year, we also helped launch the meetings with broad representation as part of the intra-Afghan dialogue, the first round of which was held in Moscow and the second in Doha. The third meeting is scheduled to take place in Beijing this year.

The experience of cooperation on these platforms has shown that it would be beneficial to organise consultations in a more restricted format involving Russia, the United States and China at the first stage, with Pakistan joining later. We believe this group's task is to create favourable international conditions for the launch of direct intra-Afghan talks on peace and the post-conflict political system in Afghanistan.

**Question: Russia-Turkey relations. Implementation of major investment projects with Russia's participation (TurkStream and Akkuyu NPP). Interaction between Moscow and Ankara on important regional matters (Syria and Libya).**

**Answer:** We are satisfied with the across-the-board progressive development of Russia-Turkey cooperation, each area of which is marked by significant and, in some areas, groundbreaking achievements. We consider this to be a legitimate result of hard, but invariably effective cooperation with Turkey. Both our countries are really interested in building up bilateral relations based on each other's interests and mutual respect.

The scale of interaction and the complexity of the problems requiring our most active involvement dictated the need for an intensive dialogue focused on reaching practical agreements at all levels.

President Putin met with President Erdogan eight times over the past year, with the Turkish leader making five visits to Russia, where he participated in the High-Level Cooperation Council. The TurkStream gas pipeline was officially launched in Istanbul with the participation of the respective heads of states on January 8.

Further convergence of the two countries' positions on pressing issues of international and regional agenda, primarily the Syria and Libya conflicts and the situation around Iran, is among important results of the year in Russia's relations with Turkey. This was reflected in the Joint Statement adopted following the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan on January 8. As you may recall, the document expressed mutual concern about the recent events in the Middle East. Both Russia and Turkey operate on the premise that there is no alternative to political and diplomatic ways of resolving contradictions in the region, rejecting reliance on force and escalation of violence and establishing a substantive dialogue between the opposing sides.

We maintained a close inter-ministerial dialogue. The 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Russian-Turkish Joint Strategic Planning Group co-chaired by the foreign ministers was held in Antalya on March 29, 2019. There were at least 10 rounds of specialist consultations at the level of deputy foreign ministers and directors of departments of the Russian and Turkish foreign ministries.

Defence ministries, general staffs and security services maintained regular contacts.

The interaction between the parliaments has noticeably intensified. Speaker of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko paid an official visit to Turkey on May 15-17, 2019. Speaker of the Grand National Assembly Mustafa Sentop visited Russia on July 1-3, 2019, with an official return visit to participate in the Development of Parliamentarism International Forum. On October 11-12, 2019, State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin took part in the Third Conference on Countering Terrorism and Strengthening Interregional Cooperation in Istanbul. Bilateral meetings also took place on the sidelines of the Fourth Conference of the Speakers of Eurasian Countries' Parliaments in Nur-Sultan on September 23, 2019, and as part of the 141<sup>st</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Belgrade.

Progress in Russia-Turkey cooperation is largely due to continually expanding trade and economic ties. In this regard, Turkey is one of our key partners. For example, mutual trade increased by 2.5% in January-October 2019 to a total of \$21.7 billion.

On a separate note, we note the successful implementation of strategic projects that go far beyond bilateral ties in terms of their importance. The TurkStream gas pipeline is extremely important for strengthening European energy security. Two pipelines with a total throughput of about 31.5 billion cubic metres of gas per year will be used to supply Turkish and European consumers with the Russian natural gas.

Another major joint project, the Akkuyu NPP, is under construction as planned. It will bring our cooperation with Ankara to the strategic level in the most advanced energy spheres and at the same time showcase the quality and reliability of advanced Russian nuclear technologies internationally. Our goal remains unchanged. It is to ensure the launch of the first power unit in 2023, the year of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic of Turkey.

We expect to see a new record number of Russian tourists who visited Turkey in 2019. However, we will continue to pay special attention to the safety of our fellow citizens during holidays and ensuring their interests and rights, which is a vital priority for us.

The cross Culture and Tourism Year, which recently ended in Istanbul, was very rich in events.

Cooperation between the foreign affairs and defence ministries of Russia and Turkey as part of multilateral efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis was high on the list of the Russian diplomacy's priorities.

Particular focus was on joint steps with our Turkish and Iranian partners in the Astana format to overcome the crisis in Syria in the interest of giving another impetus to the political process based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254. We believe that the assistance provided by Russia, Turkey and Iran to Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Syria Geir Pedersen played a significant role in launching the Constitutional Committee in Geneva.

We maintain contacts with Ankara in order to closely monitor the challenging situation in various Syrian regions and quickly take practical measures to normalise the situation on the ground in accordance with the agreements included in the Russian-Turkish Memorandum on normalising the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone of September 17, 2018, and the Memorandum of Understanding of October 22, 2019. Efforts are being made, primarily by the military of the two countries, to ensure the functioning of the demilitarised zone in Idlib and to prevent shelling by terrorists of the positions of the Syrian government forces and Russian military facilities and joint patrolling in northeast Syria.

The situation in Libya is a cause for concern for Ankara and us alike. As already mentioned, this issue was discussed during a number of bilateral contacts at the high and top levels, including the visit by President Putin to Turkey on January 8. We appreciate the fact that our Turkish partners remain supportive of a peaceful resolution of the Libyan conflict, primarily, in the context of preparations for a multilateral forum on Libya under the UN auspices. We reaffirm our readiness for further exchange of views with Turkey and coordination of our countries' efforts in the interest of advancing the political process and de-escalating tensions in that country.

**Question: I would like to ask about the development of Russia's relations with Latin American countries and Latin American integration associations in 2019, as well as the prospects for resolving the situation around Venezuela.**

**Answer:** At times the 2019 developments in Latin America brought to mind the forgotten flaming continent concept.

It goes without saying that domestic political processes unfolding in a number of Latin American countries had their own causes and dynamics. At the same time, against the backdrop of the complicated regional situation, the United States is trying more actively to reformat the region in line with its geopolitical interests and the "controlled chaos" theory. Efforts to change undesirable regimes or send vacillating regimes in the "right" direction, to disunite regional integration processes and to impose rigid neo-liberal concepts became integral parts of this policy. The "de-mothballed" Monroe Doctrine served as its ideological foundation.

It appears that the United States did not expect what happened next, as its plans started bogging down. The region turned out to be more complicated and more diverse than Washington's simplistic calculations. Despite tough and stifling sanctions and "colour revolution" methods, the United States failed to execute its blitzkrieg against Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua.

Amid the regional turbulence, tangible demand continues to grow for Russia's more significant role in Latin American affairs, and this is hardly surprising. We do not view the region through the prism of

geopolitical interests, and we don't want it to turn into an arena of confrontation with anyone.

We perceive the Latin American continent and the Caribbean basin as an important element of the emerging multipolar international order. Therefore, we are interested in strong, politically united and economically stable regional countries in their entirety and in unity in diversity. The Russian approach towards collaboration with the Latin Americans is logical: we do not pit anyone against anyone, we don't create demarcation lines or artificial barriers, we don't divide partners into those who are with us and against us, and we strive to strengthen cooperation of a de-ideologised pragmatic basis with mutual respect and consideration for each other's interests.

This constructive philosophy made it possible to expand fruitful cooperation with Latin American states in various formats and in numerous areas.

We actively expanded political dialogue at various levels, both with leftist and rightist-centrist countries. We have never had any prejudices or made any exceptions.

We would like to once again thank Brazil for its productive presidency of BRICS, and to congratulate Argentina's Rafael Grossi on his appointment as IAEA Director General.

We are ready to expand contacts with existing continental integration organisations, and we perceive such cooperation as something mutually beneficial and de-ideologised. Improving ties between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Pacific Alliance states are a case in point. We are ready to resume dialogue with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC); in this context, we are counting on the leading positions of Mexico's presidency of the Community in 2020, as well as the efforts to impart specific forms to Russia's collaboration with the Central American Integration System after this country receives observer status with the association. On the contrary, we cannot accept ideologised approaches that exceed the framework of correct communications of the incumbent leaders of the Organisation of American States (OAS), who have become a tool for interfering in the domestic affairs of sovereign countries.

It is important that we voice similar views on the need to strengthen multilateral foundations in global affairs, the UN central coordinating role and norms and principles of international law in our contacts with all Latin Americans, regardless of their governments' political orientation. This allows us to voice agreed-upon positions on many key problems of the modern world. We are confident that this will make it possible to expand spheres of mutual understanding on matters where our views may differ.

The situation in Venezuela became a problem that, without exaggeration, split Latin America and the Caribbean basin last year. We are convinced that, with the exception of a small number of countries, albeit influential, that continue to claim that all options are on the table, most states agree that it is possible to resolve the situation only by relying on national legislation and norms of international law. They advocate a search for agreements by the people of Venezuela themselves through all-inclusive national dialogue and without any unconstructive foreign interference. They reject any possible scenarios involving the use of force, not to mention military force.

Naturally, the shared perception that the sanctions introduced by the United States are illegal and increasingly inhuman, that they are not in the interests of the people in Venezuela, and that they aggravate the already complicated regional economic situation is becoming more widespread.

According to opinion polls, the people of Venezuela are tired of confrontation; they want politicians to

address everyday national problems, rather than fight each other. We believe that the situation in Venezuela is showing signs of tentative improvement, and this instils the cautious hope that the concerned parties will move towards a political settlement. The Roundtable of National Dialogue has launched its work, and it is gradually becoming a platform for coordinating the complicated positions of domestic political forces. Naturally, it is important that it represents as many parties as possible. The rotation of the leaders of parliament, whose members oppose Nicolas Maduro, creates an opportunity for scaling down confrontation.

Russia will continue to facilitate efforts to resolve the crisis by political and non-violent methods, including through dialogue with the Latin Americans, the European Union, the People's Republic of China and other partners.

**Question: What are the results of the first Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi? What are the prospects of cooperation between Russia and African countries?**

**Answer:** 2019 became an unprecedented year in the history of Russian-African relations. On October 23–24, the first Russia-Africa Summit was held in Sochi co-chaired by presidents Vladimir Putin and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. It was attended by delegations from all 54 African states recognised by the UN (most of them were represented by top officials) as well as heads of the executive bodies of the African Union and other leading regional organisations and integration associations in Africa, including the African Export-Import Bank.

Following the summit, a declaration was adopted establishing a completely new dialogue mechanism: the Russia–Africa Partnership Forum, which should make Russian-African cooperation system-wide and comprehensive. Meetings at the highest level held every three years will act as a managing body of the Forum. Between the summits, practical issues will be addressed at the annual political consultations between foreign ministers of Russia and the African countries that are the current, previous and future chairs of the African Union.

A large economic forum was held together with the summit, with over 6,000 representatives of business circles, official delegations and Russian government agencies participating in it. An important package of commercial documents, including over 50 contracts worth about one trillion rubles was signed on the sidelines of the forum.

Cooperation with African countries is developing in all areas. The political dialogue has become more intense, inter-parliamentary contacts are strengthening and the legal base is being updated. The most important areas of cooperation include combatting terrorism, extremism, cross-border crime and drug trafficking, as well as developing military-technical and military ties. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia makes a significant contribution to adopting practical measures to define the status and mandates of peacekeeping operations based on the African solutions to African problems principle.

In the economy, the main task is to double trade with the continent in the next several years. Russian economic agents are successfully operating in Africa in such areas as the oil and gas industry, geological exploration, extraction of raw materials, agriculture, fishery and high technologies. In particular, ALROSA is participating in Catoca, a large diamond-mining project in Angola; RUSAL is implementing bauxite-alumina projects in Guinea; and Vi Holding, Rostec and the Russian Export Centre are taking part in the exploration of the Darwendale platinum deposit in Zimbabwe. The creation of a Russian industrial zone in Egypt, where Russian companies localise assembly capacities to later supply their products to African markets, can serve as

an example of effective industrial cooperation. The peaceful atom is another prospective area. Bilateral cooperation agreements have been signed with a number of countries, including Rwanda, Ethiopia, the Republic of the Congo and Zambia. Practical work with Egypt is already underway.

There is tangible progress in cooperation with integration associations. The memorandum on the basis of relations and cooperation between the Russian Government and the African Union and the memorandum of economic cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the African Union were signed on the sidelines of the summit in Sochi.

We will continue to promote the human resource potential in African countries. In 2018, over 2,000 African students were admitted to Russian universities with government scholarships. In total, over 17,000 Africans are studying in Russia on contractual basis.

**Question: What do you think about Russia-NATO relations in the context of the anti-Russian activity of the Alliance?**

**Answer:** Our relations with NATO have seen various stages and have had their ups and downs. There were crises related to the bombings of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the events in Georgia in 2008. But those times cannot be compared to what is happening now. For instance, after Mikheil Saakashvili's military venture in 2008, we did not stop our practical cooperation but the political dialogue did somewhat slow down for a short time at the initiative of the Alliance. In September 2008, the NATO leadership said that the Western countries cannot afford the "luxury" of abandoning cooperation with Russia in counteracting the common security threats, first of all, terrorism. So, they understood the situation well at that time.

We tried to put our interaction with NATO on the partnership track. At the 2010 Lisbon Summit, we agreed to move towards an equal strategic partnership. We also implemented mutually beneficial practical projects.

Our current relations with the Alliance have declined to the lowest point since the end of the Cold War. At last year's NATO summit in London, Russia was named the first among the threats to Euro-Atlantic security.

These are not just empty words. NATO countries have been consistently building up their military presence near our borders and have been working on improving the redeployment of forces to the 'Eastern flank.' Their military exercises are becoming more intensive, while their scenarios look like large-scale preparations for a major military conflict. We are also witnessing a systematic development of the European segment of the US/NATO missile defence system.

The activity of the alliance is moving to new operation environments. In addition to land, water and air, NATO has established a foothold in cyberspace and in outer space. There are suggestions that the Alliance should participate in Middle Eastern affairs more actively, and to react to the challenges posed by China to the West.

As for Russia, the Alliance has officially announced that it will adhere to the so-called double-track approach, which means a combination of containment and dialogue. At the same time, the dialogue prospects are contingent on "positive changes" in our behaviour. This was again voiced in London. Restrictive measures against the Russian permanent mission to NATO in Brussels keep hampering the work of our diplomats.

The situation is taking a dangerous turn. We have repeatedly offered the Alliance the opportunity to take reciprocal steps in order to relieve military tensions. The first steps can be small: for instance, we could agree

on the sites of military exercises and how to avoid dangerous incidents. However, we have not received any response to our initiatives. The dialogue between military experts has been frozen. The existing contacts between Russia and NATO's supreme military leaders – Russia's Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Tod D. Wolters and Chairman of the NATO Military Committee Stuart Peach – are good but it would be impossible to ease tensions without a concrete conversation between experts.

The Alliance still cannot overcome its Cold War mentality. Russia is a convenient enemy for them. At the same time we can see that many NATO member states are beginning to realise how damaging this strategy is. We hope that an attempt will be made to reconsider the relations with Russia as part of the analytical process on the future of the Alliance launched at the London summit.

On our part, we remain open to dialogue in case NATO shows an explicit readiness for building a constructive mutual understanding with our country.

**Question: Could you speak about Russia-EU relations, including energy cooperation, and the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 project under US pressure?**

**Answer:** Our relations with the EU are going through hard times. This is the choice of the EU, which is trying to suspend large-scale mutually beneficial cooperation – from summits to sectoral dialogue – against the backdrop of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. This decision together with the attempts to present our common neighbours with the artificial choice of being “either with Russia or the EU” led to serious destabilisation of the situation and the deepening of the “dividing lines” in Europe.

The prospect of linking the development of EU-Russia relations with the settlement of the situation in Donbass is equally myopic. The entire package of versatile Russia-EU cooperation has become a hostage of the Kiev authorities.

I hope that the EU will be able to look pragmatically at relations with its biggest neighbour and will move away from the counterproductive policy of “detering” Russia. Russia and the EU have many more aspects that unite us rather than separate us. As the recent US illegal actions on Iraqi territory have shown, it is in the interests of Russia and the EU to stand together against the destabilisation in the region that is important for both of us. It is fraught with many trans-border threats and challenges, including terrorism, illegal migration, organised crime and drug trafficking.

We see that the EU is gradually coming to realise the need to improve the situation. Cooperation with the majority of the EU member states is making headway. The first contacts with the new EU leaders that started working in early December 2019 took place. We believe that the beginning of a new institutional cycle in the EU provides an opportunity for a new start in our relations.

We continue to be important trade and investment partners for each other. Let me recall that in the best years our trade with the EU amounted to \$417 billion. Had it not been for Brussels' sanctions games, our trade with the EU could have reached half a trillion dollars, which would allow it to be in its best shape amid increasing global competition. Even despite a substantial reduction, the EU countries account for about 42 percent of trade with Russia. In turn, Russia is the EU's fourth largest trade partner.

Naturally, energy certainly remains an area where Russia and the EU have developed successful and mutually beneficial cooperation for over half a century. Let me recall that in 2018 Gazprom supplied Europe

with a record 201.8 billion cubic metres of gas. The figures for 2019 are expected to be at about the same level. In addition, a steady growth of LNG supplies from Russia was recorded last year.

The launch of the TurkStream gas pipeline on January 8 of this year was the latest example of Russia's real contribution to ensuring the energy security of the EU member countries. According to the available information, the first gas on this route has already reached not only Turkey but also Bulgaria and Greece.

Despite all difficulties, infrastructure projects with Russia's participation, including the Nord Stream 2, are being implemented. We know that far from all EU countries welcome this project. There are opponents of it both among the EU countries and the EU institutions. It is common knowledge how the EU adopted amendments to the so-called "gas directive." Regardless of any attempt to convince us of the contrary, they were exclusively aimed against this project.

Washington's activities to destroy this initiative deserve special mention. It has included provisions on sanctions into its law on defence spending in 2020, which amounts to undisguised interference in European affairs. A number of American senators are making direct threats to specific contractors that are involved in the Nord Stream 2 project. Obviously, they are not concerned about European energy security but are trying to push expensive US LNG to the European market. This is a flagrant example of dishonest competition under the cover of political slogans.

The Nord Stream 2 project will be completed despite the continued pressure. Realistically minded Europeans must see the obvious benefit from the construction of an additional export gas route. However, there are countries that are ready to work for their overseas partners against the interests of their own compatriots.

So, it is clear who really contributes to enhancing EU energy security.

**Question: US-Russian relations in the context of the Russophobia unleashed in Washington. What is the Foreign Ministry doing to rescue the illegally abducted Russians serving prison sentences in the US?**

**Answer:** In 2019, the situation remained difficult in the dialogue with Washington. On the one hand, the US President continued to speak regularly of the need to normalise relations and establish constructive cooperation with Russia. Donald Trump reaffirmed that attitude during a very substantive meeting he had with Vladimir Putin in Osaka on June 28.

Over the past year, Sergey Lavrov's contacts with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have been quite intense, and they also talked about ways to stabilise bilateral relations. They have exchanged major visits – the head of American diplomacy visited Sochi on May 14, and on December 10, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the invitation of Mike Pompeo, visited Washington, where he also met with Donald Trump. Professional meetings have taken place at other levels, including as part of the counter-terrorism dialogue, which resumed in December 2018, covering strategic stability issues and the regional agenda.

Nevertheless, we cannot cite any significant improvement in the atmosphere and quality of the relationship. Despite all the US authorities' statements of interest in mutually beneficial cooperation, in practice, they have acted inconsistently, delayed the implementation of our proposals to restore dialogue, and, under pressure from their domestic opponents, launched new unfriendly policies against Russia. The general US aggressiveness in global affairs also persisted, as well as their tendency to dictate to others, and their reluctance to come to terms with the realities of the emerging multipolar world has not changed.

Washington steadily intensified its pressure with its anti-Russia sanctions, and they did not even try to hide that they were using that policy as an instrument of unfair economic competition. Obviously, the policy of artificial restrictions and prohibitions in the context of today's global economy has its limits, and ultimately, it will inevitably hit the interests of the United States proper. This much is clear from Washington's recent moves against Nord Stream 2, which looked to come from frustration more than anything else, and which failed to block the energy project that is beneficial for both Russia and Europe.

The collapse of the INF Treaty, finally terminated on August 2, provoked by the Americans, was a crushing blow to the entire architecture of international security. We called on the United States to take a cue from Russia and commit to refrain from being the first to deploy medium- and shorter-range ground-based missiles, which they already began testing, but got a straightforward decline in response.

Washington continues to maintain uncertainty about the future of the START Treaty, which expires on February 5, 2021, even though the Russian side has proposed extending it as soon as possible without any preconditions. We will certainly take all the necessary steps to ensure our own security, as we did after the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002. However, we would like the Americans to bear in mind the inevitable negative consequences of their steps, including the escalation of the arms race and tension in the world.

We understand that the difficulties in our bilateral relations are largely fueled by what is happening in the United States, which is also going through a difficult stage of internal development. There are political forces there that keep playing the Russian card in their inter-party campaigning even after the Special Counsel investigation by special prosecutor Robert Mueller, completed last spring, confirmed that any 2016 election conspiracy allegations involving Russia were groundless. As the next US presidential election approaches on November 3, new bursts of Russophobia should not be ruled out.

We certainly take this factor into account when assessing the prospects for dialogue in 2020. For our part, we will continue to be guided by a pragmatic approach, including responses to aggressive attacks. At the same time, Russia has no interest in generating any new conflicts. We are open to a joint search for solutions to problems that are important to both our countries and the whole world – if only we would see a genuine willingness to do business honestly and maintain a balance of interests on the American side.

Russian initiatives to build up cooperation in various areas remain on the table. Many of them can be implemented in the near future – for example, launching, as the presidents agreed, the Business Advisory and Expert Councils, exchanging letters of guarantee of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and taking steps to strengthen strategic stability. But we will judge our American colleagues' interest in cooperation by their actions, not their words.

We have proposed, for some time, addressing head-on the problems in our bilateral relations. One of the most serious problems concerns the arrests and even abduction of Russians in third countries that you mentioned. The US authorities are actually hunting for Russians. They are deliberately ignoring the bilateral mutual legal assistance treaty but simply prefer to arrest our citizens abroad. This goes as far as straightforward abductions, as was the case in 2010 with Konstantin Yaroshenko in Liberia and Roman Selezneyov in the Maldives in 2014. Viktor Bout, who was detained in Thailand and sentenced to 25 years after refusing to admit arms trafficking allegations, has served 12 years in prison.

With Russophobia in full swing in the United States, their law enforcement agencies' and special services' actions against Russians have long been politically motivated. Once arrested, our citizens suffer from a biased attitude, and experience psychological, and sometimes physical pressure. Confessions are knocked out of them, and they are often forced to cooperate. If they deny their guilt, they are sentenced to extraordinary prison terms.

Everyone remembers what happened to Maria Butina, who was arrested in Washington in the summer of 2018 as part of the witch hunt. They tried unsuccessfully to accuse her of meddling in American internal affairs, but actually convicted her on account of her Russian citizenship, forcing her to incriminate herself through the harsh conditions of her detention. Only after 15 months of imprisonment, on October 26, was she finally returned to her homeland.

We are taking all possible measures, of course, to protect the rights and interests of Russians. In addition to our overseas agencies' ongoing work to provide them with consular assistance, we regularly and directly raise these questions during political meetings with the US administration, including at the highest level. We demand the return of the Russian prisoners, make specific proposals such as the application of the 1983 Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons.

The ministry also updates the warnings on its website for our compatriots annually, recommending that they carefully weigh the risks when planning foreign trips.

The Foreign Ministry also continues to make every effort for the return of six Russian state properties in the United States, which, despite their immunity, were illegally seized by the American authorities in 2016-2018. These include two out-of-town recreation centres for the Embassy in Washington and of the Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, Russia's Trade Mission in Washington, two Consulate General buildings in San Francisco and the residence of the Consul General in Seattle. Those properties were absolutely legally acquired between the 1950s and the 1990s and have had a diplomatic status registered with the State Department since that time.

We regularly raise the issue of returning our property during our contacts with US representatives at various levels – unfortunately, so far, to no avail. Therefore, we have highlighted to international organisations and other countries Washington's abuse and violation of its obligations.

Note that the 1947 Agreement between the United States and the United Nations on deploying its headquarters in New York does not mention any rights of the American authorities – for whatever reason – to seize the property of other UN member states. On the contrary, it says that the premises of the missions and the residences of their employees, even those located outside the area of central institutions in Manhattan, have full diplomatic immunity. So this makes the seizing of our Permanent Mission's recreation facility on Long Island in December 2016, where several workers with their families lived permanently, a clear violation of that agreement and of wider international law.

We have not ruled our filing a lawsuit in a US court, even though the objectivity of the American justice system – which meekly obeys its executive authorities and special services citing vague national security considerations – is questionable. The completely biased trial of Maria Butina, which took place a year ago in Washington orchestrated by the FBI, was an eloquent example of that.

For three years now, the Russian Embassy in the United States has been sending notes every two weeks

requesting permission to inspect the seized property, but our employees have not been allowed to enter the seized buildings. To date, over 300 requests have been sent, but not one of them has been satisfied. This raises serious concerns about the condition of our property, including the serviceability of the utility systems, the failure of which can lead to serious structural damage, let alone the predictable quick wear without proper maintenance.

If the US authorities are for some reason wary of Russian diplomats, could they maybe allow their own journalists to visit some of the sites? As owners, we do not mind and even invite media representatives from all over the world to go there. It would also be very interesting for us to find out what the American special services are doing there.

**Question: What were Russian-French relations like in 2019, considering the agreements reached at the highest level?**

**Answer:** 2019 saw a warming in Russian-French relations. Stepping up bilateral contacts and expanding their agenda show that the political dialogue with France is gradually returning to the level appropriate for two nuclear powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The trajectory and pace of development of bilateral ties was set by Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron during their personal meetings and telephone conversations as well as their exchange of messages regarding cooperation between Russia and France, the termination of the INF Treaty and the strengthening of confidence and security in Europe. Following the talks at Fort de Bregancon, the presidents made the decision to promote bilateral cooperation in the area of strategic stability and security in Europe.

The resumption of the Russian-French Security Cooperation Council with the foreign and defence ministers after a seven-year-long break was another important event last year. This format remains an important means for our countries to work out common answers to the security challenges in challenging regions and the entire world.

On June 24, Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev visited Le Havre, where he had talks with Prime Minister of France Edouard Philippe. Fruitful cooperation continued between the Russian Security Council and the French Secretariat-General for National Defence and Security. On November 15, Russian-French interagency consultations on international information security took place in Moscow.

The regular session of the Russian-French Economic, Financial, Industrial and Trade Council (CEFIC) held in Moscow on December 10 was substantive. We hope that the implementation of the agreements reached there will make it possible to expand bilateral cooperation in these areas in the near future and dispel French companies' worries about US sanctions.

France remains a key investor in Russia. According to the data of the Bank of Russia, as of April 1, 2019, France's direct investments in Russia total \$18.3 billion. The French companies Total and Engie together with their Russian partners carry out ambitious projects in the gas industry, such as Nord Stream, Nord Stream 2, Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG 2.

An agreement has been reached to hold the large festival Russian Seasons in France in 2020 (over 270 events in 64 French cities) and the cross-year of interregional cooperation in 2021.

**Question: Relations between Russia and Germany in 2019. What can you tell us about the expulsion of two Russian diplomats?**

**Answer:** In 2019, President Vladimir Putin and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel maintained regular dialogue. Mr Lavrov met his German counterpart Heiko Maas six times. On January 11 this year, Ms Merkel and Mr Maas visited Moscow together. The positions of Moscow and Berlin differ on many issues but this does not prevent us from exchanging opinions with a view to settling international crises, including the conflicts in Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

On November 14 last year, Moscow hosted a plenary session of the Russian-German high-level interdepartmental working group on security policy issues.

Economic cooperation has made steady headway. The German business community is interested in expanding its presence in the Russian market and localising manufacturing in Russia, and consistently opposes the Brussels spiral of sanctions. This was clearly reflected during President Putin's traditional annual meeting with the executives of German companies in Sochi on December 6, 2019.

According to statistics published by Germany, German companies invested 3.26 billion euros (the highest figure since 2008) in 2018. The figure for the first quarter of 2019 was 1.76 billion euros. Today, the aggregate amount of German investment in the Russian economy exceeds \$18 billion, while reciprocal Russian investment in Germany is \$9 billion. Despite a 12.9 percent reduction in trade to \$38.5 billion in the first three quarters of 2019 against the same period in 2018, Germany remains one of our main foreign trade partners. Germany's share of Russia's foreign trade in the first three quarters of 2019 was 7.9 percent (second after China with 16.3 percent). The construction of the Nord Stream 2 project is in the final phase. Despite US sanctions against this project, Russia and Germany are confident that it will be completed.

Bilateral inter-parliamentary ties are increasing and becoming consistent. Contacts between twin cities are being expanded at the regional and municipal levels.

Cultural and humanitarian contacts and ties between public organisations are developing successfully. On December 7, 2019 the Hamburg-based Elbphilharmonie (Elbe Philharmonic Hall) hosted a ceremony to close Russian Seasons with the participation of Russian Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky and former German President Christian Wulff. This large cultural programme included over 450 events in 90 German cities. In August 2020 it will be followed by the reciprocal programme of the Year of Germany in Russia.

On December 2-3, 2019, the Russian-German University Science Forum reviewed the intermediate results of the cross year of 2018-2020 scientific and educational partnerships held under the patronage of the Russian and German foreign ministers. Under the plan, it will come to an end on September 15 with the participation of Mr Lavrov and Mr Maas. The theme of the forthcoming cross year ("The Economy and Sustainable Development") has been agreed upon. On July 18-19, 2019 Bonn hosted the 18th St Petersburg Dialogue Russian-German Public Forum that reaffirmed the public demand for improving bilateral relations.

As for the case of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, we would like to note that Berlin's decision to declare non-grata two staff members of the Russian Embassy in Berlin, which we consider an unfriendly and completely unfounded act, could not go unanswered. We had to take retaliatory measures and expel two German diplomats from Moscow. We believe that Germany had no grounds to complain about unsatisfactory cooperation from our agencies in investigating the murder of this terrorist. We have maintained contact with the German intelligence services via partnership channels since August 2019. The Germans had information about the location of this terrorist and criminal, who was to blame for the deaths of hundreds of innocent people, long before this crime

was committed. Using the same partnership channels, our intelligence services raised the issue of extradition. Regrettably, we did not reach a mutual understanding at that time. However, as President Vladimir Putin said, Russia is ready to provide the required support to the German law-enforcement bodies in revealing the circumstances of this murder.

We are convinced that considering Khangoshvili's criminal past, he had many enemies, including those in the criminal world. We urge Berlin to resume practical cooperation on this case, in part, with a view to conducting the effective cooperative fight against international terrorist groups. We hope the German leaders will refrain from further media, propaganda and especially political escalation of tensions that is fraught with more complications for the Russian-German relations.

**Question: Russian-Serbian relations. How do you estimate developments in Kosovo and beyond?**

**Answer:** Russian-Serbian relations have reached the level of true strategic partnership. They are based on cultural and historical affinity, as well as shared approaches to and assessments of the past and present. This is especially important in view of the attempts to rewrite history, in particular, to belittle our countries' achievements in the fight against Nazism. Serbia is planning to hold a large-scale Immortal Regiment March on the eve of Victory Day. We support this idea.

We look forward to seeing President Aleksandar Vucic at the celebrations of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in Moscow on May 9, 2020. We hope that a Serbian military unit will take part in the parade on Red Square.

Economic cooperation is developing steadily. In January-October 2019, bilateral trade grew 15.5 percent on a year-on-year basis. The bilateral Intergovernmental Committee on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation is working actively: its next meeting is scheduled to take place in Kazan in March 2020.

On October 25, 2019, t Serbia and the Eurasian Economic Union signed a Free Trade Agreement, which will give a new impetus to the strengthening and diversification of bilateral trade and economic ties.

The laying of pipes has been completed in the Serbian section of the TurkStream transit pipeline. For many years, Russia has been a reliable supplier of energy to Serbia and the Balkans. The region's energy security will be ensured.

Firm ties have been established between the Russian and the Serbian Orthodox churches. They are based on the shared understanding of the historical spiritual heritage and contemporary issues, primarily in the context of Phanar's disgraceful attempts to formalise its authority over the Ukrainian Orthodox Church using non-canonical methods. These manoeuvres by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople have caused severe damage to the entire Orthodox World. It is very important that Serbian Patriarch Irenaeus and leading hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church invariably support the Russian Orthodox Church with regard to the issue of Orthodoxy in Ukraine.

Regarding the events involving Kosovo, the post-election chaos and the scramble for power continue in the territory and there is no agent capable of resuming dialogue with Belgrade. The environment for negotiations is unlikely to improve given the radical views of the nationalists who won the October elections.

In general, the dialogue under the auspices of the European Union has not been working for a long time. The EU's mediation potential has been largely devalued. For a long time now, Brussels has not been able to influence the Kosovars and induce them to take a reasonable and constructive approach in their talks with

Serbia. One example of this is the 100-percent anti-Serbian discriminatory customs duties introduced by the Kosovo authorities in November 2018 that are still in force. In addition, since April 2013 Pristina has sabotaged the fulfilment of the obligations they had undertaken with the EU's mediation to create a full-fledged Community of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo with significant executive powers to ensure the interests of Kosovo Serbs.

We consider the plans to create a "Kosovo army," plans supported by the leading NATO countries, to be a major threat to regional security. This is a gross violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which stipulates that all armed groups of Kosovo Albanians must be demilitarised, allowing only multinational contingents in Kosovo.

We have pointed out on numerous occasions and will continue to point out to our Western partners the non-transparency of the activities of Camp Bondsteel, which was initially deployed as part of the peacekeeping activities under UN Security Council Resolution 1244, but has now formally and in effect turned into an American base.

We hope that the Hague-based Kosovo Specialist Chambers investigating the atrocities committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army will soon get down to work. All those guilty of committing grave crimes (including murder for the purpose of organ harvesting) exposed by PACE rapporteur Dick Marty in his report must be tried and brought to justice regardless of the offices they hold now.

Russia's position on Kosovo is well known. We are in favour of Belgrade and Pristina reaching a viable and mutually acceptable solution based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244. This solution must be in compliance with international law and receive the approval of the UN Security Council, because it affects international peace and security.

We are ready to continue providing support for our Serbian partners on the Kosovo issue. We will only agree to a solution that will satisfy the Serbs themselves.

**Question: Could you tell us about the work with compatriots in 2019?**

**Answer:** In 2019, work continued on expanding partnership with the multinational, multi-faith and multimillion-strong Russian World. The Government Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad coordinated the implementation of the federal and regional programmes dedicated to work with the Russian community.

The collaboration with organisations of Russian compatriots living abroad was aimed at boosting their activities and strengthening their ties with the Russian Federation.

There was a special focus on further consolidation of the communities, protection of the compatriots' rights and lawful interests, primarily in Ukraine and the Baltic states, Russian-language education abroad, the development of the compatriots' media, strengthening the role of young people, and the fight against the falsification of history, anti-Russian sentiments and prejudice in the countries where the compatriots live.

At the compatriots' initiative, coordinating councils of the Russian communities were created in 100 countries to organise their activities. Close interaction between regional and global coordinating councils has been established, including their regular meetings in Russia and elsewhere.

About 1,000 major events, including over 40 youth meetings, five regional conferences, 85 country conferences and two meetings of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad, were held under the auspices of the Government Commission with support from Russian foreign missions and

compatriots' organisations in Russia and abroad.

On October 30–31, the Female Compatriots and Generation Continuity International Thematic Conference was held in Moscow under the auspices of the Government Commission and the World Coordinating Council. It was attended by 155 leaders and activists of the Russian community and prominent female representatives of the Russian diaspora from 93 countries. The participants in the forum decided to join the activities of the Eurasian Women's Forum and study the possibility of establishing an international non-governmental organisation of Russian-speaking women in order to develop ties between female compatriots' communities around the world.

We supported Russian regions' work with compatriots, which refers primarily to Moscow, St Petersburg, the Republic of Tatarstan, the Republic of Crimea, the Leningrad, Kaluga, Kaliningrad, Nizhny Novgorod, Omsk, Orenburg, Samara, Ulyanovsk and Yaroslavl regions, the Yamal-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi autonomous areas, and the Altai, Krasnodar and Stavropol territories. We encouraged the regions' interest in using the potential of compatriots members of the business community abroad. The compatriots involved in business were invited to take part in a business forum (Salekhard, April), an international conference (Khanty-Mansiysk, June) and the Entrepreneur Compatriots: Prospects for Cooperation Conference (London, November).

Work to support ethnic communities abroad continued. Specifically, the third congress of the European Alliance of Tatars took place in Vienna in October. We supported the holding of the national Tatar festival, Sabantui, in a number of countries.

In most countries, our compatriots initiated and inspired public events to celebrate Victory Day, protect the historical truth and counter anti-Russian sentiments with the support from the Government Commission and in cooperation with Russian foreign missions. The geography of such events as the Immortal Regiment, St George's Ribbon and the Memory Candle has expanded significantly. These involved about 1.5 million people and were held in more than 120 countries. Currently, Russian communities abroad are actively preparing events commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

The effort to protect the rights and lawful interests of Russian compatriots living abroad remains an important element. Platforms of the universally recognised human rights mechanisms and agencies of the UN, OSCE, the Council of Europe as well as bilateral channels are used. Compatriots from Baltic states and Ukraine took part in discussions at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (Warsaw, September 16–27). Contacts were established between the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad and the heads of the Russian Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights.

The foundation for the support and protection of the rights of compatriots living abroad provides for the activities of 26 centres of legal assistance for compatriots living abroad, including the re-established regional information and legal centre for North Africa and the Middle East. The centres' activities are aimed first of all at improving the legal awareness of compatriots. The Foreign Ministry has established cooperation with law firms and constructively-minded non-government organisations.

**Question: Measures taken by the Foreign Ministry in response to the violation of the rights of Russian media in a number of foreign states.**

**Answer:** The situation related to the freedom of speech and the media in the world remains unsatisfactory. In violation of their international commitments, some Western countries (primarily the United

States, France, Britain, Germany, Latvia and Lithuania) continue to practice restrictions and pressure as regards Russian media, particularly the RT and Sputnik news agencies and their media partners in the host countries. The position of journalists in Ukraine is a source of serious concern. Ukraine maintains a policy of systematic reprisals against journalists.

The Foreign Ministry continuously monitors the position of the Russian media abroad through its diplomatic missions in host countries. We maintain operational contact with Russian media news offices and respond via diplomatic channels upon identifying any violations of their rights.

In specific cases we summon heads of foreign diplomatic missions to the Foreign Ministry.

Using available potential, we regularly express our position, including by publishing comments on the Foreign Ministry's website and its official accounts in social media.

We use related international venues (the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the OSCE) and bilateral contacts to protect the rights of Russian media and alert specialised institutions to the problem of restrictions and sanctions. We pursue an assertive policy in this vein and work to make all states effectively implement the existing international legal security guarantees for journalists in their territory. We oppose the inclusion of unofficial or non-inclusive West-centric approaches to media freedom in conceptual frameworks drafted by related international organisations.

In this context, we derived some benefit from the OSCE meeting held in Moscow on November 6 with the Foreign Ministry's assistance. During the discussion, we managed to clearly express to our partners that we were concerned about the discrimination against the Russian media by the Western authorities and the toughening of government media and internet regulation in the West. Specifically, we conveyed to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Desir our apprehensions over the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), a non-transparent media regulation project contemplated by the Reporters Without Borders, and the media "white lists" drafted within its framework.

We would like to say most emphatically that the Russian side allows all foreign journalists without exception to pursue free and unhindered professional activities in Russia in full conformity with this country's commitments to the UN, the OSCE and other international organisations. However, we will always be compelled to respond in kind to any attempts to restrict the operations of Russian media abroad and to create a hostile atmosphere for them.

**Question: In 2020, we will celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. What steps will the Foreign Ministry take to preserve historical memory and counter the falsification of history and in general attempts to revise the internationally recognised results of World War II?**

**Answer:** It is no secret that an open and undisguised "historical aggression" has been launched against this country. There is no doubt that this is being done for political and time-serving purposes. The goal of the states involved in this is not only to slander modern Russia as the successor of the USSR but also to conceal their own unseemly role in conniving at the Hitler regime and to justify the outrageous excesses committed by their neo-Nazis as well as their rogue war on the monuments to [Russian] liberator soldiers. Another aim is to promote a distorted outlook on the entire postwar system of international relations.

In this context, we attach special importance to our efforts to preserve the historical truth, including by submitting relevant documents to international organisations. Our resolution on countering the glorification of

Nazism is given an invariably broad support at the United Nations. The plenary meeting of the 74<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly on December 18, 2019, approved this document by an impressive majority of votes (133 votes “for” and two votes “against,” with 52 abstentions). For the first time, the total number of states co-sponsors of the resolution reached 62. The upcoming anniversary of Victory loomed large in remarks the Russian representatives delivered at the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly.

At Russia’s initiative that was co-sponsored by Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and China, a separate item on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II was put on the agenda of the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, which happens to coincide with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in t World War II. . The UN General Assembly is expected to hold a special ceremonious plenary meeting within the framework of the said agenda item some time before May 9, 2020.

There is no doubt that an international dimension is of much importance in the context of joint efforts to prepare the celebrations in honour of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory. Numerous official delegations from foreign countries will attend the ceremonies in Moscow on May 9, 2020. Invitations on behalf of the President of the Russian Federation have been sent to heads of state and government of foreign states and to heads of international organisations. Guests of honour from among prominent public figures and politicians are expected to come to Moscow. Delegations of 1941-1945 Great Patriotic War veterans and WWII veterans, who fought on the side of the anti-Hitler coalition, from foreign countries will be invited to Moscow as well.

The Foreign Ministry’s missions abroad will hold numerous memorial, protocol, information and cultural events as part of the preparations for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory celebrations. These include official receptions, functions, meetings with war veterans who will be awarded anniversary medals, ceremonies at monuments and memorials to Soviet soldiers, conferences, contests, documentary photo exhibitions, film festivals, concerts, and public screenings of the best Soviet and Russian movies dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. Special attention will be paid to upgrading the Russian (Soviet) military burial sites in foreign countries.

Associations of Russian compatriots living abroad will be encouraged to organise numerous public and political events, such as the St George’s Ribbon, Memory Watch and the Immortal Regiment March.

In cooperation with the Federal Archive Agency, the Foreign Ministry’s Archive Service is conducting extensive and meticulous work to identify new material on the entire range of WWII issues, including the prehistory of the war. These materials are used to validate this country’s position on historical matters at the highest level and are emerging as a valuable acquisition for Russian and international academic communities. In his coverage of prewar historical events, President Vladimir Putin relied, among other things, on documents from the Foreign Ministry’s archives.

The ministry is taking part in a long-term historical project, At the Headquarters of Victory, which has been ongoing since 2015. The most recent exhibition as held in May-June 2019.

We provided over 300 unique documents from the ministry’s archives for the exhibition and the online project “The Year 1939. The Beginning of WWII.” The exhibition was co-organised by the Foreign Ministry and the Federal Archive Agency.

The Federal Archive Agency will open, a large exhibition entitled “Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt” in April. The Foreign Ministry is taking part in the preparations for this. The display will confirm that the Soviet Union appreciated cooperation with the leading powers of the anti-Hitler coalition and that their leaders, in turn,

recognised the Red Army's key role in the rout of Nazism. In line with the established practice, an online project of the same title is being created to enable audiences at home and abroad to access the documents.

The ministry's archive materials are displayed at a large exhibition dedicated to the liberation of Europe from Nazism and entitled "On the Road to Victory: Historical Sources Testify" in the State Central Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia. The exhibition traveled to 21 countries as part of this international project.

The Foreign Ministry's archives will contribute unique documents from the Great Patriotic War to the album "On the Diplomatic Fronts" to be published for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory.

Special mention should be made of the bilateral commissions of historians, which can conduct unbiased discussions on the most sensitive issues. We are carrying out scholarly and educational projects with colleagues from a number of European countries, which make it possible to truthfully reflect the history of war years.

Efforts to counter the falsification of history are regularly made at numerous international venues, including the UN. Cooperation is maintained with the Russian Historical Society and societies of military history, Russian and foreign NGOs and academic institutions.

**Question: In 2020, the world will mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN. What events is Russia planning to mark the anniversary at a high level? How does Russia assess the effectiveness of the UN in addressing global problems? Please comment on Moscow's position on UN reform.**

**Answer:** First, there are two important dates in 2020 – the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II and the establishment of the UN. For Russia, as a country that played the decisive role in the defeat of Nazism, and one of the founders of the global organisation, the historical correlation between these two events is of particular significance.

The Second World War was the most devastating catastrophe in the history of mankind. It is important to remember the mistakes of that time to be able to avoid a recurrence at a new historical stage. With this in mind, Russia, with a number of other member-states, initiated including an item on celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII on the General Assembly's agenda and on approving a relevant resolution.

As for the UN anniversary, we deem it necessary to promote a positive unifying agenda with an emphasis on there being no alternative to the UN's central and coordinating role in world affairs, strict compliance with the UN Charter and other international laws, and the consolidation of a truly multipolar world order. The anniversary should not be an occasion for advancing polemic agendas that will only divide the member-states. However, such unscrupulous efforts are being made now, as President Vladimir Putin said.

We plan to hold a series of events at the UN venue in New York that will highlight our country's role in the defeat of Nazism and the creation of the UN. An extensive programme of anniversary events is planned in Russia. The reference is to a series of research-to-practice conferences, forums, roundtables, exhibitions, the Vitaly Churkin Moscow International Model UN and UN models in a number of Russian regions.

Second, the growing instability in various regions of the world and the emergence of new global challenges and threats are becoming a serious test for modern international relations, something that lays an additional burden on the UN. The key to the organisation's effective functioning is the constructive interaction of the member-states and the coordinated work of its Secretariat.

In this context, individual Western countries' attempts to redraw the modern system of international relations to suit their ends citing 'multilateralism' as a specious reason are deeply disturbing. Multilateral

platforms, including UN mechanisms, are being attacked. Key international law frameworks are being destroyed. The concept of a “rule-based” world order is being increasingly introduced into the global agenda, ever more frequently accompanied by pressure on those who disagree with the use of financial and economic sanctions, trade restrictions and other unilateral measures.

This unconstructive policy pursued by some of our partners complicates the elaboration of collective decisions within the UN, including on the most acute problems. However, it would be premature to confirm a radical weakening of the organisation, which has a strong safety factor. So far, no one has been able to propose anything more perfect or effective, or to question the viability of the fundamental principles of the UN's work, including the independence and sovereign equality of states, non-interference in internal affairs, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the current situation suggests a need to further increase the importance and authority of the UN. In this regard, we note the initiatives by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to reform the organisation's activities in three main areas: the peace and security section, the governance system and the system for assisting development. The reform can be considered mostly complete, but we still have to see the effectiveness of the measures taken.

The debate on the UN Security Council reform has not progressed much over the past year due to the persisting and deep-seated contradictions between the main negotiators on the main components of the reform: categories of membership of a renewed Security Council, its size and regional representation. Russia's position remains unchanged: while not rejecting any of the reform versions, we call for finding a formula for expanding the Security Council that will enjoy the widest possible support from the UN member- states; ideally, a consensus. Only in this way can we ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of a renewed Security Council.



[https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3995958](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3995958)