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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a news conference on the results of Russian diplomacy in 2020, Moscow, January 18, 2021

93-118 minutes

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

This is our traditional news conference on the foreign policy outcomes of 2020. It is traditional, but remote. We opted for a format that was widely used over the past year due to the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions imposed in almost all countries, including Russia.

Despite the pandemic, our Ministry kept in close contact with you and your colleagues at all levels. I myself had the pleasure of speaking to you following talks, which did take place several times in Moscow, and will continue to do so. I also spoke to you in a video format. My deputies regularly talk with agencies. The Ministry's official spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, conducts regular weekly briefings and, in between them, interacts with most of you. I am sure you are aware of the facts and information about what Russian foreign policy is currently promoting in the

international arena.

The pandemic has dealt a severe blow to all forms of communication, particularly contacts between people in culture, research, sports and tourism. This caused major shifts in public consciousness in many countries. We know this from daily reports coming from European and other countries. In Russia, we are also trying to minimise the inconveniences caused by objective sanitary restrictions on everyday life. However, certain and not too positive changes are still being felt. You are probably following the discussion focusing on Russia's epidemiological policy, including the Sputnik V vaccine, EpiVacCorona and the third vaccine, which is on its way.

We reiterate what President of Russia Vladimir Putin said in August 2020 when announcing the registration of the world's first coronavirus vaccine: we are wide open to cooperation in these matters. We had a positive response to the proposals that the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) had made to its foreign partners with regard to organising licensed production. This topic is being discussed with our colleagues in Asia, the Arab East, Africa and Latin America. Not long ago, President Putin and Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel also briefly discussed the prospects for Russian-German and Russian-European cooperation in producing and improving vaccines. I think this is the right path to take based on the desire to consolidate our efforts and the solidarity of humankind. Unfortunately, not everywhere and not always has this quest for solidarity and joint work manifested itself during the pandemic. Some of our Western colleagues, primarily the United States and its closest allies, tried to take advantage of the situation and to ratchet up pressure, blackmail,

ultimatums and illegitimate actions while introducing unilateral restrictions and other forms of interference in the internal affairs of many countries, including our closest neighbour Belarus.

The West unanimously ignored the calls by the UN Secretary General and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to suspend, at least for the duration of the pandemic, unilateral and illegitimate sanctions regarding the supply of medications, food and equipment needed to fight the virus while Russia was ready to back up this approach. President Putin put forward a parallel initiative during the G20 summit to create green corridors in the economy that are free from sanctions and other artificial barriers. Unfortunately, these sensible appeals - both ours and those of the UN leaders - were left hanging in the air.

Last year we observed the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII, the birth of the United Nations and the entry into force of its Charter. Against the backdrop of these anniversaries, we are very concerned about the continuous arrogant actions of the United States and most of its Western allies, which are aimed at undermining international security, which is based on the UN, its Charter and its agencies and replacing the traditional norms and standards of international law with a “rules-based international order.”

Some exclusive mechanisms – groups of so-called co-thinkers began to be set up in this context outside the UN and its universal agencies. These narrow groups are trying to impose their decisions on all members of the international community. One of the manifestations of these rules on which the West would like to establish a new international order is the concept of

multilateralism, which our German and French colleagues have started promoting in the past two years. The descriptions of this concept in the public statements of the German and French foreign ministers make it very clear that the EU wants to present itself and everything it does as a foreign policy ideal. The EU views the establishment of specific rules as its exclusive right in the belief that all others must follow these standards. Examples are many.

The EU has held special events on cybersecurity, freedom of the media and international humanitarian law outside UN agencies. These events have been attended by several dozen countries. Holding them outside the UN framework is very indicative. It is based on the understanding that in the UN the advocates of this concept will have to meet people with somewhat different views on ensuring cybersecurity, freedom of the media, especially in today's world, and on how to ensure the equal application of the standards of international humanitarian law. In my opinion, unless I am convinced of the opposite, these are apprehensions of competition and the understanding that in today's world the West can no longer dictate its own orders to others as it has over the last five centuries. History is moving forward, it is developing. This has nothing to do with ideology. This is just a statement of fact. It is necessary to consider the views of the countries that now have a much greater weight in the world arena (completely incomparable with that of the colonial era) and the countries that want to preserve their civilisational identity and that do not see in the West the ideals for their societies. Tolerance of diversity is another characteristic that the West is losing very quickly.

There are situations where half a dozen people that have created

their own technological empires do not even want to know what rights they have in their own states. They determine their rights themselves proceeding from so-called corporate standards and completely ignore the constitutions of their states. We have seen this clearly in the US and this is a source of deep concern. Much has been said about this recently in television reports and special analytical materials. We are not pleased by the attempts of the Western elites to find external enemies to resolve their internal political problems. They find these enemies in Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Venezuela. The list of these countries is well known.

We all see the response to the news of Alexey Navalny's return to the Russian Federation. Carbon-copy comments on this event are coming in one after another. They are full of joy because they allow Western politicians to think that in this way they can divert public attention away from the deepest crisis of the liberal development model.

I am convinced that it is necessary not to seek outside excuses to justify one's own actions or sidetrack attention from one's deepest problems and crises. On the contrary, it is essential to play an honest game and look for opportunities to resolve domestic problems via fair and equitable international cooperation. No one can expect to resolve its own problems outside multilateral formats any longer.

Russia strives to act as constructively as possible in the international arena. We are convinced that we must sit down and discuss all existing grievances rather than wrangle with each other. We have always been ready to do so: back when Russia was accused of "interference" in the US elections, in Barcelona, during

Brexit, the Skripal case, the Malaysian Boeing, which was shot down over Ukraine in July 2014, and with regard to Alexey Navalny. I can later cite in more detail the arguments that you are well aware of. In every above case and in other cases where we were accused of something specific, we have never been given evidence that would corroborate these unfounded accusations. We've only heard "highly likely," "no one else has these motives" or "only you have such capabilities, so you are guilty, so we don't need to prove anything." They just don't provide the facts, which is what decent people always do in order to justify their discussions.

We are interested in addressing problems through a dialogue. However, "forcing a closed door" that the West keeps "under lock and key" is beneath our dignity. Your governments are well aware of our proposals that we have made repeatedly, starting with the dialogue on strategic offensive arms, arms control and nonproliferation to interaction on cybersecurity and non-deployment of weapons in space. There are many such areas. For each of them, Russia has proposals for establishing honest cooperation on key threats that are common to all countries around the world instead of using these threats to achieve unilateral geopolitical advantages by means of unscrupulous competition. President Putin's initiative to hold a summit of the five UN Security Council permanent members is a manifestation of such a desire to start a dialogue. All other leaders of the Group of Five responded positively to this proposal. Unfortunately, the pandemic made holding such a meeting impossible. We are convinced that the leaders must meet in person. We hope this summit will take place the epidemic situation permitting.

With regard to promoting a positive agenda, we invite our Western

partners to return to common sense and to consider under the UN umbrella their ideas on cyber security, freedom of the media and many other problems that they are trying to resolve among themselves.

We will introduce similar approaches in other organisations of which Russia is a member, including the SCO, BRICS, the CSTO, the CIS and the EAEU.

President Putin's initiative, which we are promoting, is to form the Greater Eurasian Partnership that is open to all Eurasian countries without exception by way of an equal collective dialogue. This covers the EU countries along with the EAEU, the SCO and ASEAN members. Generally speaking, it covers countries that are not part of any regional organisations, but are located in Eurasia. I would like to note the importance of the G20, an association that unites the Western G7, which is no longer able to overcome global challenges all by itself. The G20 also brings together the BRICS countries and the like-minded nations which share our common philosophy: to say no to confrontation and to address existing problems on a balance of interests.

Today we will discuss ongoing conflicts as well. We are working with other countries to advance a settlement in Syria, to break the deadlock of the intra-Libyan conflict that erupted after NATO countries' aggression had undermined the Libyan statehood almost 10 years ago.

We will also talk about other hot spots in the Middle East and North Africa, primarily the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which they are undeservedly trying to put on the back burner.

Quite recently, we released a multi-page document on the main

foreign policy results of 2020. It contains a lot of hard facts. I hope you have had a chance to read it.

Today, we will focus on challenges facing the world which quickly change our daily lives.

Question: In what direction are relations between Russia and Italy developing, especially in the coronavirus pandemic year?

Sergey Lavrov: Relations between Russia and Italy are good. Italy is one of those EU countries that follow the discipline and principles of solidarity in the EU, but that still do not consider it appropriate to take an aggressive position against the Russian Federation. Conscientiously, in joining the consensus on certain sanctions, Italy does not consider them to be effective tools for influencing anyone, in this case the Russian Federation. Not without objections from Brussels, Italy insists on its right to develop bilateral relations with Russia and does so sincerely. This policy reflects a correct understanding of the national interests of the Italian Republic, the interests of its business and its citizens seeking to continue humanitarian, sport, cultural and other contacts between people.

We have a good tradition with Italy with our cross cultural years. They are dedicated to topics that interest citizens of both countries, primarily in areas of culture, language, literature and regional contacts. This is a very good tradition. It actually helps respond to the needs of people and businesses, which is important.

Russia and Italy have a 2+2 mechanism where the defence and foreign ministers of the two countries meet and review the key issues in the world, in the Euro-Atlantic area and other regions

where both Italy and the Russian Federation have interests.

Information on the specific events we held last year and what are scheduled for the future is available in the Results of Foreign Policy Activities in 2020. All this is described in detail there.

Question: I am one of the seven journalists in Latvia who were detained in December by local security service officers for cooperation with Sputnik Latvia and the Baltnews agency. In December, they carried out a search of our office and took away our office equipment, computers and dictaphones, bringing criminal charges against us over the violation of international sanctions. During the six weeks that have passed since then we have not heard of any reaction from international human right organisations to this out of the ordinary event, to put it mildly, including from the leaders who yesterday vehemently reacted to the detention of Alexey Navalny only five minutes after it happened.

Why do you think international officials say nothing about this outrageous, in my view, incident – the detention of seven journalists in Latvia? Can the Russian Foreign Ministry throw its weight behind the journalists representing Russian media abroad?

Sergey Lavrov: We are doing our best. I do not use these words to give you the runaround. We are really taking important measures. We discuss this issue at the meetings I hold weekly with my deputies and Foreign Ministry Collegium members. Not only must we voice our disapproval of a flagrant violation of the national law and international commitments like this, but we must also resort to international mechanisms. We spoke about this incident at the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. We will

continue this work.

Whenever we have incontestable and hard facts that freedom of the media has been flagrantly violated coupled with threats to bring criminal charges, the mechanisms existing in the UN human rights formats – and there are plenty of speakers there reporting on various aspects of human rights violations; they have the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media – cannot justify what they are doing to you. Quite a few incidents like this happen now and then in the neighbouring Baltic States. Usually, they write letters to us. But we want to use mechanisms provided for in relevant conventions that require that a country in question rectify this type of violation. These mechanisms must – pardon me for the parlance that is not altogether diplomatic – put a squeeze on the violator until things are put right. Our colleagues at multilateral institutions show much less zeal seeking to establish the truth when it comes to a Russian-language media outlet. Although in the case of Latvia, Russian is a native tongue, as about half of the population in this country – no less than 40 percent – think in Russian and use this language in their daily life. One should have a very specific political orientation to want to show complete disrespect to one's own compatriots in this way.

We will continue to seek reasonable actions from international agencies, but at the same time we want to involve NGOs in these efforts. They have every reason to appeal to the courts, but a denial in a court allows them to address the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). It has dealt a few times with the subject of the media. Such precedents did not exist before but they have been created in connection with Western reproaches concerning

the Russian media. So at this point the ECHR has to consider a situation that does not allow for any dual interpretation. It is so obvious, and I don't think the court should take a long time to pass a ruling.

At the same time, we are working and will continue working with international lawyers. We will also use the Russian Fund for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad that is willing to help journalists among others.

I confirm our support for Sputnik and not just because it's a Russian media outlet. Citizens of any country, including Latvia, have the right to alternative information sources. Access to information is provided for by the numerous decisions of the OSCE. It is guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This principle of access to information was recently trampled underfoot in the United States to the accompaniment of perplexed silence or indistinct comments by US allies. Now attempts are being made to hush it all up by saying that Donald Trump's Facebook account has been restored (but not his Tweeter account). But this is not about Trump but about the big failure of the state to comply with its commitments to ensure access to information. They said it was not the US Government that has shut out all those that were recognised by these platforms as sources of unreliable information. After all, corporations have not signed any pacts. All this comes "straight from the devil." The Pacts and top-level decisions of the OSCE, which the West never tires of quoting (at least this was the case until recently), oblige the state to ensure free access to information for every person on its territory. So, Sputnik enjoys our full support. I know it is also popular with my Western colleagues. They consider media like

Sputnik and RT important because their views differ from the common opinion that is being imposed by the Western media at every more or less important instance.

Question: Antony Blinken will probably become the next Secretary of State and Victoria Nuland, whom we all know, will be his deputy. What can you say regarding these candidates? What are your expectations with respect to working with them further in the future?

Sergey Lavrov: I try not to have any expectations on any subject. As for what to expect from the new US Administration, so much has already been said about it that I don't want to take up your time with that.

We know these people. On the one hand, this makes it possible, given their reciprocal wish, to respond to many of our proposals on the Russian-US agenda, which are still on the table, and start talks without a large pause and preparations. On the other hand, we can easily imagine what line will the "new old" members of the incoming US Administration's foreign policy team take; moreover they do not conceal their intentions and plans. From regular interviews, articles and advice given by US think tanks, including NATO's North Atlantic Council and other entities, we can see that the line will continue to pursue the goals of US state and way of life, without understanding other countries' patterns of life. The containment of Russia and China will undoubtedly be present on the foreign policy agenda. They are already discussing how to prevent Russia and the PRC from joining forces to such a degree that they could become more powerful than America. There are proposals of playing on the confrontation between Russia and China. All of this has long been a part of US policy.

Possibly, their manners will be more polite with respect to Russia, but the essence of their policy will hardly be different. When the Americans find it beneficial, when they realise that they cannot achieve anything without Russia and China, then they will have to be ready for agreements. This concerns combatting infections (by all appearances, it is a long-term topic); climate change, which also implies specific and practical interaction between many countries, including Russia and China; fighting terrorism and other forms of organised crime – drug trafficking and human trafficking. Most importantly, they should deal with the situation in arms control which is absolutely abnormal. We have heard about the intention of Joe Biden's Administration to resume the dialogue with us on this subject, including trying to agree on the extension of the New START treaty before it expires on February 5. We will wait for their proposals. Our position is known very well and remains in force.

We have heard about the plans to revise the decisions of the outgoing US administration to withdraw from quite a number of other multilateral agreements and organisations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNESCO, and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

We harbour no illusions. We are realists. We have our proposals on all agenda items that are important for all humankind, and a number of them are being implemented. I would mention the UN work on international information security and curbing cybercrime, which our Western colleagues do not want to continue in a universal format, but rather to concentrate it within a close circle of likeminded parties and work out the rules, and then demand that everyone observes them.

In brief – we do not expect any radical changes. However, the methods of promoting US “leadership” will be somewhat different.

Question: What move by the Biden Administration do you think could indicate its readiness to reset relations with Russia? What is Russia ready to do to display a desire to improve relations with the United States?

Sergey Lavrov: We do not have to do anything to indicate our desire to have good relations with the United States, relations that would reflect the responsibility of the world’s two largest nuclear powers for security at the global, regional and any other level. We have put forth proposals to this effect, and the Biden Administration is well aware of them.

When Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated Joe Biden on his victory in the presidential election, he reaffirmed our commitment to cooperation with the United States on all issues of mutual interest and importance for the world. This can be interpreted as invitation to dialogue.

The most important thing is that our proposals on cybersecurity and on investigations into our alleged interference in US affairs, as well as on space projects and arms control, are on the table. As recently as in September 2020, President Putin publicly invited the United States – not President Trump or anyone else, but the United States as a power which, we hope, has retained at least a degree of respect for continuity and compliance with foreign policy agreements – to reboot our relations in the sphere of cybersecurity and non-intervention into internal affairs of each other. He proposed exchanging guarantees of such non-intervention and restoring a regular full-scale bilateral dialogue on all aspects of the

use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) related to the military-political security of states and the possible use of cyberspace by all kinds of criminals, including terrorists, paedophiles and human traffickers. We have not received any response to that proposal, just as to our initiative put forth two years ago for reaffirming the statement made by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan to the effect that a nuclear war is unacceptable, cannot be won and so must never be fought.

I don't know how the new US Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control will formulate President Biden's position, but Marshall Billingslea, who will leave the post in two days, cannot let up but continues to give interviews and write for the media. He said openly in one of his statements that the new administration must not fall into the Russian trap by making a statement on the inadmissibility of a nuclear war. This is not a whim of Mr Billingslea or any other American official, who consider it unacceptable for the United States to agree that a nuclear war must never be fought. This position reflects the US doctrinal provisions on the use of military force and nuclear weapons. Lowering the yield of nuclear charges so that they can be used on the battlefield, and refusal to formalise a provision on the no-first use of nuclear weapons – these nuances of the US doctrines speak volumes. We would like to know who will ultimately determine the US position on strategic offensive armaments (not only nuclear ones) and how this will be done.

New technologies can be used to boost the US Prompt Global Strike project designed to create powerful conventional precision weapons that can deliver an airstrike anywhere in the world within one hour.

We called on the outgoing US administration to consider formulating a new arms control document, to extend the New START treaty so that we have at least one effective arms control document, and in the meantime to coordinate a new document that would cover all types of weapons, including not just those mentioned in New START but also strategic armaments that could be considered a threat to our national territories. I believe that this is an understandable consideration, and a much more important one than the idea of recounting all warheads of any type, which we are being encouraged to accept, while our US partners reject our proposal to focus on the current and very probable threats.

Let's wait and see. Joseph Biden is an expert on disarmament and arms control. I think he would rather have a team of professionals than propagandists.

Question: Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi has said recently that China and Russia would continue to provide an example of the development of neighbourly and friendly relations between world powers, boost the revitalisation of the global economy and maintain global strategic stability. What possibilities do you envision for the further development of ties between our two countries? What can Russia and China do to hinder foreign interference and attempts to drive a wedge between their cooperation?

Sergey Lavrov: We have very close strategic relations with the People's Republic of China. Our leaders are good friends who maintain regular trust-based communication. Their personal contacts were complicated last year, yet they managed to have at least five detailed telephone conversations and videoconferences.

We have held a regular, 25th meeting of our heads of government, contacts between the five subcommissions set up under the guidance of our prime ministers, and a meeting of the Russian-Chinese Inter-Parliamentary Commission. We held joint celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII. A Chinese delegation led by Defence Minister Wei Fenghe and a Chinese Honour Guard company attended the parade held on Red Square on June 24, 2020. We appreciate this.

We are now implementing a major project, the Year of Russian-Chinese Scientific, Technical and Innovative Cooperation. It is currently the most important matter designed to give a second lease of life and a new quality to our trade and economic interaction. Unlike many other countries, we managed to prevent our mutual trade from decreasing during the pandemic. It is developing quite sustainably. We are implementing major infrastructure, industrial, agrarian, energy and investment projects.

We have been collaborating closely to stop the spread of the COVID-19 infection and to overcome its impacts since the start of the pandemic. When our Chinese friends identified the problem at Wuhan, they collaborated closely and effectively with us to help repatriate Russian citizens. We are working together to provide humanitarian assistance to each other. There are such examples on both sides. We are working on the vaccines at present. I have no doubt that we will succeed.

We are cooperating within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. The People's Republic of China and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) have signed a cooperation agreement. We are aligning integration

within the EAEU and China's Belt and Road Initiative. Last December, we signed a protocol on extending the agreement on notification of the launch of ballistic missiles and space carrier rockets for another 10 years. Also in December 2020, the Chinese Air Force and the Russian Aerospace Forces conducted the second joint patrol mission over the Sea of Japan and East China Sea. This is evidence of the trust-based and forward-looking nature of Russian-Chinese relations and our mutual commitment to maintaining stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Some of our other colleagues, for example, the United States, have been trying to build up tension by conducting military activities that are openly spearheaded against China and are aimed at isolating Russia, as well as within the framework of practical US plans to deploy the components of the US ballistic missile defence system in Asia Pacific. These components have the capacity to reach the territory of both China and Russia.

A lot more can be said about Russian-Chinese cooperation. It is ongoing in a wide range of spheres, in fact, in nearly all spheres of human and state endeavour. I would like to mention our close coordination at the UN on many practical matters. It is based on Russia's and China's commitment to protecting international law and preventing the erosion of universal structures and the replacement of the UN with extraneous formats and partnerships, which Western countries are using to formulate rules suiting their own purposes and subsequently force them on the rest of the world. Russia and China firmly stand for protecting the achievements set out in the UN Charter, which are based on the principles of equality, respect for the sovereignty of states, non-interference in their internal affairs and a peaceful settlement of

disputes.

This year we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Russian-Chinese Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation. We have huge plans for celebrating this memorable occasion.

Question: Several days ago now, the entire world was amazed by how easily, virtually with a snap of a finger, corporations banned Donald Trump from social networks. In your opinion, how does this “digital GULAG,” that is holding captive politicians and their supporters, journalists and ordinary people all over the world, align with the concept of American democracy? Is it possible that in the future, such selective blocking of accounts becomes a fundamental of international policy and common practice?

Sergey Lavrov: Everybody is talking about it on all the television channels and social networks. I heard that Telegram was threatened with blocking their services. It will be rather interesting.

I have already mentioned the topic of states’ obligations and now want to remind you about them. The US is a member of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Interestingly (however, this issue is often omitted) there have been two international treaties, one for civil and political rights, and the other the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Having signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (it was in the 1960s), the US flatly refused to sign the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This is a refusal to take any responsibilities related to providing adequate quality of life to its population and solving social and economic problems. But the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is an obligatory document for the US. The Helsinki Final Act and an entire series of OSCE documents (the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the Charter for European Security adopted in Istanbul in 1999) say that every person has the right to freely express their opinion. This right includes the freedom to search, receive and distribute various kinds of information and ideas regardless of state borders, by mouth, in writing, using the press, creative forms of expression or other means. "Other means" meant the visionary prediction that social networks would appear. There is no exception to this. It is said that each person has the right to access information. The state signed under it. So, claiming that Google, Facebook, YouTube and other corporations have no responsibilities is childish nonsense. The state has to assume responsibly for them, and if they misbehave, the state must bring them to order and to its legal obligations.

I do not know what will happen next. There have been many different forecasts. There is a state, private capitalism. Who will be changing the rules of the game now? Many recalled Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and other analysts of capitalism and imperialism as its last stage. I do not know. The only thing I am sure about is that if the US fails to make the violators comply with the freedom of speech and its own Constitution (let alone international covenants), the US will present itself to the world as something other than a champion for democracy.

Speaking of the freedom of speech. Every year, the UN General Assembly at our initiative adopts a resolution on inadmissibility of

glorification of Nazism and other forms of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, and the US votes against it saying that the voting for prohibiting neo-Nazi movements is a violation of the First Amendment. They state this openly. By the way, only one country, Ukraine, votes against this resolution alongside the US. And for obvious reasons: neo-Nazis freely march there and hold torchlight processions and in addition to all that really influence the practical policy of this, so to speak, state. In the US, the situation is slightly different, but they also do not want to violate the First Amendment.

Let us hope that American society will not allow the elites in their fight against each other to use blatant censorship in violation of the Constitution and international obligations. But this is their problem. If the American society fails to cope with it, we cannot do anything about it. But then everybody should be ready for the ramifications of this failure of the American state. And these ramifications will be grave on the global stage. I think everybody understands this. It is no coincidence that Europe is preparing EU documents about how to start a dialogue that takes into account all possible scenarios immediately following Joe Biden's inauguration.

I would suggest paying attention to how the US has found itself in a position that bears risks to undermine the American state if it fails to bring private corporations that are fewer than 12 to order so that they would comply with the state mechanisms, legislation, and first of all, its own Constitution.

Question: A politician and Russian citizen has alleged that Russian security services attempted to poison him. Alexey Navalny has provided facts which nobody has reliably invalidated so far. He has decided to return to his home country, where no

criminal case of his poisoning had been opened. The plane he boarded was diverted to another airport. The people who came to welcome him home, including journalists, and Navalny himself have been detained. How does this make Russia look? Don't we care about our image any longer?

Sergey Lavrov: Of course, one should care for one's image, but we are not a young girl preparing for a ball. We must first of all do our job, which is to implement Russia's foreign policy. A foreign policy aspect has been added to the Navalny case artificially and without any justification. Everything associated with his return and detainment is the competence of the law enforcement authorities. There is a detailed statement by the Federal Penitentiary Service, which provides facts and violations and explains why the complaints have been put forth. This is not something that can be placed on the Foreign Ministry's doorstep. The matter concerns compliance with Russian laws. As we pointed out, if some countries regard respect for their own laws to be of secondary importance compared to their geopolitical goals, that is their problem. In our case, the law enforcement agencies have clearly formulated their position. And they spent a long time doing this, since August, several days after the blogger left the Omsk hospital.

Alexey Navalny has said that he is returning home with a clear conscience, because he had not left Russia of his own free will. He inferred that he was well-nigh forced to leave. In fact, he was unconscious; it was a dramatic life-or-death situation. It was his wife who insisted that he must be allowed to leave Russia and who was responsible for putting him on a German plane, as well as the German authorities, who demanded quite aggressively that we

hand him over without delay. We did so.

Euronews broadcast a story today. Correspondent Galina Polonskaya, who was on the plane with Alexey Navalny, said that according to Charité doctors Navalny had been poisoned with a chemical warfare agent, which the OPCW later confirmed. She added that the Russian authorities repeatedly denied the allegation. According to the initial information provided by Germany, doctors at the civilian Charité hospital, just like their colleagues in Omsk, had not found any traces of warfare agents in Navalny's samples. They were later found at the Bundeswehr hospital. First Germany refused to provide test results to us, claiming that this would enable us to learn about Bundeswehr technologies for identifying chemical weapons. How do you like that? Actually, they should not supposedly have such technology at all, because after the alleged poisoning of the Skripals with Novichok the West claimed that it did not have the relevant knowledge or technology.

However, in the case of Navalny it took the Bundeswehr barely a few days to determine that he had allegedly been poisoned with Novichok or a similar agent (we don't know for sure to this day, because they have not provided any materials to us). The French and even Swedes have reaffirmed that it was a Novichok-class agent even though it was not on the list of substances prohibited by the OPCW. In accordance with their numerous commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), both bilateral and European ones, we requested to see the results of these tests. First they told us that it was a multilateral matter and that all materials had been sent to the OPCW. OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias refused to answer our questions, but later he

admitted that they had taken samples from Navalny but could not provide them to us because they “belong” to Berlin. It was Berlin that requested the analysis, so we should ask Berlin for its results. Berlin told us that it was not a bilateral matter and redirected us back to the multilateral organisation. I believe this is sheer mockery. There is no question about the OPCW, which has long been privatised by the West. It has been trying to do the same with other organisations, but it has been especially successful in the case of the OPCW. Only after a long time, during which we were directed from Berlin to The Hague and back, were we told that there was another reason for their refusal to give us the test results: Alexey Navalny does not want Russia to have this information.

Several days ago, Germany happily announced that it had answered the four requests it received from the Prosecutor General’s Office of Russia. The reply consisted only of answers they had received from Navalny and his wife. That is all we got. No factual evidence, nothing about water bottles with traces of poison, copies of toxicology results, biological samples or test results. Navalny claims that he has been poisoned by the Russian state and by President Putin personally. The West accepts this without asking any questions. The Western countries only provide facts as they had been presented by Navalny himself during his interviews with the law enforcement authorities. I regard this as total contempt for the procedure.

The German parliamentary party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is widely seen as being cultivated by Russia, has officially requested relevant information from the German government. They have not received any reply. They asked concrete questions:

Who had the water bottle during the flight from Omsk to Berlin? Was it known before the flight that its organisers allowed the bottle to be taken? The answer was that the German government had no information regarding this. How can this be? There were not only doctors but also representatives of German special services on board the plane that delivered Navalny from Omsk. Everyone knows this. If they don't know who took the bottles on board the plane, this is on their conscience.

First it was said that Navalny had tea at Tomsk airport; this version had been planted in the public space at the very beginning. Later it was removed. It turned out that a close associate poured tea for Navalny. Then they presented the version with the water bottle. It fizzled out as well. The next version concerned clothes, and then they revived the bottle version again. It has been said recently, several months after it all happened, that attempts to poison Navalny had been made before that, but as a result it was Yulia Navalny who was poisoned. When increasingly more surprising news is made public, we as a foreign policy agency have a question for our German, French and Swedish colleagues: Ladies and gentlemen, please act on your international obligations and present the results of the tests which, as you claim, contain an unidentified toxic substance that is not on the OPCW lists. We have not received any replies in the case of Alexander Litvinenko, which was kept secret, or in the alleged poisoning of the Skripals. Those who expelled Russian diplomats at Britain's request said they would provide the facts later. They have not provided a single fact, any information one can get is in the public sphere. "Highly likely" and that is it. Those who trusted the British may be sorry now, but they will never admit this out of a misguided sense of

solidarity.

Neither do they say anything about interference in the US elections now. Former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has refused to provide the “irrefutable proof” he had said publicly they have. They will not provide any proof, full stop. The same is true about the Navalny case. If you want to know the truth, just be polite and respect the law, honour your obligations and do not resort to diplomatic insolence by saying that you would not give anything to Russia, which is a poisoner by default. That is no way to talk to us. This is the foreign policy dimension for which the Foreign Ministry has been responsible throughout its history. This is not how our partners should behave.

Question: Will Russia send another request to Germany regarding the case of Alexey Navalny, since Moscow wasn't happy with the previous answer they got? Did I understand correctly from your previous answer that without Navalny's permission Russia will not get access to his test results from Germany and no criminal case will be opened?

Sergey Lavrov: Regarding the Prosecutor General's Office's inquiry, this is its prerogative. I think that an additional request must be sent so that our German colleagues do not feel like they have already performed their functions. It was a perfunctory reply, which is unworthy of a department in charge of the law enforcement cases' legal aspects.

Doctors in Omsk, who saved Mr Navalny's life before he was literally ripped away from their hands unconscious, asked his spouse to sign a paper to the effect that she insists on taking him away. They made their findings and test results available to

German doctors, who also gave a receipt thereof. In August, the Charite Clinic reported that nothing had been found. This is a civil clinic, just like the one in Omsk. The samples were made available to a Bundeswehr clinic, which detected traces of a chemical agent. Since nothing was found in Mr Navalny's tests in Russia which would indicate poisoning with warfare agents, there's no reason, under our legislation, to initiate a criminal case, no matter what someone may tell us.

If there's something that makes someone suspicious, the matter could have been settled long ago as follows. The Germans say that this is no longer a bilateral, but a multilateral issue, and sent it to the OPCW. We suggested that the OPCW Director-General use the CWC article, which provides for according assistance by its Technical Secretariat to the participating country. They were offered to come to Russia. They have samples of Navalny's biomaterials. We also have them. They are being kept in the Omsk hospital (maybe they have already been transported to the corresponding laboratory). There's an OPCW-certified lab in Russia. Their and our doctors first examine one set of samples, then another, or vice versa. They will perform these tests together so as to be able to establish mutual trust. The lab is adequately equipped to conduct such tests. If they believe they need innovative sophisticated equipment, they can bring it in, we have no objections. The only condition is to do it together. After a number of episodes involving the alleged use of chemical agents in Syria, and after the Secretariat's reports, we said outright that we have no trust in that. So, we want to use Ronald Reagan's paraphrased principle "trust but verify."

For a very long time they tried to avoid providing a direct answer.

They said they were internationally recognised and asked for our samples, saying that “they will let us know afterwards.” This will not happen again. There will no longer be a one-way street approach. There will be no trust in the Bundeswehr clinic, the French or Swedish clinics, or the one that the OPCW may choose for its internal purposes without our participation until we are convinced that these people are honest researchers and specialists. I don’t see how anything can be done until we see the requested materials, or until they carry out the experiment that we asked for. They chickened out, probably, meaning that their conscience is not clear. It is not for nothing that the organisation, which the Germans mentioned saying that they now own it, is saying that it is Berlin’s property. The circle is complete. As Vladimir Putin said, don’t try to make retards out of us.

Question: The future of prisoners in Baku is what concerns Armenia’s public opinion most. As we understand it, this matter remains unresolved. Azerbaijan is manipulating the prisoner issue. Armenia is hoping that Russia will help. What is being done to get the prisoners of war back home? Is there an understanding of the time frame within which a positive decision on this matter can be made? Armenia has released all the prisoners of war, but its move was not reciprocated. Processes are underway that do not quite fit into the framework of the declarations signed on November 9, 2020 and January 11, 2021. Are there any classified attachments to these declarations that we are unaware of? Is there any progress in determining the status of Nagorno-Karabakh? How delayed is it? There are rumours in Karabakh that since Russia has helped it out so much in this situation, perhaps it may become part of Russia? Is this option on the table?

Sergey Lavrov: The issue of prisoners of war was indeed discussed. It is part of the agreements signed in the early hours of November 10, 2020. It was further discussed during telephone conversations between President Vladimir Putin and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and in my conversations with Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan and Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov. It was also part of rather lengthy discussions during the visit of the leaders of the two countries to Moscow on January 11.

Summing up the developments, indeed, the Armenians had more problems initially. First of all, both countries needed to get together lists of the missing people who they want to rescue from captivity. Azerbaijan provided such lists, which were fairly short. Not right away, but everyone mentioned on the Azerbaijani lists were released. There were no more questions to Azerbaijan about missing, captive or involuntarily held persons. The lists provided by Armenia were incomplete and overdue.

Subsequently, there were exchanges of the participants in the events that ended on November 9, 2020. Now, the focus is on the issue that arose already in early December 2020. In late November 2020, a group of 62 Armenian servicemen was sent to the Hadrut region and captured within a week. Azerbaijan then stated that since they came to the area after the ceasefire had been announced and the hostilities had ended, they should be considered separately, rather than falling under the Declaration of November 9, 2020. Nevertheless, during our contacts with our colleagues, President Putin and I promoted the need to continue to consider this matter in order to bring it to a closure based on the “all for all” principle. I spoke with Mr Ayvazyan in an effort to clarify

the final lists of those missing. It turned out that there are many more than 62 of them.

In a collaborative effort with their colleagues from Armenia and Azerbaijan, our military are checking the lists person by person in order to locate these people's whereabouts. Of course, the issue is there. If it were not for the Russian peacekeepers, the matter would probably be even more complicated. Commander of the peacekeeping contingent Lieutenant General Rustam Muradov maintains direct contact with his Armenian and Azerbaijani colleagues.

I did not quite understand the assertion that the processes “on the ground” do not quite follow the agreements of November 9, 2020 and January 11, and whether there are any secret protocols or annexes in this regard. Where specifically do events “on the ground” “not follow” the agreement? I believe that the Declaration of November 9, 2020 is being implemented quite effectively. This is what both Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan are telling us. That is, with the exception of the POW issue, which remains unresolved for reasons I already mentioned and which, in its current form, arose in early December 2020, a month after the signing of the agreements. The issue concerning the peacekeepers' mandate is in the process of being settled. It should be the subject of a trilateral agreement as discussed in Moscow on January 11. There are no secret annexes. I don't understand what topics might be classified.

Regarding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, it is not mentioned in the agreements of November 9, 2020. This was done deliberately. The territory where the Russian peacekeepers are deployed is the area of responsibility of the Russian peacekeeping contingent. We

operate on this premise in our contacts with Yerevan and Baku. The nuances and details related to organising transport routes, delivering supplies to the peacekeepers' area of responsibility and providing humanitarian aid to returnees (50,000 already) are being worked through. The International Committee of the Red Cross has been working there for a long time now in coordination with the Russian peacekeepers. International organisations, including UNESCO, the United Nations Office for Refugees and Humanitarian Affairs, are now coordinating the format of their assessment mission with Baku and Yerevan. There are issues primarily related to differences concerning the status. Exactly because the problem of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh is controversial, if we take the positions of Yerevan and Baku, the three leaders decided to leave it be for future consideration.

The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs should also be involved in this. They have renewed their contacts with the parties and are going to visit the region again. The faster Baku and Yerevan comply "on the ground" with their assurances that the most important thing is to improve the daily life of the ethnic and religious communities that coexisted in Karabakh and to restore peaceful and neighbourly life, the sooner the status issues will be resolved.

As for the exotic proposal to make Nagorno-Karabakh part of Russia, as far as I understand it, the independence of Karabakh is not recognised by anyone, including the Republic of Armenia. We are not even close to having thoughts like that. We believe that all matters in this region must be resolved between the countries of the region, primarily, Armenia and Azerbaijan. We are ready to help look for and find solutions which will ensure peace and stability in this region. The safety of the people who have always

lived here and should live in the future is of paramount importance.

Question: Azerbaijan protested against the visit of Armenian officials to Nagorno-Karabakh. Why are Armenian officials unable to obtain Azerbaijan's permission while visiting Nagorno-Karabakh? How will the Russian peacekeepers resolve this issue? Have you taken note of Azerbaijan's protest on this matter?

Sergey Lavrov: All agreements, especially those made on November 9, 2020, stipulate the parties' agreement that Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh will communicate via the Lachin corridor, which will be controlled by Russian peacekeepers. No one has ever denied ties between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. During the decades of talks, there has never been any discussion of cutting off Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia. This is why no one has rejected the Lachin corridor as a concept. The parties still agree on this matter, and this includes the consent of our Azerbaijani neighbours. In addition to the Lachin corridor, which will be run along a new route, reliable and permanent lines of communications will be established between western districts of Azerbaijan's main territory and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia have formalised this agreement. Everyone agrees that Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and those in Armenia should maintain communications, and I see no reason for hampering contacts at this level.

Armenian officials are involved in providing humanitarian assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh, and this has not caused any negative reaction in Baku. It would be strange if things were different. Certain Armenian officials make sufficiently politicised statements in Nagorno-Karabakh, and this causes tensions. I

believe that it would be better to avoid this. Prior to the 44-day war, we saw how emotional statements from Nagorno-Karabakh or about the region and dealing with a new war and new territories became a reality. Words become a material force. In this event, words from different sides became a highly negative material force. Consequently, we pay so much attention to establishing contacts between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia and creating an atmosphere of trust. This became yet another important essence of the Moscow meeting between President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia. I hope that these emotions will now be relegated to the background.

Now is not the best time to prioritise Nagorno-Karabakh's status. This subject will be discussed in the future. I guarantee that the zone of Russian peacekeepers' responsibility (and this is how this status is defined in practical terms) will guarantee the interests of both Azerbaijan and Armenia. We will review this matter later on. There are co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group; but, most importantly, future discussions between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh should be specific and calm, and they must be based on law and on neighbourly relations that all of us together should restore in the region.

Question: Your Greek counterpart, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias has recently singled out Russia as the only power recognising Greece's right to extend its territorial waters to 12 miles. Despite such positive aspects, I would say that Russian-Hellenic relations are developing painfully. For the first time in many years, opinions are being expressed in Greece and Cyprus that Russia is pursuing destabilising activities in the Mediterranean

region. This is what American diplomats openly say. Others say that Moscow is abandoning its historical partners and changing its policy for an alliance with Turkey alone. Is this true? Is cooperation possible between Greece, Cyprus and Russia in today's conditions? Or do we have diverging interests?

Sergey Lavrov: You have said that in Greece and Cyprus they say more often that Russia is playing a destabilising role in the region and then you added that it was American diplomats who were saying this. If American diplomats are saying this in Greece and Cyprus, they also say it in every other country. So don't be surprised about this. In any country an American diplomat would openly, against all rules and traditions, take a microphone and say that the state where they serve as ambassadors should stop communicating with Russia. Sometimes China is also added, for example when US State Secretary Mike Pompeo was touring Africa, he demanded Africans stop trading with Russia and China, because the Russians and the Chinese had some "hidden agenda" while the US would trade with Africa selflessly. Fairly primitive, but this is the diplomatic way today.

I have recently visited Greece and Cyprus. Moreover, I have recently talked with Foreign Minister of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides by telephone. I can see no reason why these countries should be persuaded that Russia is an enemy of theirs or has carried out an unfriendly policy towards them. Someone is trying to convince them, but politicians with common sense can see the whole truth: that they are only trying to make an enemy out of the Russian Federation and saying that our presence in the Balkans prevents these countries from moving into NATO, hinders their Euro-Atlantic integration.

There is no diplomacy here, only crude public leverage. Not everyone in such countries as Cyprus and Greece can publicly respond to such battle cries because they are scared to offend “Big Brother.” There is no underlying enmity between anyone in Russia, Greece and Cyprus.

We have very warm and close relations, a spiritual connection. Our American colleagues are actively trying to undermine this spiritual connection: they made Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew follow the path of schism, undermining centuries-old traditions of Orthodox Christianity, the path called Popery. It has always been rejected by the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is a reason that there is no analogue of the Pope in the Orthodox world. There is the Ecumenical Patriarch, who until recently was revered as the first among equals. Under the gross and open pressure from Washington, he chose schism in Ukraine creating a puppet Orthodox Church of Ukraine and deceived the Church by cutting off the rights promised to it. Now, together with the Americans, he is trying to work on other Orthodox churches, including the Greek Orthodox Church and the Primate of the Cypriot Orthodox Church, in order to continue deepening these subversive anti-canonical actions against Eastern Orthodoxy. The Pandora’s Box Bartholomew opened has already led to a split in the Cypriot Orthodox Church and unrest in other Orthodox churches. The mission the Americans have assigned to him (they do not even hide that they are actively working with him under the slogan of “freedom of religion and confession”) is to bury Orthodoxy’s influence in today’s world. I can see no other explanation for his actions.

As for the disputes that you indirectly mentioned asking if Russia

recognises the 12 nautical mile zone of Greece's territorial waters. It is not Russia who recognises it, it follows from the universal 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The convention, which everyone (except the United States) signed, states that a country has the right to establish territorial waters of 12 nautical miles.

When Greece announced that, we said the same thing I have said now: this is an absolutely legitimate solution. It is a different thing when territorial waters chosen by a state challenge the interests of a neighbouring state. If these interests are identified as legitimate, considering the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, it is necessary to search for a solution through dialogue and a balance of interests. We call for all the problems related to the exclusive economic zones of both Greece and Cyprus to be addressed via a dialogue.

I hear that my colleague, Foreign Minister of Greece Nikos Dendias has agreed to have a meeting with Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu in late January. I believe this is the right format for discussing and finding solutions to such issues. Of course, no one wants the use of any kind of force in the Eastern Mediterranean. As for Russia, it is ready to use its good relations with countries involved in these disputes if it might be helpful. We will be ready if we receive any such request.

Question: You spoke about the strategic partnership and great relationship between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin. How do you see the evolution of India-Russia ties in the changing geopolitics, particularly in the context of the threat of sanctions from some countries on India-Russia defence trade, including the S-400 missile system?

Sergey Lavrov: The partnership between Russia and India is called slightly differently. You called it a strategic partnership. This was the original title. Some years later, the Indian side proposed to call it a privileged strategic partnership. And a few years ago, when Prime Minister Modi became the head of the Indian government, we changed it to a specially privileged strategic partnership.

I believe there is room for further improvement, but the current terminology indicates a special kind of relationship. India is our very close, very strategic and very privileged partner. Take the economy, take innovations, high technology or military and technical cooperation, India is one of our closest partners in all these areas. We have close political coordination in the United Nations and within BRICS. We did a lot to make sure that India and Pakistan join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation where, I think, we now have a configuration which is very representative, to promote constructive, positive and stabilising ideas both for the Eurasian region and, in broader terms, for the Asia-Pacific.

We discussed with our Indian friends, at the level of the president and the prime minister, at the level of ministers, experts and consultants, we discussed, in a very open way, both practical things and conceptual issues, including issues emanating from the new concept which is called the Indo-Pacific Strategy. We do not believe that this is just a terminological change. Because if you take it literally from the geographical point of view, then “Indo” means the entire Indian Ocean, all littoral states of the Indian Ocean. But East Africa, we were told, is not included in the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The Persian Gulf, which is part of the Indian Ocean, is not included. What is included? As the American

sponsors of this concept say, the US, Australia, Japan and India, which is the backbone of, as US State Secretary Mike Pompeo recently said, the free and open Indo-Pacific Region. We have reasons to believe that when the Australians, the Japanese and the Americans promote this format and, well, they almost openly say that this is important to ensure stability in the South China Sea and this is important to contain China. We discussed this with my good friend, Foreign Minister of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and our Indian colleagues fully understand that some countries would like to use the Indo-Pacific Strategy in a manner that is not inclusive and that is confrontational. ASEAN, by the way, feels the same way. They are concerned that this aggressive promotion of the Indo-Pacific concept will undermine the central role of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific Region, the East Asian Summits (EAS) and other formats, the center of which has been ASEAN for many years.

I know that in India this issue is very actively discussed. And I know that India is not going to move this Indo-Pacific cooperation in a way that would be not positive and not constructive. I say so in much detail because some of my previous statements on this issue have been widely discussed in the Indian media which I believe is not very friendly towards the Indian government, but we don't want any misunderstanding with our friends, the Indian people: we are friends with India. We are doing our utmost to make sure that India and China, our two great friends and brothers, live in peace with one another.

This is our policy which we promote not only in the context of the SCO or BRICS. We have a special trilateral format, a "troika" or RIC – Russia, India and China. It was established in the late

1990s, and it is still functioning. The last meeting at the level of ministers took place in Moscow in September 2020. We adopted a joint communiqué recognising the role of the three countries in promoting peace, stability and security in Asia and the world and confirming the cooperation between our countries.

I am glad that, besides the political dialogue between the three countries, we have plenty of formats that involve people-to-people contacts, including academic formats, youth formats and many others. We all are wise enough to see that if a strategy is indeed intended to be not inclusive but rather divisive, then the wisdom of our countries will certainly prevail. And in no way will our closest cooperation and partnership with India be affected. The most sincere and honest dialogue, even on the issues where we do not one hundred percent see eye to eye, is the key to the further development of our partnership.

Question: The next question has to do with the situation in Northeast Asia. Japan is seriously concerned about the nuclear build-up in North Korea, which has forced it to strengthen its security, or more precisely, buy a missile defence system. Russia does not seem to share our concern, but regards our efforts to protect our security as a threat. The problem has been complicated with the US intention to deploy its medium-range missiles in Asia Pacific. Several media outlets have reported that Russia and China are considering joint countermeasures if the United States does deploy its missiles. Is this true? It appears that two military blocs are being created in the region, one comprising the United States, Japan and South Korea, and the other made up of Russia and China. I believe that current relations between Japan and Russia are relatively good and neighbourly. What

should be done to prevent their deterioration or even a confrontation, in light of the current situation in the region? Do you think we can maintain our positive ties amid the deteriorating Russia-US relationship?

Sergey Lavrov: Tension between the United States and North Korea and between the two Korean states has persisted during the past 18 months. We hope that the parties will refrain from taking any dramatic moves in the military sphere that could aggravate tension around the Korean Peninsula. The parties have not abandoned their previous commitments. At the beginning of last year, North Korea, followed by South Korea, reaffirmed their readiness to honour the agreements reached between the leaders of the two Korean states in 2018. A military parade held in North Korea to mark its anniversary attracted considerable attention. In general, no actions that could lead to the development of a material basis for escalation have been taken so far.

Let's wait and see what policy the Biden administration adopts in this sphere. We would like to see stable peace on the peninsula. Together with our Chinese colleagues we prepared a roadmap of our common vision of movement towards peace back in 2017. We discussed it with the other members of the six-party talks, that is, with Japan and the United States, as well as with North Korea and South Korea. Based on our common views and that roadmap, we and our Chinese partners prepared an action plan, which we are ready to submit for discussion as soon as contacts are resumed. I would like to once again express our sincere desire to promote the achievement of a lasting peace and agreement in the region.

As for our relations with Japan, we regard them as positive. The Russian President and his Japanese colleagues, the prime

ministers, have always maintained friendly ties based on personal sympathy. I am sure that such personal contacts will be established with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga as well.

Touching upon the military situation in the region, it is true that Russia and China are working together, including in the form of military exercises. Russian-Chinese military exercises are nothing new at all. We have held several army exercises within the framework of the SCO and at the bilateral level. We have held joint exercises of our aerospace forces. They are not spearheaded at Japan but are held to check the combat readiness of our air forces, which are guarding the safety of Russian and Chinese borders. What is threatening them? There are quite a few threats, including the one you have mentioned, the US plans to deploy ballistic missile defence systems and ground-launched medium and shorter-range missiles, which were prohibited by a treaty from which Washington has withdrawn, in Japan and South Korea.

We have forwarded to Tokyo a list of our practical security concerns, which are directly related to the possibility of continuing constructive talks on a peace treaty. We are still waiting for a reply. The deployment of a US BMD system and the potential deployment of US ground-launched medium- and shorter-range missiles in Japan are among our concerns. When it comes to BMD systems, our Japanese colleagues assure us that they would control the Aegis Ashore systems they would buy, and that the Americans would have no connection to their management. With all our respect for our Japanese friends, this is impossible. They will be unable to prevent the Americans from controlling these systems. As for medium- and shorter-range missiles, the Japanese government is not happy with this US idea, as far as I

am aware, and it has attempted to turn the talks around from ground-launched to sea-launched missiles. But this will hardly change the essence of the matter, because medium- and shorter-range missiles, even if deployed on warships in the Sea of Japan, will be able to target a substantial part of the Russian territory.

We are ready to continue dialogue, but first of all we would like to receive answers to our security concerns about which the Japanese partners are well aware. In addition to the material aspect of the planned weapons deployment in Japan in one format or another, there is also a military-political dimension, that is, Japan's union with the United States, in accordance with which the United States may deploy its weapons in any part of Japan. As far as we know, Tokyo has reaffirmed its full commitment to this military union on numerous occasions, including last year, describing the Americans as its main allies. This is taking place at a time when the United States describes Russia as its main adversary and even enemy, as Mike Pompeo noted recently. When our Japanese friends reaffirm and promote their union with a country that considers Russia an enemy, we see this as a specific situation that should be clarified.

Question (retranslated from Spanish): I am a journalist from a public television channel in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is an important subject for our Latin American region and particularly for the Argentine Republic. I am referring to the sovereignty over the Islas Malvinas. I would like to ask you about the Russian Federation's position on this score and on changes following the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union?

Sergey Lavrov: We support all resolutions of the UN General Assembly on the Islas Malvinas. We have been voting for them

ever since the UN started reviewing this subject, and we will continue to demand that these resolutions be fulfilled. There is such a notion as double standards. The problem of the Islas Malvinas came into being a long time ago. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland insisted very sternly that the residents of the Islas Malvinas (that London calls the Falkland Islands) have a right to self-determination. We reminded the UK's representatives about this when they became overexcited about the March 2014 referendum in Crimea. We asked them whether the Islas Malvinas, located 10,000 miles away from the UK, had the right to self-determination, and whether the people of Crimea who have been part of this country all their life were denied this right. The answer was very simple; they replied that these were two different matters. Let this rest with their conscience. We are convinced that it is necessary to settle the dispute through dialogue, as stipulated by the UN General Assembly's resolution.

Question: On January 12, 2021, Berlin hosted this year's first meeting of the advisers of the Normandy Four leaders. As Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office, Dmitry Kozak, said they failed to come to terms on a single issue. What do you see as a way out of the deadlock in the Ukraine crisis?

Sergey Lavrov: In our opinion, the only way out is to implement the Minsk agreements. What were the advisers of the Normandy Four leaders doing at this meeting? They were trying, once again, to put together a roadmap for moving towards this goal. Our participation in compiling or trying to compile this roadmap is a serious concession on our part. A concession was also made by Donetsk and Lugansk with whom we closely coordinate our position before every meeting in the Normandy Four format.

The Normandy format merely accompanies the main work that is being conducted by what the Ukrainians call the trilateral group. We call it a contact group. But it can be called a trilateral group since there are three sides— Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk, while Russia and the OSCE are the mediators. The roadmap that the Germans and French suggested drafting three or four years ago has now reappeared. At that time, the idea was to synchronise movement along the security track: the disengagement of forces, withdrawal of heavy weaponry, and usable checkpoints for civilians. It was also necessary to move towards a political settlement by making progress on the status of the regions in question, preparing for an election, announcing amnesty, etc. However, at that time these goals were not achieved because Ukraine adamantly rejected this parallel progress and insisted that security issues must be resolved first and political problems settled later. At one point, the election issue faced a similar stumbling block.

According to the Minsk agreements (if they are not politicised or viewed through the prism of ideology), it is first necessary to ensure the special status of Donbass and then hold an election on this basis. But Ukraine had a different position: “Let’s first hold the election and if we like those who are elected, we will give it special status. If not, we won’t give them this status.” At that time, the sides reached a compromise with the participation of President Vladimir Putin and the leaders of France, Germany and Ukraine – the so-called Steinmeier formula that synchronised the election and the granting of the special status to the region. All this was confirmed at the summit in Paris in December 2019. President Vladimir Zelensky committed himself to introducing this formula

into legislation.

Few decisions from the Paris summit were carried out. The disengagement of forces and weapons took place in some sections, and a small exchange of prisoners and other detainees was carried out. Attempts to come to terms on another exchange of prisoners, which were going on all these months, ended in failure due to Ukraine's position of introducing more and more contrived demands.

The DPR and the LPR announced, with our support, that they planned to unilaterally transfer to Ukraine some of its citizens that were detained on their territory as a goodwill gesture. Let the Ukrainian authorities at least feel ashamed that an "all for all" exchange, as agreed on earlier, was delayed for reasons that had nothing to do with humanitarian considerations. Now, at the recent meeting, the leaders' advisers made another attempt to compile a roadmap. If the Minsk agreements are presented as the accords of indirect action, let's specify each and every step they envisage. As for Ukraine, its position is completely obstructionist.

Here's one example. The Minsk agreements read: forces and weapons must be withdrawn to a certain distance from the contact line. Thus must be done all along this line. On the eve of the December 2019 summit, the negotiators harmonised a final statement from the leaders that contained an item on the disengagement of forces and arms all along the contact line by a certain deadline. The statement was signed by the negotiators, ministers and advisers. President Zelensky said he could not do this but was only willing to agree to the proposed disengagement at three new check points. The German and French leaders were taken aback. Ukraine was saying at every instance that its priority

is to achieve security on the ground. All of a sudden, the president that inspired so many hopes for progress to peace, and made the goal of peace in Donbass the main slogan of his election campaign, said “no” to the disengagement of forces and weapons except in three villages. This makes you think twice. It is possible to lament this approach but the bottom line is the inability or reluctance of Berlin and Paris to compel their protégés in Kiev to stop undermining the Minsk agreements.

According to President Zelensky, Ukraine needs the Minsk agreements to maintain the sanctions against Russia. Otherwise, he would have withdrawn from them. Paris and Berlin remain completely silent. The Kiev representative in the contact group, former President Leonid Kravchuk, declared that the Minsk agreements were the main obstacle to settling the Donbass problem. This means only one thing: these agreements stand in the way of Kiev’s attempts to impose its own rules. Another member of the Kiev delegation in the trilateral group, Alexey Reznikov claims that the Minsk agreements are not so bad, but they are not legally binding and simply amount to a political wish... This is total lack of competence. The Minsk agreements have been approved by the UN Security Council’s unanimous resolution and have therefore become part of international law. He also said “it is possible to change the priority of some measures; the main goal is to first introduce Ukrainian border guards to occupy the entire border with the Russian Federation, thereby surrounding the Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics; then the Ukrainian defence and law enforcement agencies will encircle them and in this case the election will become unnecessary.” They will appoint their own governors-general and imprison the leaders of these

republics because they will be labelled terrorists.

Now, the main task for me is to understand what the French and Germans think about themselves. In response to our numerous appeals, including my own letters, to bring Kiev's representatives to reason at the talks with Donbass, they are simply retreating into the shadows and refraining from public statements. If there is an instruction not to offend the country (or Ukraine's leaders, to be more precise) in order to realise a desire to deter Russia, let them be straight about this. In this case, we will have a different policy in this area.

Question: Here is a question from SANA news agency and the people of Syria who have been suffering from Israel's aggressive actions all this time. Israel continues to bomb our cities, our villages, and it has now considerably expanded the territory of its operations in Syria. At the same time, the people of Syria are suffering from aggressive sanctions, imposed on them by the United States and its allies. The people of Syria are experiencing hard times. Tell me, please, what can you say about this situation?

Sergey Lavrov: We have repeatedly expressed our assessments of the developments in Syria. Everyone signed the unanimously approved UN Security Council Resolution 2254 that calls for respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the Syrian Arab Republic. US actions in Syria blatantly violate this resolution. Washington's line to block humanitarian relief aid distribution to Syria in any way they can, including blackmail and ultimatums, also crudely violate this resolution. UNSC Resolution 2254 calls for providing humanitarian relief assistance to the people of Syria. The United States is doing everything it can to prevent this from happening. It has declared

extremely tough sanctions, the so-called Caesar Act. It has also forbidden international organisations and other parties to take part in the November 2020 Damascus conference for repatriating Syrian refugees and temporarily displaced persons. Nevertheless, the conference gathered about 20 countries, including five Arab states that did not fear the domineering United States.

At the same time, while forbidding everyone to even send humanitarian goods to Syria, the United States occupied substantial territories on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River. It ruthlessly exploits Syrian hydrocarbon deposits, Syrian national wealth, plundering and selling it and using the money to support its proxies, including Kurdish separatists, and to persuade the Kurds not to hold a dialogue with Damascus while encouraging a separatist atmosphere. This is also causing problems in Turkey. But the main thing is that all this is happening in the Syrian Arab Republic, and no one invited the United States or its Western allies there.

We, including the President of the Russian Federation, have repeatedly expressed our position on this. Yes, we maintain contacts between the military with the United States but we are not doing this because we recognise the legitimacy of their presence there but simply because the United States must act within certain boundaries. We cannot expel it, and we will not clash with US forces. Now that US forces are deployed there, we are conducting a dialogue with US representatives on so-called deconfliction. During this dialogue, we demand compliance with certain rules, and also sternly note the unacceptability of using force against Syrian state facilities.

Regarding Israel, we maintain close contact with Tel Aviv.

President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly discussed this subject with Benjamin Netanyahu. We strongly noted the need to honour UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and the resolution on Lebanon. Israel also violates this while using Syrian air space to hit facilities in Lebanon. This is a serious aspect of our relations. Israel insists that it is forced to respond to national security threats emanating from Syrian territory. We have repeatedly told our Israeli colleagues: "Please give us the relevant information if you see these threats." We absolutely don't want Syrian territory to be used against Israel or as an arena for an Iranian-Israeli confrontation, as many people would like. To our Israeli colleagues: please notify us immediately of any facts that a threat to your state emanates from some part of Syrian territory. We will act to neutralise this threat. So far, we have received no specific reply to this appeal, but we continue to press the point.

Question: If possible, I would like to go back to the developments in the United States. They were quite dramatic, especially in Washington. All of us remember the footage of the Capitol and the violence we saw happening there. But the subsequent events, the reaction to these events are notable as well. Many people in the United States are now using the old rhetoric we remember from our own history. They are talking about purging the Republican Party of extreme Trumpists, which actually amounts to a cleansing campaign. You have mentioned that some people, including the US President, have been deprived of access to social media platforms. Mr Lavrov, isn't this reminiscent of anything to you personally? Also, do you expect new political and information attacks against Russia considering that many people in America continue to believe that Donald Trump came to power four years

ago with the help of Russia? Thank you.

Sergey Lavrov: We have already spoken, in part, about this subject. As for whether this is reminiscent of anything to me, I will not answer this question, because this may be reminiscent of different things to different people. There have been different periods and forms of persecution in different periods of human history. I don't think people can easily forget this. Although people tend to have a short memory, we have history textbooks and we must teach historical truth to our young people. Otherwise, future generations may decide that there has never been anything apart from Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other platforms, which have a monopoly on the truth. Like all other normal people, I take no pleasure in watching problems come to a head in the United States.

Some people could be tempted to say, "The Americans have been lecturing the world, and have tried to lecture us, driving us into all kinds of corners, and now they are on the receiving end." The United States is a huge country, and we cannot steer clear of it, because whatever happens there is bound to have global consequences, if only because the so-called digital giants are global corporations. Unlike the global corporations of the past, when Ford and other industrialists moved production to developing countries, these new corporations are producing ideas. As the classic saying goes, "A thought expressed becomes a lie." This explains the risks we are facing.

If we look back on history, customs and manners of US foreign policy activities, it is always "America is Number One," "America must prevail," "American democracy is an example to be emulated by others" and "democracy must be spread everywhere." They

have tried and continue trying to spread American democracy in the Middle East contrary to the region's civilisation, traditions and culture. They have tried doing this in Afghanistan and Iraq and are trying to do this in Libya with complete disregard for the traditions, history, and ethnic and religious aspects of the countries concerned. They have changed the government in a European country, Ukraine. In which of the countries I have mentioned, or any other country where the Americans have tried to spread democracy has life become better for people? There are no such countries.

During the past few years President Donald Trump has been saying that there would be no wars during his term. No new wars have been launched indeed. But US interference in the internal affairs of others went on very energetically. The physical methods of interference are giving way to interference through social media. Reliance on NGOs and the nursing of opposition forces loyal to the West are complemented with a dramatic increase in the power of social media and their capabilities. The American state is now facing the issue of whether they should be taken under control or left with regulation "standards" based on the liberal ideology and world outlook. No restrictions are being placed on the US's freedom of expression, freedom that has been set out in corporate standards that gives the Americans the right to restrict the others' freedom of expression. This is a serious problem, and I sincerely hope that the Americans will settle it. After all, it is their country where they will have to live.

This shows once again how important it is to take multilateral decisions. I hope that those who have tried for years and even decades to hinder discussions on making internet governance

more democratic, and those who have been putting spokes in the wheels of the Russian initiative set out in the UN General Assembly resolution on advancing responsible state behaviour in cyberspace and in the draft Convention on Cooperation in Combating Cybercrime will see the problem in a different light, especially when it comes to more democratic internet governance. This subject has been under discussion for years at a specialised UN body, the International Telecommunication Union. Nearly all countries are willing to coordinate universally acceptable forms, but the Americans are categorically against this.

Touching upon the events that have led to this situation, it would be worth recalling – a lot has been said about this – how the social media reported on voting during the US presidential election and how they worked to form a lop-sided public opinion of the developments in the United States and across the world.

Many people are talking now about the things that were obvious from the very beginning but have been glossed over. Two months before the actual election day, ballot papers were mailed to voters in several states for casting postal votes. They mailed 95 million ballots. Two-thirds of them turned out to be filled in prior to the election day. One-third of the ballots were not completed despite aggressive encouragement. This campaign of forcing people to cast their ballots by postal vote did not fit in with the US election standards. When both candidates got more than 40 percent of the vote, postal voting became a serious problem. As I have already said, those who received ballots by mail could send them back, take their ballots to the polling stations or cast them in some other way. This went on for weeks and was reported on social media as a normal practice and accepted by those who had criticised our

voting on constitutional amendments. Curbside voting is child's play compared to what has been done to the voting mechanism in the United States. Social media played the decisive role in covering the process. They openly supported one of the two parties and did not make any secret of their desire to have a system of government based on one ruling party. American society's problem is their own election system and the way they hold political debates. This is a war on dissent, something which our Western colleagues have always claimed to be against. But they have taken up this banner now and are unlikely to cede it to anyone in the near future.

Question: Thank you, Maria and thank you, Mr Minister, for taking my question. I need some clarification on Alexey Navalny, on what you are saying about the findings because the Germans have said that they have given you the blood and tissue and clothing samples, that you would need to carry out a proper criminal investigation. I am not entirely clear on what would hold you back?

We are also at the police station where he currently is and he said there is a hastily convened court hearing which is not part of the standard legal procedure. Why is he not receiving normal recourse through Russian law like a normal citizen would?

Sergey Lavrov: I don't know where you received the information that the Germans have given us tissue samples and other bio materials. This is not true. The reply that the German authorities sent us three days ago, obviously preparing for Navalny's return on January 17, only quotes the information provided by Navalny himself and his wife Yulia. To say nothing about bio materials or the bottles involved in this case, we don't even have the results of his tests or a toxicological conclusion! We don't have any of these.

If you were told we were given his clothes, bottles and biomaterials, you were misled.

As for the legal procedure, let me repeat that biomaterials were taken and tests made at the Omsk clinic (a civilian clinic). Nothing like a chemical warfare agent was discovered in them. The Charite Clinic (also a civilian clinic, as the Germans reported) has not identified anything like a toxic chemical agent. The Omsk and Charite clinics are civilian clinics. The Germans, as they said themselves, transferred Navalny's samples, taken at the Charite Clinic, to a Bundeswehr clinic. Its military staff who evidently possess the required knowledge discovered a prohibited chemical warfare agent, but of some new modification. Where did the Bundeswehr and the Germans in general receive this information? This is an interesting question. We asked this in the queries sent by the Russian Prosecutor-General's Office to the German Ministry of Justice. It is necessary to find this out.

Recently they told us almost in unison in Germany, and in Britain after the Skripal case, that they did not conduct any research on the so-called Novichok. Hence, researchers in Germany, France and Sweden couldn't have the relevant markers and technology for identifying Novichok, albeit of a new version, in a matter of three to five days.

To initiate a criminal case in our judicial practice, we must have justification in the form of evidence that a crime was committed or an attempt to commit it was made. Since no chemical warfare agent was detected in Navalny's samples taken by our doctors, we have asked for the OPCW tests made in Germany, France and Sweden. I hope you heard that I described in detail our proposal to this organisation to conduct a joint investigation. I find it hard to

believe that our Western colleagues are so high-handed and arrogant that they deem it possible to demand explanations from Russia without presenting us any evidence. You (I mean the West) say you have evidence that he was poisoned and this is beyond doubt. But when we are told that we won't be given this evidence, allow us to at least remain skeptical as regards to what happens with Navalny.

If you have nothing to hide, if you are not afraid to put the truth on the table and submit these facts to us, why aren't you doing so? As soon as we see this, and if the attempt to poison him with chemical warfare agents is confirmed, we will start criminal proceedings. The pre-trial investigation conducted here in conformity with Criminal Procedure Rules has not revealed any grounds for opening a criminal case. I understand that you do many things on the sly. I have mentioned that the investigators in the Alexander Litvinenko poisoning in Britain have suddenly decided to classify this case and many details remain classified. We have received no information on the Skripals. Nothing has been disclosed to Britain's allies in NATO or the EU. The case with the Malaysia Airlines crash (flight MH-17) is the same.

In accusing us, the Dutch have organised a trial with 13 witnesses, of which 12 are anonymous. They are refusing to reveal the names of 12 out of 13 witnesses. First, bother British and other European law-enforcement bodies and ask them why they are playing in the dark, what they are concealing and what they are afraid of. Then I will be ready to answer your questions if you receive sensible answers from them.

Question: The past year was difficult for everyone, including the Russian diaspora abroad. In this context, as an NGO uniting the

media of our compatriots, independent Russian-speaking internet journalists and bloggers, we are particularly interested in your assessment of the results of the year in this aspect of Russian foreign policy. What do you think about the performance of Russian compatriots in these difficult circumstances? What good news awaits us this year?

Sergey Lavrov: We give a lot of attention to working with our compatriots in all aspects, including the media. This is one of the key areas in the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, the updated version that was approved by President Vladimir Putin in 2016. Needless to say, the pandemic affected our communication. During the past year, the bulk of our planned events were converted to an online format, but some were held offline.

I would like to start by mentioning the programme to bring Russians home at a time when an almost global, universal lockdown was in place. What was done by our people, compatriots living in different countries deserved the highest praise. There was understandable turmoil. Flights were announced and then cancelled for objective reasons. In several cases these reasons were subjective. People who went to airports needed a place to spend the night. Our compatriots met them and provided them with accommodation and transport, gave them money and food and personal protective gear. They organised the publication of information via social media and support groups. We are very grateful to all participants in the action that we organised under the hashtag #WeAreTogether. Volunteers from among our compatriots were awarded with a special medal "For Selfless Contribution to Organising the Pan-Russian Mutual Assistance Action

‘#WeAreTogether’” and a certificate of honour from the President of the Russian Federation.

Regarding more traditional forms of work, I would like to mention the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad. It held its sessions online and soon it will have new members for the next four years. Its thematic groups continue to function, including trade and economic structures that are aimed at facilitating the development of business incubators for young compatriots. I think this is a very useful undertaking, and we will certainly support it.

As for our assistance in resolving the problems of our compatriots, Ukraine and the Baltic countries require the most attention for protecting the rights of Russian speakers. Russia has the Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad that is operating under the aegis of the Foreign Ministry and Rossotrudnichestvo (the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation). It has established 49 human rights agencies in over 30 countries. These are centres for legal support, consultative offices, and regular legal columns in the media of Russian compatriots with useful consultations.

I would also like to thank, with your help, all those who took part in the actions devoted to the 75th anniversary of Victory – Immortal Regiment, St George’s Ribbon, and the Memorial Candle in Israel. All these actions evoked the keen interest of our compatriots and their sincere striving to not forget the memory of their fathers and grandfathers. In September, we held Eurasia Global, an in-

personal youth forum. The Young Compatriots interactive platform was launched. This is also a very important new undertaking. The World Business Alliance of Russian-Speaking Women and its auxiliary, the Alliance of Business Women, are unfolding their activities. The Government Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad remains active. I head this commission, and we have a plan. Under this plan the central event of the year will be the Seventh World Congress of Compatriots in Moscow in the fourth quarter of 2021. I hope we will be able to meet at this event.

If the media you work with in the Media Alliance of Russian Communities encounter discriminatory actions by the host countries, we will certainly be willing to support you. Earlier we discussed how some countries are discriminating against the Russian media. I do not rule out that the media outlets of our compatriots are subjected to negative influence. If you have exhausted the procedures that you can resort to yourselves, we will be willing to render you legal and other aid.

Question: Do you plan to be vaccinated? Considering the growing scale of vaccinations in all countries, how soon will it be possible to return to traditional, regular international politics in a personal, offline format? When will we be able to meet physically? The Group of Seven has planned to hold its summit offline. When do you think the first international talks at the high or highest level will be conducted in the traditional format?

Sergey Lavrov: As for the highest level, preparations of the events for the President, this is the responsibility of the Presidential Executive Office. I do not want to get ahead of things in this respect.

As for the ministerial level, we are gradually moving forward. I made several visits in the autumn of 2020, for instance, to Greece and Serbia. I received guests here, including Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu. Representatives from a number of countries and international organisations are going to arrive here soon. We are doing this slowly and steadily, with the observance of all precautions and considering the health condition of each participant. I have anti-bodies because I already had a light form of the coronavirus. I heard yesterday that specialists still advise even those who have had the disease to get vaccinated. I will consult our physicians on this.