

[mid.ru](https://www.mid.ru)

Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, April 15, 2021

57-73 minutes

Table of contents

1. [New US sanctions](#)
2. [Sergey Lavrov's meeting with Prime Minister of Libya's Government of National Unity Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh](#)
3. [Sergey Lavrov's upcoming talks with Prime Minister of Lebanon Saad a Hariri](#)
4. [Sergey Lavrov's upcoming talks with Foreign Secretary of Mexico Marcelo Ebrard](#)
5. [Coronavirus update](#)
6. [Update on southeastern Ukraine](#)
7. [NATO activities in Ukraine and near its borders](#)
8. [US double counter-terrorism standards and media reports about new ISIS leader Amir Muhammad Sa'id al-Mawla](#)
9. [Persecution of Russian-speaking journalists in Latvia](#)
10. [Danish authorities' anti-Russia statements](#)
11. [Norwegian documentary Front Fighters](#)

12. [Second report by OPCW Investigation and Identification Team on alleged use of chlorine in Saraqib, Syria on February 4, 2018](#)
13. [Russia's position regarding Cypriot settlement](#)
14. [Russia's activities at the East Asia Summit](#)
15. [Online education resource Russian Electronic School](#)
16. [Presidential elections in the Republic of Ecuador](#)

[*Answers to media questions:*](#)

1. [Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations](#)
2. [Russia's response to expulsion of Russian diplomats from the United States](#)
3. [Follow-up on matters Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden discussed during a phone call](#)
4. [Referendum in Kyrgyzstan](#)
5. [De-dollarisation of the economy and disconnection from international payment systems](#)
6. [Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's inquiry into the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border](#)
7. [Weapons and military equipment supplies to Ukraine](#)
8. [Military support of Ukraine](#)
9. [Statements made by President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev](#)
10. [Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Pakistan](#)
11. [The peace treaty with Armenia](#)
12. [Japan's plans to dump radioactive waters from the Fukushima station into the ocean](#)

13. [The US actions after a telephone conversation between President Vladimir Putin and President Joe Biden](#)
14. [Scandinavian countries' recent rhetoric](#)
15. [Plans to participate in the Atlantic Council](#)
16. [Russian Electronic School project](#)

New US sanctions

We received many requests to comment on the new US sanctions.

We have repeatedly warned the United States about the consequences of its hostile moves that are dangerously raising the level of confrontation between our countries. This course of action does not serve the interests of the people of the two leading nuclear powers that bear historical responsibility for the fate of the world.

In a telephone conversation with the President of Russia, Joe Biden expressed interest in normalising Russian-US relations but the actions of his administration suggest otherwise. The United States is not ready to accept the objective reality of a multipolar world in which American hegemony is not possible. It is placing its bets on sanctions pressure and interference in our domestic affairs.

This aggressive conduct will certainly meet with resolute resistance. There will inevitably be a response to the sanctions. Washington must realise that it will have to pay for the degradation of bilateral relations. Responsibility for what is happening fully rests with the United States.

US Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan was summoned to the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation. We will share with you additional information about the outcome of what will be a difficult conversation for him.

[Back to top](#)

Sergey Lavrov's meeting with Prime Minister of Libya's Government of National Unity Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh

On April 15, 2021, Prime Minister of Libya's Government of National Unity (GNU) Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh arrived in Moscow on a working visit with a representative delegation. He is expected to meet with representatives of Russian ministries and departments and our leadership. Some meetings are already taking place, for instance, with Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Mikhail Mishustin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The GNU is a transitional government body, the main task of which is to prepare and conduct national elections on December 24, 2021. We welcome the progress in the political process in Libya and consider the efforts of the transitional authorities to unite the previously disconnected government institutions and financial and economic agencies to be an important stage towards full normalisation in this friendly country.

During Mr Dbeibeh's visit the sides will discuss in detail issues related to the political settlement in Libya and prospects for developing bilateral political, trade and economic relations.

[Back to top](#)

Sergey Lavrov's upcoming talks with Prime Minister of Lebanon Saad al-Hariri

Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Saad al-Hariri is in Moscow at the invitation of Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. Sergey Lavrov will meet with the prominent Lebanese politician on April 16.

The discussion is expected to focus on the situation in Lebanon, where the challenging process of forming a new cabinet is

underway, as well as other current issues in the Middle East region. They will also consider matters related to the continued development of bilateral Russia-Lebanon cooperation.

[Back to top](#)

Sergey Lavrov's upcoming talks with Foreign Secretary of Mexico Marcelo Ebrard

On April 28, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with Foreign Secretary of the United Mexican States Marcelo Ebrard in Moscow during his official visit to our country. Let me remind you that the Russian foreign minister visited Mexico in February 2020.

Mexico is an important partner of Russia with which we traditionally cooperate on the basis of mutual respect and equal consideration of each other's interests. Last year our nations celebrated the 130th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

The forthcoming meeting of the foreign ministers is proof of steady progress in the extensive political dialogue between our countries.

During the talks, the ministers will discuss a broad range of issues on the bilateral agenda, including prospects for building up and diversifying trade and economic relations as well as expanding cultural and humanitarian cooperation. They will focus especially on countering the spread of the coronavirus.

There will be an exchange of views on current international and regional topics, such as our countries' interaction at the UN, including the Security Council where Mexico will be a non-permanent member in 2021-2022, as well as at the G20 and APEC.

They will also discuss the expansion of Russia's dialogue with the

Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) where Mexico holds the rotating presidency until 2022.

[Back to top](#)

Coronavirus update

We continue to monitor the situation with COVID-19, both politically and logistically. International organisations are working and international experts are exchanging information. By April 15, the number of people infected with COVID-19 around the world has exceeded 138 million and nearly 4 million people have died.

We have to state with regret that the overall situation with morbidity is getting notably worse as we approach summer: the number of new confirmed cases and deaths around the world has been growing steadily for four consecutive weeks. Various countries, including those that are traditional tourist destinations, have recorded a distinct correlation between the spread of the new strains of the coronavirus and the incidence rate. We urge you to keep an eye on information from the emergency response centre and relevant agencies, including Rostourism, Rospotrebnadzor and Rosaviatsia.

Given the complicated epidemiological situation in the world, we would like to repeat our warning to those who plan to travel, particularly as tourists, that currently any trip abroad is associated with high risks. If a trip cannot be cancelled or postponed, please consider all factors involved, as well as the likely scenarios of what might happen. Our previous recommendations are still relevant.

[Back to top](#)

Update on southeastern Ukraine

Mounting tensions on the line of contact in Donbass continue to cause concern. According to the latest report by the OSCE Special

Monitoring Mission (SMM), the number of ceasefire violations in the previous two weeks has doubled compared to two weeks earlier, reaching 4,300. The shelling of towns in the Lugansk and Donetsk regions by the Ukrainian armed forces has become heavier.

Casualties among civilians in Donetsk and Lugansk are growing. Kiev continues to deploy more military vehicles and troops in the region. According to SMM reports, Grad multiple rocket launchers, the use of which is banned under the Minsk agreements, have been seen in the settlement of Druzhkovka to the north of Donetsk.

The escalation of tensions was discussed at the meetings of the Contact Group and its sub-groups on April 13 and 14. Regrettably, they have again yielded no results because of Ukraine's counterproductive approach. This proves yet again Kiev's unwillingness to get down to concrete work and start seeking a settlement using peaceful diplomatic tools.

In a move to divert attention from its activities in Donbass and its failure to act in the Contact Group, Kiev has drawn on the active and broad support of its Western curators – which by and large amounts to a campaign – to keep pursuing its aggressive information policy against Russia. The Ukrainian and Western media are blowing the issue of Russian military activity near the border with Ukraine out of proportion. Western countries, both separately and collectively, are churning out statements to this effect. Part of this misinformation and propaganda campaign is Ukraine's efforts to use the provisions of the OSCE Vienna document on confidence- and security-building measures, which deal, as they say, with "unusual military activity." On April 10, 2021, this issue was discussed at the relevant consultations and on April 14, at the joint meeting of the OSCE decision-making bodies: the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Cooperation.

It is the second week that our diplomats in Moscow and Vienna have been calling on our partners not to distort reality and not to try and interpret the planned combat training Russia is conducting on its territory as a manifestation of its aggressive intentions. The scale of these activities does not surpass that of the previous years and looks much more modest than the military exercises the Ukrainian armed forces and NATO countries are holding both close to the Ukrainian borders and directly on the territory of Ukraine.

The OSCE Vienna document provisions on the unusual military activity apply more to what the Ukrainian armed forces have been doing in Donbass since 2014, leaving 14,000 people dead and forcing 2.5 million people to become refugees and internally displaced persons. Not once have we seen the West's deep concern about facts like these.

Once again we call on our partners, primarily Germany and France as our colleagues in the Normandy format, to stop taking part in this propaganda campaign built around Russia's activities on its territory that are posing no threat to anyone and instead to focus on the efforts to encourage Kiev to de-escalate tensions in Donbass and implement the Minsk Package of Measures.

[Back to top](#)

NATO activities in Ukraine and near its borders

The United States and its NATO allies continue accusing Russia of building up its military units and equipment near the border with Ukraine. These propaganda attacks demonstrate that the Alliance and its member countries want to justify their more intensive military activities in Ukraine and near it.

I would like to remind you that throughout this year alone NATO is planning seven military exercises in Ukraine. The active phase of

the Defender Europe 2021 exercise, the most extensive exercise for many years, is to commence near Ukraine soon. This event is to involve 25 states. NATO warships are entering the Black Sea ever more frequently; the number of such visits increased by one-third last year.

US, British, Canadian and Lithuanian training missions are deployed in the country. It should be noted that Ukrainian service personnel that have been trained by NATO instructors are often sent to the zone of the so-called “anti-terrorist operation,” directed against certain districts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

US strategic bombers overfly the Black Sea and Ukraine much more often than before, and they enter preset sectors for launching cruise missiles. More intensive aerial reconnaissance missions are taking place near the Crimean peninsula.

Moreover, the United States and its allies are supplying Ukraine with numerous weapons systems. Our Western partners and their countries’ media are keeping quiet about this. Since 2014, Washington has provided almost \$2 billion worth of military assistance to Kiev.

All this shows it is precisely NATO countries which are aggravating the situation around Ukraine with their provocative actions. By the way, Ukraine is not included in NATO’s zone of responsibility. These provocative actions are fueling military revenge-seeking moods, as NATO builds up its military potential near this restless region.

The double standards of US-led NATO are not something new. They are also manifested in other matters, including counter-terrorism operations, rather than just in the context of Ukraine.

[Back to top](#)

US double counter-terrorism standards and media reports

about new ISIS leader Amir Muhammad Sa'id al-Mawla

As of late, US media outlets, including the Voice of America, Bloomberg, The New York Times and others, have published material resembling planted stories about Moscow's alleged contacts with Islamists. To be quite frank, we are surprised that US media outlets are paying more attention to such planted stories, fake news and misinformation about other states' ties with Jihadists, rather than to reports about support for terrorism by their own country's representatives.

It was the United States that published reports about the new ISIS leader Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla who worked for Washington in the past and who was a US informant. Citing his interrogation protocols, The Washington Post has published details of his cooperation and information passed on from him to the US authorities.

We assume that The Washington Post is a media resource for US readers, and that it has a high reputation in its own country. In this connection, such statements inevitably attract the closest attention and interest on the part of other US media outlets.

The just-mentioned article once again confirms that the practice of worked-out double standards permeates all strata of the US society. Unfortunately, the journalist community that should be objective and unbiased is no exception here either. In any event, they tried to persuade us that they were living in line with these declared principles.

[Back to top](#)

Persecution of Russian-speaking journalists in Latvia

Systematic infringements on the freedom of speech are ongoing in the Baltics. Here is the latest example: on April 14, the Latvian

State Security Service summoned five freelance employees of the Russian Sputnik Latvia and the Russian-language Baltnews news portals for interrogation as suspects.

According to our information, they signed non-disclosure and travel restriction agreements. Proceedings can be initiated against them for violating the EU sanctions, which is punishable with financial penalty or up to four years in prison.

We regard this as yet another example of the “demonisation of Russia”, persecution of Russian-speaking residents of Latvia, and double standards. We believe that criminal prosecution of journalists in Latvia is a direct violation of international law when it comes to the freedom of expression and media pluralism.

We are aware of the campaign launched by US media resources and officials, who claim to be concerned about the pressure US media outlets allegedly experience in Russia. No concrete examples have been provided, because there are none, in principle. But this pseudo-information based on rumour has been published, even though they could not provide any evidence of pressure on American journalists.

Meanwhile, Russian journalists across the world are not just being pressured but persecuted. I have provided just one of a long list of such examples. We are speaking about them at the official level. There is proof of this information. Why haven't they attracted the interest of American journalists, human rights organisations and the specialised bodies whose job is to protect the freedom of speech and journalists' rights? Are they not interested? I can't believe this. There are enough facts. In fact, there are so many of them that they cannot go unnoticed.

I would like to remind you that similar proceedings were initiated against seven freelance employees of Sputnik Latvia and Baltnews

in December 2020. Their homes were searched, and their computers, mobile phones and bank cards seized. We can see that “undesirable” journalists have been and are still being treated as criminals without any legal substantiation.

We urge the Riga authorities to abandon their repressive methods and media bias and to stop using the EU’s illegal sanctions to cover up their open infringements on the freedom of speech.

We hope that the concerned international platforms and human rights organisations will provide an objective assessment of the Latvian authorities’ actions.

It is impossible to think that they can escape the attention of agencies that purport to be independent, unbiased and objective.

[Back to top](#)

Danish authorities’ anti-Russia statements

We have to once again bring to your notice the Danish authorities’ consistent promotion of anti-Russia approaches in the context of the preservation of the historical memory of WWII.

In particular, the Danish Ministry of Defence posted a statement on the social media in connection with the 75th anniversary of Soviet troops’ withdrawal from Bornholm, saying that Denmark became free only after the Soviet troops left the island in 1946.

This statement is an example of a deliberate distortion of truth. The special operation conducted by the Red Army in May 1945 was aimed at liberating Bornholm from Nazi occupation. A German garrison with 12,000 troops stationed on the island refused to surrender. The Danish party was notified that the Soviet troops would remain on Bornholm until all military matters were settled with Germany. Abundant proof of this is available in Soviet and Danish documents.

It appears that Copenhagen is deliberately distorting facts in an attempt to rewrite the book of history by tearing out pages that look unsuitable in the current political situation. This misrepresentation is especially cynical this year, when we will mark 80 years since Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union.

Juggling with historical facts in this manner is inadmissible.

[Back to top](#)

Norwegian documentary Front Fighters

We have taken note of a documentary drama titled Frontkjempere ("Front Fighters") that came out on April 6 on the NRK channel of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation to mark the anniversary of Norway's occupation during World War II (April 9, 1941). The plot of the film is rather unsightly: the film tells the story of former members of the Norwegian Legion of the Waffen-SS who fought "heroically" on the Eastern Front, including near Moscow, Leningrad, in the Caucasus and North Karelia. Notably, Norway's Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Defence were involved in creating this so-called documentary.

Hiding behind the "benefits" of a non-politicised exchange of opinions, the film creators distorted and turned history upside down presenting war criminals and voluntary Nazi collaborators as naïve victims of Hitler's propaganda and patriots who were resisting the expansion of Bolshevism. The creators are urging viewers to refrain from condemning the "front fighters" but instead try and understand their motives. The "veterans" are broadcasting a complete lack of remorse or repentance, while their complicity in Nazi atrocities has been left out of the script. The "heroes" are flaunting their "achievements in battle" and recall, with smiles, the efficiency of German machine guns and the heavy death toll of the Red Army.

We would like to remind director Alexander Kristiansen and other creators of the film about one fact that evaded their attention. During the Petsamo–Kirkenes offensive, including battles for liberation of Eastern Finnmark, the Soviet Union lost over 6,000 soldiers. Some 12,678 Soviet prisoners of war died in Nazi camps on the Norwegian territory. For comparison, Norway's total casualties in World War II amounted to 10,262 people.

The film creators are not even perturbed by the fact that the activity of the Waffen-SS received a legal judgment under international law during the Nuremberg trials, the outcome of which is not subject to review.

This kind of pandering to war criminals has nothing to do with freedom of speech. It leads directly to the glorification of Nazism and is fraught with the falsification of our common history.

Until recently, Norway never made such major attempts to revisit the WWII events, with government bodies actually encouraging such distressing projects.

We remember very well the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Soviet Red Army's liberation of Northern Norway from Nazi occupation in Kirkenes. The anniversary in October 2019 was attended by King of Norway Harald V. Sergey Lavrov headed the Russian delegation.

We praise the exemplary maintenance of Soviet war burials in Norway, installation of new monuments and Norway's diligence in identifying the people who perished in Nazi camps on the Norwegian territory, as well as the care and attention it shows towards our veterans. As you remember, in September 2020, we commented on the ceremony at the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow where Great Patriotic War veteran Mikhail Podgursky was

presented with Norway's state medal for the participation in the defence of Norway on behalf of the King of Norway.

Broadcasting such an anti-masterpiece by a Norwegian state television and radio company is absolutely unacceptable and shameful. It is good to know that the documentary has already been criticised in Norway itself. We also expect an honest and unbiased response from official Oslo.

[Back to top](#)

Second report by OPCW Investigation and Identification Team on alleged use of chlorine in Saraqib, Syria on February 4, 2018

We noticed the report on the investigation of the February 4, 2018 incident in the Syrian city of Saraqib that supposedly involved the alleged use of chlorine, published on April 12, 2021, on the internal portal of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The release of these findings shortly before the final meeting of the 25th session of the Conference of the States Parties (CSP) to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC, The Hague, April 20-22, 2021) was by no means accidental. The conference is going to consider a draft decision stripping Damascus of its rights and privileges under the CWC for the allegedly proven involvement of the Syrian armed forces in three chlorine and sarin attacks in al-Lataminah in March 2017, as reported by the Syrian opposition. This kind of politically motivated decision is unprecedented for this purely technical international agency.

This is the second report, imposed on the OPCW by Washington and its Euro-Atlantic allies in violation of the CWC, prepared by the "attributive" Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The conclusions are absolutely identical and follow 'the best traditions'

of this quasi-prosecution group – “there are reasonable grounds to believe that at approximately 21:22 on February 4, 2018, during ongoing attacks against Saraqib, a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force codenamed “Alpha-253”, under the control of the Tiger Forces, hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder. The cylinder ruptured and released a toxic gas, chlorine, which dispersed over a large area, affecting 12 named individuals.” Is this the kind of language that an international organisation based on international law should be using? Does “there are reasonable grounds to believe” sound like a conclusion underlying a major report they have been working on for so long?

This time, to make the biased, politically motivated and pseudo-professional conclusions more plausible, the team allegedly called in every expert they could dream of, including experts in meteorology, toxicology, weapons, geolocation and digital technology. Every trick in the book was used to build a solid research basis for supposedly the only possible version that involved a 120-litre cylinder with household chlorine dropped from a helicopter, apparently from a great altitude, on a piece of wasteland in the suburb of Saraqib. In a word, IIT – an illegitimately created agency – seems to be continuing the vicious reporting practice previously used by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and the former OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

At the same time, it is encouraging that the numerous forgeries and frauds used during the increasingly sophisticated preparations of such accusatory reports against Damascus are becoming public knowledge thanks to some honest and politically unbiased employees of OPCW, a once respected organisation that was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 specifically for the successful chemical demilitarisation of Syria. More confirmation of

this is that Berlin Group 21, an independent association that includes a number of credible and internationally known scientists and public figures, has issued a new appeal to the leaders of the OPCW Technical Secretariat calling for all of the aforementioned original OPCW inspectors to be heard. Those people had once helped shed light on the FFM's corrupt activities during the investigation of the chemical provocation organised by the pseudo-humanitarian NGO White Helmets in the Syrian city of Douma on April 8, 2018. They also proposed a thorough review, made by the OPCW's Scientific Advisory Board, of what the inspectors consider to be serious procedural and scientific irregularities in producing the perverted final version of the report about that chemical provocation by the White Helmets, skilled in such staged video productions, committed by OPCW employees who were not strong enough to rebel against the politically-motivated pressure from their bosses.

We hope that justice will ultimately triumph and that the forces behind such unseemly action tarnishing the OPCW's former reputation and the integrity of the CWC will finally see reason. Otherwise, the entire system of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which has been formed with such difficulty over the decades, will be irreparably damaged.

[Back to top](#)

Russia's position regarding Cypriot settlement

We welcome the UN Secretary-General's initiative to hold an informal five-plus-one meeting dedicated to the Cyprus issue in Geneva on April 27-29. We are closely following the preparations for this. It is a positive sign that all the interested parties have expressed readiness to attend it. We hope that the upcoming event will help relaunch the negotiations and find compromise solutions to problematic issues.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia is categorically against the enforcement of any external ready-made formulas and temporary solutions. The Cyprus communities must be free to choose their own future.

Our principled stance remains unchanged: we stand for a comprehensive, fair and sustainable settlement in the best interests of all Cypriots based on the generally recognised legal formula that provides for the creation on the island of a bizonal, bicomunal federation with a common international jurisdiction, sovereignty and citizenship.

The insistent advocacy by some capitals to change the current principles of a settlement from a federal to a two-state model is unacceptable. Any change of the basic parameters is only possible with the approval of the UN.

A major aspect of a settlement is the gradual demilitarisation of the island and the replacement of the obsolete system of external guarantees with the safeguards of the UN Security Council.

[Back to top](#)

Russia's activities at the East Asia Summit

We are interested in strengthening the ASEAN-centric system of multilateral relations in the Asia Pacific region and in promoting a unification agenda in the region and applied cooperation on the ASEAN-centric platforms.

In 2016, long before the COVID-19 pandemic, we submitted to the East Asia Summit our proposals on regional cooperation to prevent infectious diseases. At our initiative, the East Asia Summit leaders adopted a statement on strengthening collective capacity in epidemics prevention and response at their 15th meeting in November 2020. The statement was co-authored by Vietnam,

Indonesia, China and Thailand. Our ASEAN colleagues are now considering the concept of a cooperation mechanism to address the threat of infectious diseases, which we prepared within the framework of the agreements reached at the highest level.

This year we will discuss what's happening with the travel industry in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. The importance of this topic for ASEAN was reaffirmed at the relevant Russia-ASEAN high level consultations held on February 3, 2021. Moreover, this subject has been added to the priorities of Brunei's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2021. We can clearly see that our Asian partners have a positive view on our initiative that the ASEAN leaders adopt a statement advocating practical steps towards this at the 16th East Asia Summit.

In light of the analysis of all aspects of the regional developments, we believe that the EAS should continue to concentrate on the matter of new threats and challenges. We have the political and legal framework for this. In particular, in 2017 and 2018, the EAS approved the Russian drafts of the final documents on countering the ideological challenges of terrorism and the threat of foreign terrorist fighters.

[Back to top](#)

Online education resource Russian Electronic School

We would like to draw the attention of Russian citizens living abroad to the state education resource Russian Electronic School that has been launched by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, with the support of numerous partners. This education resource is unique in terms of its scale.

In fact, this is a real Russian school employing the best Russian teachers who use custom-made curricula. This e-school is available

on any digital device, including computers and smartphones, as well as in any country. Its lessons completely meet federal state education standards and the main general education curricula. The lessons' custom-made exercises and tests aim to make things easier for pupils and to better prepare them for the final state certification in the form of the Unified State Examination for high school graduates and for those enrolling at Russia's higher education institutions.

This resource provides Russian-speaking citizens in Russia and abroad with an absolutely free, safe, highly convenient and effective tool for teaching high school pupils wishing to enroll in Russia's higher education institutions and for earning education degrees in line with high Russian standards.

The Russian Electronic School's website posts interactive lessons dealing with the entire school curriculum from Grade 1 to Grade 11, a catalogue of museums, films and music concerts, as well as a collection of the best methodological material and teaching aids for all lessons for educators.

We hope that the Russian Electronic School will become an irreplaceable educational asset for all those wishing to study in Russian, for those who are interested in this country and its culture, and who want to link their future with Russia.

[Back to top](#)

Presidential elections in the Republic of Ecuador

On April 11, the second round of presidential elections was held in the Republic of Ecuador, and the winning candidate is Guillermo Lasso.

The President of the Russian Federation has sent a message of congratulations to the President Elect of Ecuador.

Russia and Ecuador are linked by traditionally close friendly ties that have been developing dynamically on the basis of equality and mutual respect. In 2020, both countries marked the 75th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations.

We hope to further expand our constructive political dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation in all directions. We are confident that relations between our countries will continue to get stronger in the interests of maintaining international stability and security.

[Back to top](#)

Answers to media questions:

Question: We are approaching an important anniversary for diplomacy, the 60th anniversary of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Do you think it has lost its relevance in modern conditions?

Maria Zakharova: We attach particular importance to the upcoming 60th anniversary of the signing of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (April 18, 1961). It is one of the most relevant international treaties that secured the status and functions of diplomatic missions, privileges and immunities of diplomatic staff, the procedure for handling diplomatic mail and many other rules of diplomatic communication, thus becoming an important element supporting stability in interstate relations.

It should be noted that, under Article 51 of the Convention, the document actually took effect much later – on April 24, 1964 – 30 days after 22 instruments of ratification were deposited with the UN Secretary-General. The Soviet Union, by the way, ratified the Convention on February 11, 1964.

The Russian Federation has always highly valued the role and

significance of the Convention as one of the fundamental acts of international and diplomatic law. Our country strictly follows its letter and spirit and always requires as much of its partners from foreign countries. Let me remind you that 192 states are parties to the Vienna Convention.

Overall, Russia's approach invariably involves consistently upholding the foundations of the international legal system. The erosion of this system is unacceptable, as is interpretation of international law solely to suit one's own interests while disregarding any arguments. In this context, although the document does contain certain archaic elements, there is no reason to believe the Convention has lost its relevance. The fundamental principles contained in it are still applicable and provide a framework for the architecture of diplomatic relations. That said, reciprocity has been and remains the main principle of building relationships between states.

At the same time, we do not rule out that there may be a need, at a certain stage, to modernise the text of the Vienna Convention and adapt it to modern realities. If the international community makes a consolidated decision on this score, Russia will be ready to participate in the process.

Unfortunately, in recent years, we have been compelled to highlight increasingly frequent and serious violations of the Vienna Convention, on the part of Western countries that are trying to replace international law with their own rules-based order. We cite evidence of this at almost every briefing. One of them is a vivid manifestation of aggressive policy on the part of the United States, which is brutally destroying diplomacy.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Will Russia, in response to Washington's actions,

expel American diplomats?

Maria Zakharova: As I said, there will be an inevitable response. It will be worked out. You will find out shortly. Our experts are preparing it now.

I would also like to point out that at this very moment, the US Ambassador to Russia is at the Foreign Ministry, and he is not going to enjoy the meeting. We will certainly update you on the results.

[Back to top](#)

Question: During the recent phone conversation between Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden, the two presidents agreed to give instructions to relevant agencies and offices to work out matters that they discussed. Is there any clarity regarding what kind of instructions these were? Has the process of preparing a summit of the Russian and US presidents begun?

Maria Zakharova: Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov commented on everything that relates to the possible bilateral summit. Please be guided by this information.

As for the signals that were supposed to be sent, we have a feeling that the US party sent them somewhere else. Given what mess they have made today.

[Back to top](#)

Question: How can you comment on the recent referendum in Kyrgyzstan on the adoption of a new Constitution given that it evoked a controversial reaction in the West? In particular, independent EU observers mention breach of secrecy, the violation of election campaign rules, and bribery of voters.

Maria Zakharova: There is not much to say about the

objectiveness of EU's assessments of electoral processes in the world. If their approaches at elections at various levels in the United States had been unbiased, it would have been worthwhile to pay attention to their comments on elections in other countries. Given that their assessments before, during and after the election in the United States cannot even be called laconic, much less unbiased, there is no point paying attention to them in other cases. First of all, they should get some experience and a reputation at being objective. It would be the first steps toward being trusted and being able to make such comments. So far, there is nothing to talk about, so let us concentrate on our own assessment of the developments in Kyrgyzstan.

On April 11, 2021, Kyrgyzstan hosted an election to the local governments and at the same time a referendum on adopting a new Constitution, which implies transition from the parliamentary to presidential form of government. According to the preliminary data of the local election commission, over 79 percent of voters voted for the new Constitution.

The referendum has been passed. International observers say that the voting was open, free and legitimate.

We hope that the will of the Kyrgyz people will facilitate domestic stability, the development of the republic under the rule of law and stable growth of its economy.

[Back to top](#)

Question: In a recent interview with Iran's Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia has been taking steps to move towards de-dollarisation of the national economy and to stop using international payment systems controlled by the West. Is this connected to the Kremlin's concern voiced by Dmitry Peskov that Russia

may be cut off from these systems any day, including as part of the sanctions policy? During the interview Sergey Lavrov said that Russia had been working actively to that end. Could you tell us more about this work? Has any timeframe been coordinated?

Maria Zakharova: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has commented on this topic many times during numerous interviews.

It is no secret that Russia has been working consistently to reduce the share of dollars in the national currency reserves and in mutual settlements with our main trade partners. You can read the statements to this effect made by the Russian Government and various ministries and agencies, including the Foreign Ministry leaders.

At the same time, we are working to create and promote an alternative payments architecture that will be aligned with analogues in other countries that do not depend on Washington's policy. You know all too well when and why we started doing this. We understand that Washington is using its national currency and its financial system as tools for conducting its policy aggressively, not just contrary to or in violation of the international legal framework, but with a view to destroying it.

I would like to note that these actions are a forced measure taken due to the loss of our trust in the Western ability to pursue a non-politicised approach to ensuring uninterrupted access to the international financial system, the decreasing predictability of the US economic policy, uncontrollable introduction of unsubstantiated restrictions, and continued threats of their use.

Of course, this is putting in question not just the expediency of using the US national currency as a priority payment currency, but also a reliable use of the payment mechanisms controlled by the

West. It is logical that due to these circumstances we have to take measures to minimise the potential economic losses and transaction risks.

As for Visa and MasterCard, they have already raised the possibility of suspending their operations in Russia. It was in response to these insinuations that we created and launched the National Payment Card System (NSPK) in 2014 to ensure the uninterrupted use, efficiency and accessibility of money transfer services. A Mir card of the national payment system was issued in 2015.

We have been working consistently to synchronise Russia's national payment systems with those of several other countries. We are developing interaction between the Mir system and foreign analogues such as China's UnionPay, Japan's JCB and the international payment system Maestro. These co-branded cards are accepted both in Russia and abroad, for example, in Armenia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkey. We are also working energetically to develop the cooperative use of Mir cards in several other countries. But this is taking a great deal of time and effort.

It would be premature to speak about a concrete timeframe for the creation of comprehensive national payment instruments and their promotion on international markets, or any possible new Western restrictions against Russia in the financial sphere.

According to the statements made the bank's management, the Bank of Russia does not envision any risks of being cut off from Western payment systems. However, our experience shows, as Dmitry Peskov has already said, that nothing can be ruled out in our current relations with the West. Therefore, we must prepare for any unfriendly moves by our co-called partners.

[Back to top](#)

Question: The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said it had sent a request to Russia on the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border, but Moscow refused to give any explanations. What is your comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: Ukraine invoked the 2011 Vienna Document on confidence and security-building measures to request that Russia, via the OSCE channels, “provide information on the purpose of Russia’s military activities near Ukraine’s border and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, the exact locations used for the operation, its completion dates, as well as the names, subordination, number and types of participating military units.”

We preferred to overlook the mistake made in the request about the territorial affiliation of Crimea and answered on the merits: “The Russian Federation is not engaged in any significant military activity on a scale that would require a notification under the Vienna Document. All activities carried out by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and involving redeployment of troops in the zone of application of confidence and security measures are part of routine combat training and do not warrant notification.”

On the other hand, we consider it necessary to highlight a truly alarming exacerbation of tensions around Donbass due to the provocative actions by the Kiev regime.

Kiev continues to send new military equipment to the contact line. From March 1 to March 31, the Special Monitoring Mission reported 288 cases where Ukrainian weapons (including 142 pieces of large-calibre artillery, over 100 mm) were spotted at Donbass railway stations controlled by the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Rubezhnoye, Pokrovskoye, Zachatovka, Konstantinovka, and Slavyansk). The number of attacks on the Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics

also increased. For the first time since last July, when additional measures were taken to strengthen the ceasefire, the Armed Forces of Ukraine used artillery prohibited by the Minsk agreements against the LPR. Unmanned aerial vehicles are increasingly used, and the number of victims among the civilian population is growing. There was publicity about a case involving the death of a child in the village of Aleksandrovskoye (DPR), although Kiev tried to evade responsibility. The death was confirmed by the UN Human Rights Observer Mission in Ukraine. But this is not the only problem. In fact, over the years, hundreds of boys and girls have been killed, not just one or ten, and their deaths remain unpunished and even unnoticed by the international community. It is as if they are turning a blind eye. This is just shocking.

More and more statements and actions by representatives of the Kiev regime prove its actual departure from the Minsk agreements. By and large, there seems to be nothing left of Vladimir Zelensky's pre-election statements and promises to end the war. His most recent remarks are openly aggressive and belligerent. At the same time, Ukraine is clearly counting on the intervention of its Western supervisors. Bad idea. Any scenarios of a forceful suppression of Donbass, let alone a seizure of Crimea, are infeasible and suicidal.

We do not count on the sanity of those who took over power in Kiev and deceived the expectations of people who believed in their peaceful intentions. By the way, this is one of the reasons why the Russian side does not invoke the relevant provisions of the Vienna Document, which has been repeatedly violated by Ukraine. We appeal directly to those who, by their actions in 2014 and later, took responsibility for the anti-constitutional armed coup and are responsible for the destruction of a peaceful multinational country.

We call on Ukraine's 'allies' to stop inciting the Kiev regime to

bloody and destructive adventures by supplying weapons, ammunition and non-lethal military products, as well as funding, and by providing intelligence, training and political support.

Russia is not interested in triggering a civil war in Donbass and will make every effort to protect its residents and ensure peace in that long-suffering region. This is our basic stance. The Russian leaders have repeatedly spoken about this.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his deputies have expressed concern that Turkey and other NATO members are encouraging Kiev's militarist sentiments and their disappointment about the use of Turkish drones over Donbass. What operations are they involved in? Why is it a problem that NATO states and Turkey are selling combat drones? After all, Russia also engages in military technical collaboration with Turkey.

Maria Zakharova: I would like to point out a matter of principle: a civil war is underway in Ukraine. The nationalist forces, which seized power in Kiev in February 2014, have been conducting military operations against their own citizens for the past seven years, using artillery, armoured vehicles and even combat drones. These forces came to power not through elections but by staging a state coup. It was not the first time this was carried out, and they accomplished the coup with foreign assistance, including from NATO countries, which has led to violence. This is the distinguishing feature of this situation.

Civilians are being killed. They are unable to live peacefully. We have pointed out on numerous occasions that those who are interested in the developments in that region and in Ukraine in general, primarily journalists, should visit Donbass, Donetsk and

Lugansk, where they will be able to use their professional skills to form their own opinion. They should talk with local people – not necessarily the military, but ordinary civilians – and ask them why many of them are worried by the delivery of weapons to Ukraine. They will answer your questions, not based on theory but because they know about this from their everyday lives. Civilians, worse still, children go outside and never return home.

We believe that the supply of weapons, including drones, to Ukraine from NATO countries, including Turkey, will not help bring about a peaceful settlement in Donbass. The international community has been using legal means with the aim of putting an end to the civil war in Ukraine on the basis of the law. The Minsk Package was drafted and adopted by the sides. These agreements have become binding after their approval by the UN Security Council. Do they say that arms deliveries to Ukraine should be increased to attain peace? Are arms deliveries a key or additional element of the Minsk agreements aimed at restoring peace? No, they set out absolutely different measures. The Minsk Package is a roadmap for peace and normal life. It does not mention weapons. These arms deliveries run counter to Ukraine's commitments. Why is Kiev doing so much to receive ever more weapons and nothing to implement the binding provisions of the Minsk agreements? This policy is only fostering Ukraine's militarist aspirations and could encourage it to use military force to settle the internal conflict. This approach is diverting the Kiev regime from the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

This is extremely alarming. We will never tire in our efforts to draw attention to this and to urge Kiev to comply with the Minsk agreements.

[Back to top](#)

Question: After the talks with the Foreign Minister of Egypt, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned Turkey and other countries against providing military support to Ukraine. Did Turkey give any response about understanding the situation?

Maria Zakharova: I have already said enough on this matter today. I can add that during contacts with Turkish leaders, we have a regular exchange of opinions on all, even the most sensitive, issues on the international and regional agendas. In particular, we inform Turkey about Russia's stance on the southeastern Ukraine.

Of course, Ankara is well aware of the fact that we are highly concerned about foreign countries encouraging Kiev's hostile course of action. We always stress the importance of refraining from steps, including in the military and technical cooperation, that could trigger an escalation in Donbass.

We intend to continue an engaged and professional dialogue with our foreign partners and to discourage them from stimulating Kiev's revanchist sentiments. Instead they should use all available political and diplomatic resources to make their fair share of contribution to stabilising and improving the situation around Ukraine.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Recently, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev made two bombshell and even provocative statements. The first statement was that Yerevan and Zangezur are allegedly historically Azerbaijani territories. The second statement concerned debris of an Iskander missile that was allegedly found in Karabakh. What do these statements have to do with Russia in such a complicated geopolitical situation? What is Russia's response to the reports of Iskander missile debris that was allegedly found?

Maria Zakharova: As far as the Iskander debris is concerned, Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov has already commented on this matter. This is our military's area of responsibility.

[Back to top](#)

Question: For the first time in nine years, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov paid a two-day visit to Pakistan. Islamabad considers this a big step towards friendship between the two countries that should facilitate, among other things, the peace process in Afghanistan. What is Russia's stance on the Pakistan visit? What agreements were signed?

Maria Zakharova: We share Pakistan's view of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on April 6-7. During the friendly consultations between Minister Lavrov and his Pakistani colleague Shah Mahmood Qureshi as well as his meetings with Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan and Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the current state and development prospects for bilateral relations were discussed in detail, including the possibility of further strengthening cooperation in trade and the economy and in counter-terrorism activity. The parties also had an in-depth exchange of views on the topical issues on the regional and international agendas with a focus on cooperation at multilateral platforms such as the UN and the SCO. The parties specifically discussed the state of affairs in Afghanistan and expressed mutual concern about the degrading security situation, growing terrorist activity and the strengthening of ISIS positions in the north and east of the country. The minister and his counterparts also reaffirmed their shared intention to further support the contending forces towards a constructive resolution which should end the civil war in Afghanistan through agreements on

forming an inclusive government. In particular, they highly praised the outcome of the Expanded Troika meeting on the settlement in Afghanistan, which was held by Russia, China, the United States and Pakistan in Moscow on March 18.

[Back to top](#)

Question: President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said the other day that Azerbaijan was ready to work on a full-fledged peace treaty with Armenia in the future. Will Russia mediate this peace treaty? Is there any perception of its contents?

Maria Zakharova: We cannot but welcome initiatives aimed at establishing lasting peace and neighbourly relations between Baku and Yerevan. The agreements of November 9, 2020 and January 11, 2021, reached by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, serve as a reliable foundation for doing this. We are ready to continue facilitating these processes in every way.

It goes without saying that Azerbaijan and Armenia are only setting out on a difficult road towards establishing the required level of mutual trust and normalising bilateral relations. It is important that this movement take place against a positive background, including the media background.

The parties will have to overcome many difficulties and obstacles. While cooperating with our Azerbaijani and Armenian friends, we underscore the fact that the stability and sustainable economic development of the South Caucasus meet the interests of all of Russia's regional partners.

We hope that, in their practical activities, both countries will strive to take steps aiming to normalise relations and to create an atmosphere of trust, rather than new demarcation lines.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Does the Foreign Ministry plan to request information from the Japanese party on Japan's plans to dump radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear power station into the Pacific Ocean?

Maria Zakharova: On April 13, 2021, we already provided a detailed comment on this matter. The comment is posted on the Foreign Ministry's official website and on social media networks.

I can repeat once again that we have voiced serious concern over the Japan's intentions. We are expecting the Government of Japan to display adequate transparency and to inform interested states about their actions which could pose a radiation hazard. We are expecting more detailed explanations on all aspects linked with the planned discharge of radioactive water into the ocean. We assume that, if necessary, Japan will enable monitoring of the radiation situation in areas where this discharge is scheduled to take place.

We hope that Tokyo will address this important matter in a highly responsible manner, and that it will take the required action in order to minimise the negative impact on the marine environment and prevent an aggravation of the environmental situation, and that it will not hamper the economic activities of other states, including fishing operations.

We will follow this subject during our contacts with our Japanese partners.

[Back to top](#)

Question: After it was reported that President of Russia Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden had held their first telephone conversation, Jen Psaki promised new restrictions against Russia. Is the US trying to provoke Russia into reciprocating by adopting new sanctions immediately after the

first top-level contact?

Maria Zakharova: No, the US is just trying to destroy our bilateral relations.

[Back to top](#)

Question: What is the reason for the new rhetoric glorifying criminal organisations such as the SS in Scandinavian countries? You have said that the Danish Defence Ministry has all but accused the Soviet Union of occupation. Is there a connection between all this and Ukraine?

Maria Zakharova: Regarding the trend of rewriting history in Western Europe, notably Scandinavia, it is a complicated story that began long ago, even before Ukraine. For some forces, it is an attempt to take revenge, while others are trying to prevent the acceptance of the Soviet Union as a country that defeated fascism and is refusing to make compromises with the Nazi policy and ideology. The first such attempts were made immediately after the end of WWII. There are documentaries and a great number of facts proving this. We watched this happening during many decades. These attempts were not so obvious and cynical. It was an undercover struggle because the direct participants of the war were still alive. It is impossible to lie to those who defended the world from fascism and Nazism with arms in hand. While they were alive, it was impossible to bring up the young on the ideology of reincarnation and the whitewashing of those who killed their fathers and mothers. This is why that harsh and absolutely unscrupulous struggle was waged secretly, behind the scenes.

As the older generation departed and the number of witnesses and participants of those events decreased, this secret struggle came to the fore. They dropped all pretense. There was no longer any sense in hiding, and they started saying openly what they had said

secretly before. It all began long ago, but now this struggle has entered an active phase.

Why these countries? It is a trend, a mainstream policy enforced by the so-called collective West – Brussels, the EU and NATO. When we say the EU, we mean NATO, because the EU does not have a sovereign and independent political policy of its own. It has long been steamrolled by the North Atlantic Alliance.

In short, it is a common trend that is being enforced through the so-called sponsor money and budgets, as well as through a ramified system of allegedly non-governmental organisations which are financed from government sources. A relevant paid-for information and political campaign is being waged against history. It takes the form of the demolition of monuments, the production of feature and pseudo-documentary films, and scientific – in fact, pseudo-scientific – conferences. Ukraine is one of the most glaring examples. It has become the territory of the experiment. How can the mentality of a nation whose fathers and grandfathers rose in arms against the Nazi ideology be changed? This is a global experiment. How can Nazi accomplices be glorified in a country which the Nazis drenched in its own blood? This seems impossible, in theory, but in reality they are succeeding. It is a question of money and effort, the elimination of Ukraine's real national interests and their replacement with alien values. It is a matter of double standards and the distortion of one's own history.

It is not in the past few years that Ukraine became the stage for a war against historical truth. It all began decades ago with the subversive Western operations to send former collaborators and military accomplices of the Nazis to Ukraine, and efforts to enforce the nationalist ideology and its elements, an ideology that has become the leading one now. These elements include the

glorification of Nazi accomplices, the rehabilitation of criminals and, shockingly, the legalisation of the symbols that used to be unquestionably associated with Nazi supporters.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Is Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expected to visit Reykjavik for the Atlantic Council meeting on May 19-20 as part of the Russian delegation? Is there a chance that Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden will meet in Reykjavik?

Maria Zakharova: Top-level summits are the competence of the Presidential Executive Office.

On May 19-20, a ministerial session of the Arctic Council will take place in Reykjavik, where Russia is to take over the chairmanship for the next two-year period.

The overall priority of the Russian chairmanship will be to promote the sustainable development of the Arctic region. We plan to develop cooperation in four priority areas: the population of the Arctic, including indigenous peoples; environmental protection, including adaptation to climate change; socioeconomic development of the region; and strengthening the Arctic Council as a key regional forum for intergovernmental cooperation.

Given the ongoing constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the upcoming ministerial session of the Arctic Council in Reykjavik will be held in a mixed format. Some delegations from a number of countries will participate at the venue, while others will join the meetings online.

At the moment, we believe the Russian representatives should actually travel to Reykjavik to participate. The delegation is to be led by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. The matter is still under

consideration though. We will inform you as soon as a decision is made.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Thank you for the information about the Russian Electronic School and the Foreign Ministry supporting the project. We earnestly ask you to continue this support and even expand it. The children of our compatriots live in various countries and are familiar with the mentality of these countries. In the future, they could be support to the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Maria Zakharova: Why don't you describe your vision conceptually and send it to us? We will forward it to relevant experts. We will make our comments on your proposals, or we will take them into account in our work.

[Back to top](#)