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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the TASS news agency, Moscow, September 22, 2020

5-7 minutes

Question: Our team just returned from Belarus; we have worked there for over a month. Belarus is an urgent issue now. We closely followed statements from Moscow. It was announced more than once that Moscow supports the idea of President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko carrying out constitutional reform. If we support this, there must be an idea of when it should happen. Is it a matter of weeks, months, half a year, a year?

Sergey Lavrov: We support this idea because it was actually proposed by President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko. We also support it because there is an obvious need for a specific, inclusive venue for a national dialogue in the Republic of Belarus.

As for a time frame and the content of this initiative, as well as who might participate, this must be decided by the Belarusians themselves, and in this context, a dialogue between the government and society in the broad sense of the word is really much in demand.

Mr Lukashenko said that he wants to involve not only official institutions like the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus but

also the All-Belarus People's Assembly. This is probably a step that would now be needed for organising a national dialogue. However, it is up to our Belarusian neighbours to make specific decisions on this.

Question: If this idea is carried out (obviously, a national dialogue is a fragile undertaking), do you think it could have a negative effect if one day Lukashenko announces his intention to run for a new term?

Sergey Lavrov: Once again, it's up to Belarusians themselves. I think the first step that is logical for any constitutional reform, is to make the relevant changes and have them approved at a national referendum. This is how it is done everywhere and, as far as I know, this is what is being planned in Belarus. All other issues must be coordinated by the main political forces of the republic under constitutional law like in any other country. These requirements would lay out how an election should be organised.

Question: Ukraine is our other neighbor. You said last week that the Minsk agreements probably won't be implemented under the current Ukrainian administration. What will we do in this case – withdraw from the talks or wait another four years? Or, maybe there are alternative options?

Sergey Lavrov: There is no alternative to the Minsk agreements. This is regularly confirmed by all the participants in the process: France, Germany and the EU. Importantly, the EU said the other day through its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell that there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements and that they must be fulfilled in full. We completely agree with this. Kiev must realise that this is a clear

signal that it is unacceptable to turn the Minsk agreements upside-down and change the succession of them by giving priority to the de facto occupation of separate districts in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions that have proclaimed themselves the people's republics.

Under the Minsk agreements, the Ukrainian government has the right to establish control over the entire length of the border as a final step when all the other settlement provisions are implemented. This applies to amnesty, the inclusion of Donbass' special status in the Ukrainian constitution and the holding of elections based on the foundation that will be agreed upon by Kiev on the one hand and Donetsk and Lugansk, on the other, as envisioned in the Minsk agreements.

Statements by officials to the effect that the Minsk agreements have become obsolete, that they must be revised and more parties must be involved in fulfilling them are an obvious departure from the requirements that were made, in part, by Brussels on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Question: I cannot help asking about the US. They will soon hold an election as well. Do you think a colour revolution could take place in the US if one of the sides does not recognise the results of the election?

Sergey Lavrov: It's not for me to judge. There is a joke that the US will never have a colour revolution because it doesn't have an American Embassy. Every joke has some truth in it.

Threats and assumptions can be heard, and it is possible that one of the sides will refuse to recognise the results of the election. You know how US President Donald Trump comments on the

forthcoming mail-in vote by directly accusing those who would be counting the votes of the intention to distort the results.

There are many suppositions and speculations about the election, but I won't comment on them or predict anything. We have emphasised many times, including by President of Russia Vladimir Putin, that we will work with any leader that is chosen under US law. Incidentally, there are many questions about this law. There are still debates on why it happened in US history more than once that a nominee who received a majority vote of US citizens, eventually lost the elections because the votes of the Electoral College are distributed in a different way and do not reflect the ratio of the direct votes by the citizens. But this is an American problem. This is the US Constitution and law.

However, we would not want a leading global power like the US to fall into a deep crisis and have any instability in addition to the alarming manifestations of violence and racism that are now observed in different US cities and states.