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# **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks on Russia's foreign policy priorities and answers to questions during the Government Hour at the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Moscow, December 1, 2021**

36-46 minutes

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Ms Matviyenko,

Senators,

The fruitful dialogue between the Foreign Ministry and the Federal Assembly has become a tradition, as the current meeting shows.

Thank you for your invitation to speak during the Government Hour.

We highly value the principled position of Russian senators on topical matters of the international agenda and their invariable readiness to help promote Russia's priorities on the global stage, both in bilateral relations and at various multilateral parliamentary platforms.

We attach great importance to further expanding our interaction with both houses of the Federal Assembly and their committees in the interests of strengthening the country's international

positions. Diplomats have to feel the pulse of society and to sense the mood of the public.

Creating the most favourable and, most importantly, the safest external conditions for the country's dynamic domestic development and for raising the well-being of our citizens and the quality of life remains a high-priority aspect of all our professional efforts. This goal is stated in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by President Vladimir Putin in November 2016, and other doctrinal documents. The support of the Russian legislators, who express the interests, expectations and aspirations of Russian citizens, is particularly important to us.

The amendments to the Constitution, which were approved by a nationwide referendum last year, are an invaluable asset during our work. They have a foreign policy dimension as they elevate the efforts to protect our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, to defend the rights and interests of our compatriots and to preserve the historical truth, to an entirely new level.

Colleagues,

Speaking at an extended meeting of the Foreign Ministry Collegium on November 18, 2021, President Vladimir Putin outlined principled assessments of the situation in key areas of the Russian diplomacy's activities and set forth ambitious long-term practical tasks for us.

The situation in global affairs remains complicated and tends to degrade further in some respects. The main reason for this is the lack of readiness on the part of Washington and its allies to recognise the reality of the emerging polycentric world order, their persistent striving to address arising problems by force using a wide range of illegitimate tools, from unilateral economic

sanctions to direct interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states in the spirit of “colour revolutions.”

Western countries have gone so far as to purposefully demolish the UN-centric system of international law, which was established after the Great Victory, and is trying to substitute it with the so-called rules-based order that benefits them alone. These rules are written behind the scenes, using restricted formats from which the West stands to gain and in circumvention of the UN. The West then tries to impose these rules on all others.

The US initiative to convene the so-called Summit for Democracy ranks among the most odious and ill-conceived projects that have been hatched under the brand of this “world order.” The summit is scheduled to be held on December 9–10 via videoconference. The United States alone has decided who should be invited to this friends-only party, and who should keep out. At the same time, following air strikes in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya, following the 20-year experiment in Afghanistan and other audacious undertakings, Washington’s vain attempts to usurp the right to determine the extent of democracy in any given state looks simply cynical. Obviously, this line is aimed at creating new demarcation lines in international affairs. This time, we are talking about a standoff between a group of countries claiming the right to decide the destinies of humankind and other members of the international community.

In these conditions, there can be no reasonable alternative to Russia’s independent and open foreign policy line. We are not imposing anything on anyone, nor are we teaching anything to others. We are always ready to expand equitable interstate dialogue with everyone on the solid foundation of international law and principles of the UN Charter. At the same time, we

drastically suppress any attempts to speak with us in a preaching and arrogant manner, let alone blackmail us and interfere in our domestic affairs. We always respond in a tough and resolute manner. Our conversation with any partner can only be mutually respectful and should be aimed exclusively at finding a balance of interests.

This line which is directed at consistently protecting national interests and simultaneously establishing neighbourly relations with foreign partners in all regions has been proven to be successful. It makes it possible to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with an overwhelming majority of countries that account for over 80 percent of the planet's population.

As a great Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power, and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia understands its great responsibility for peace and stability on the planet. We promote unifying global and regional agendas aimed at mobilising collective efforts to successfully tackle modern challenges, from combating terrorism to overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. This is the philosophy that underpins President Vladimir Putin's initiative to convene a summit of the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

This is not creating an exclusive club of countries that will make decisions for the others. In fact, that would be simply impossible, considering that new centres of development are emerging in the world. Our country is a very proactive participant in a great number of innovative global governance structures that reflect the reality of the multipolar world. Most notably, these are BRICS and the SCO, groups without "leaders" and "followers," without "teachers" and "students," groups where decisions are made based on a carefully balanced consensus. Another

structure is the Group of Twenty, which is now involved in discussing many important financial and economic issues. Members of the Western G7 as well as BRICS members and their allies are represented in the Group of Twenty on absolutely equal terms.

Genuinely democratic multinational associations involving Russia, such as the CIS, the EAEU, the Union State and the CSTO, operate successfully across the vast Eurasian space.

Speaking about processes in Eurasia, I would like to note the high level of the Russia–China strategic relations, relations of truly comprehensive nature that play an important stabilising role in regional and international affairs. Our privileged strategic partnership with India is moving forward as well. We are strengthening links with the majority of our partners in the Asia-Pacific, including ASEAN. We are working to integrate the potentials of the EAEU and China's Belt and Road initiative, to reinforce the ties between the EAEU, the SCO and ASEAN, and to harmonise the integration across our enormous continent. All these efforts pave the way to realising President Putin's initiative to form a greater Eurasian partnership, not only to ensure sustainable economic growth on the continent but also to build a contour of equal and indivisible security.

Our cooperation with Africa is entering a completely new stage, thanks to the consistent fulfilment of the agreements reached at the first in history Russia–Africa summit, which was held in Sochi in October 2019. In cooperation with our African friends, we are preparing for the second high-level meeting. We are also expanding our links with Latin America, both bilaterally and within multiple sub-regional bodies.

Having made a significant contribution to decolonisation, our

country strongly condemns any attempts to dictate somebody else's will to independent countries and nations. Attempts of former parent states to claim any 'special rights' with respect to the African continent are unacceptable to us, as is Washington's ambition to act in the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine in the Western hemisphere. We will continue to protect the right of every state and nation to determine its own development path.

The efforts to settle numerous regional conflicts remain on the agenda. Russia makes a concrete contribution to the settlement of such crises, including our efforts to counter terrorists and promote a political dialogue in Syria. Our country plays a key role in ending the bloodshed in Nagorno-Karabakh and in searching for sustainable solutions to disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We are actively involved in the work on Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, the Iran nuclear programme, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Korean Peninsula and other hotspots.

Special attention goes to the developments in Ukraine. Our position is unchanged: it is possible to overcome the intra-Ukrainian crisis only through full and consistent compliance with the Minsk Package of Measures, which was approved by Resolution 2202 of the UN Security Council and has become an inseparable part of international law ever since. The key to success is a direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict: Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. Russia is ready to continue providing mediation efforts as part of the Contact Group and the Normandy format.

Unfortunately, the situation is seriously aggravated by the openly destructive stance of the NATO states, which seek to pull Ukraine into their orbit and turn it into an "anti-Russia" (as [President of Russia Vladimir Putin put it](#)). Lethal weapons are

being delivered to Kiev on a larger scale, and provocative manoeuvres with the participation of the US on land, in the air and at sea near our borders are happening more often. At the same time, they try to dictate to us how the Russian Armed Forces must behave on our own territory.

In accordance with President Vladimir Putin's instructions to receive long-term trustworthy guarantees of Russia's security on the western borders, we are preparing relevant initiatives. We will continue to respond very strongly to any unfriendly steps, and we will not allow any harm to our national interests.

It would be much more sensible and useful to join efforts in dealing with global issues such as the green transition and digital transformation than to try to whip up tensions and Russophobic rhetoric. Being among the advanced countries, Russia is open to the most comprehensive cooperation under the auspices of the UN. We will clamp down on the attempts of the West, in particular, the US and the European Union, to privatise the right to determine the climate agenda and to use it to introduce new forms of protectionism and unscrupulous competition.

We will continue to promote the truly universal agreements on the all-round strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regimes and the conventions prohibiting chemical and biological weapons.

Among our absolute priorities are the protection of the rights and interests of our citizens and compatriots abroad, the promotion of the Russian language, culture and education, and support for Russian business circles on global markets.

We will continue to provide assistance to the country's regions in the development of their international contacts. The Foreign

Ministry's Council of the Heads of Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation shows good results. Another meeting of the council took place last week; extensive recommendations were adopted there. The practice of presenting the regions' potential to foreign partners at our ministry and our foreign missions has also proven useful.

Colleagues,

While acting responsibly and predictably, Russia – together with its allies and like-minded partners – will continue to consistently work on strengthening the international order outlined in the UN Charter following the Victory in the Second World War, and firmly prevent attempts to rewrite its results. We will stand up for the democratisation of interstate dialogue and the improvement of collective and legal principles in global affairs.

I confirm our interest in the further development of close friendly cooperation with the representatives of the legislative bodies of the Russian Federation by uniting the potential of classic and parliamentary diplomacy. This will also be the focus of the United Russia commission on international cooperation and support of compatriots abroad, created at the instruction of the President. Plans call for holding its first meeting before the end of December 2021.

**Question:** What is the Foreign Ministry's position on countering ethnic intolerance towards Russian compatriots, residents of Central Asia, cases of which (in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) were already reported by the media?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Our position on intolerance based on ethnic or other features of a nation is universal: we will not accept intolerance towards any nation, not only our compatriots (naturally, they are a priority). Any manifestations of racism,

chauvinism and other forms of xenophobia in any state of the world are unacceptable.

Russia is a traditional initiator, with a large group of co-authors, of over 50 annual UN General Assembly resolutions that denounce as unacceptable the glorification of Nazism, racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. The overwhelming majority of votes are for this resolution but, unfortunately, the entire European Union abstains from voting, whereas the United States and Ukraine vote against it. The West maintains that any appeals to avoid or curb manifestations of racism and chauvinism are an encroachment on freedom of speech. It is clear that nothing can justify such freedom of speech. With the signing and ratification of the UN Charter, all UN members without exception agreed with the verdict of the Nuremberg Tribunal. We have no doubts in this respect. Meanwhile, the EU feels ashamed. This is clear from our contacts with our European partners but the Baltic states, Poland and some other countries are persuading them to abstain. These countries are having a careless attitude to the revival of rabid Nazism, glorification of Nazi criminals with torch-light processions, destruction of memorials to the victors and erection of monuments to collaborators.

As for the CIS, we have special mechanisms for reviewing these issues there. We do not want these single countries to reflect systematic problems. We noted that the CIS Charter declares the formation of its Human Rights Commission. About a year and a half ago, we told our CIS friends that this commission would be very useful if we launched it for practical work. They agreed. I hope we will be able to report on progress in this area in the near future.

**Question:** The coronavirus pandemic has introduced

substantial changes in the usual formats of joint cultural projects with foreign countries. What do you think about the peculiarities and prospects of cultural cooperation with foreign countries in the new reality, in part, the holding of cross years of culture?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The coronavirus has affected all kinds of contacts, especially cultural ties, considering that these are large events with big numbers of participants that involve reciprocal visits, theatre and other performances, etc. That said, we have not cancelled a single cross year. In some cases, we suspended such events for six months or held most of them via videoconference. But we have preserved offline meetings in all cases, although they are not on the same scale as usual. We are committed to this form of interaction (weeks of culture, festivals, film festivals and theatrical arts). It makes it possible to use the state's resources in conjunction with public and cultural diplomacy. This is the strongest argument in our international actions. The pandemic revealed a possibility of making frequent use of the online format even after return to normal life. This is true not only of cultural contacts but also of interstate and intergovernmental ties. This will be effective and useful to supplement our contacts with "live" meetings. We are now starting to use this practice while broadening our offline contacts.

I am flying to Stockholm today to attend a meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council. All OSCE members will be represented there in person. In planning such events, the organisers will make better use of videoconferencing even when the pandemic is over.

**Question:** Relations between Russia and Turkey have always been in the focus of attention. We can see that Turkey has become more active, and that it implements a more active

foreign policy on the territory of the post-Soviet region's countries. Do deliveries of Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 strike drones to the Armed Forces of Ukraine mean that Turkey is beginning to play a negative role in resolving the civil conflict in southeastern Ukraine?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It is common knowledge that Turkey is “working” actively in adjacent territories and in more distant expanses. We respect the right of each country to use its capabilities for promoting its interests and establishing closer contacts with any specific state, especially if Turkey's compatriots live there. We are also working actively in this direction. There is only one condition: all such actions on the part of each state should be legitimate and linked with the promotion of legitimate interests. Our Turkish partners do not contest this axiom. Indeed, Turkey is working actively with Central Asian states in the post-Soviet region. All of them, except Tajikistan, are members of the family of Turkic-speaking nations.

Turkey is working actively with South Caucasus partners, primarily with Azerbaijan. It voices a special position on the Ukrainian crisis and retains its position on Crimea. To my mind, everyone realises that this matter has been closed for good. Nevertheless, Turkey regularly makes official statements on the unacceptability of annexing Crimea. It was involved in a gathering called the Crimean Platform, organised by President Vladimir Zelensky with encouragement from the United States and its allies.

Like many others, Turkey is noting the need to completely fulfil the Minsk agreements, but it attaches a special meaning to this call. It is not even hinting, but suggests that Russia fulfil its obligations more actively, although the text of the Minsk

Package of Measures contains no such obligations. The document clearly mentions the concerned parties, Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. This approach was manifested in a recent statement by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who noted that he was ready to act as mediator between Moscow and Kiev. The Kremlin, in the person of Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov, has already responded to this tirade and said that Russia is not a party to the conflict. We are now watching how the Turkish press is responding to these statements and the Presidential Press Secretary's answer. Our leaders are to speak with each other by phone. I believe that these matters will also be discussed.

The positive feature of relations between Russian and Turkish leaders, foreign ministers and other government members is that, regardless of the serious nature of various discourses about important international problems, the concerned parties always discuss specific disagreements and the most effective options for coping with these problems in a comradely, candid and mutually respectful manner. This is exactly how all states without exception should deal with one another. We will strive to accomplish this, while fulfilling the instructions of President of Russia Vladimir Putin who confirmed them at the Russia Calling! Forum. In a nutshell, we will press for long-term, reliable and legally binding guarantees of the Russian Federation's security in connection with current developments on our western borders. Only this mutually respectful discussion can defuse tensions, now being deliberately whipped up by the West.

**Question:** In your opinion, how likely is it that the Ukrainian authorities will fulfil the Minsk agreements? Is there a possibility that the Russian Federation will impose sanctions against Ukraine for its failure to abide by the Minsk agreements?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Russia opposes unilateral sanctions as a matter of principle. In Ukraine's case, this would have been unilateral sanctions. Ukraine imposed sanctions on many Russian nationals and certain entities, so these companies no longer contribute to Ukraine's GDP. Nevertheless, mutually beneficial economic ties carry on, and nobody is complaining about this. All we hear are misgivings over issues that can resonate in the media space without hurting those who spread them. The Ukrainian leaders act in this peculiar manner. We responded by taking the appropriate measures against entrenched, hardcore Russia-haters who make daily media appearances with unacceptable statements.

As for the Minsk agreements and their implementation, we are trying to make this happen. I think that in terms of carrying out the UN Security Council humanitarian resolution, this is a lost cause for Ukraine. In the first weeks and months of Vladimir Zelensky's presidency, we heard him say that the Minsk agreements are bad, and should be perpetrated in order to retain the Western sanctions against the Russian Federation. He said it all. There is no way of putting it better to show what you are actually worth. The Minsk agreements are obsolete – this is what we have been hearing in numerous statements by the prime minister, deputy prime ministers, foreign and defence ministers, as well as commanders of the joint forces operations and the commander of the Ukrainian armed forces.

Only recently, Alexey Reznikov, who used to be Deputy Prime Minister, then worked on the Contact Group, and is now Defence Minister, said that this is a political document that cannot be viewed as a binding international commitment. What about the UN Security Council resolution? They pretend that this document is no longer relevant, since the previous

administration adopted it, so they need something new, like drawing in the United States and Great Britain, and this way everything will be fine. At the same time, they are making legislative arrangements to dismantle the Minsk agreements, at least as far as Ukraine's obligations are concerned. I am referring to the already adopted laws on language and education that are outright discriminatory against the Russian language. They started by giving the Ukrainian language priority over all other minority languages. Just as we expected, an exception was later made for EU languages, so that only the Russian language faced discrimination, not only in education, but also in everyday life. For example, a person could face criminal charges for talking in Russian to an obstinate shop employee who did not like being addressed in Russian.

Ukraine is currently drafting a crucial law. President of Russia Vladimir Putin has drawn the attention of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron to the law titled On the Principles of the State Policy of Transition Period. It makes the Minsk agreements null and void. It replaces total and unconditional amnesty for all the participants in these events (military action) with a screening process and mandates criminal charges against the heads of the two regions, the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics. Instead of holding elections and amending the constitution to grant Donbass special status, the law provides for establishing a civilian and military administration there (without any elections). It is said that the Ukrainian armed forces need to restore the country's territorial integrity. Once the troops enter this region, a civilian and military administration is to be established there, so forget about the status, elections and the rest. In his conversations with Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, the Russian

President raised this issue several times. They reassured him that they would do everything to make sure that this law is not adopted. However, the ball keeps rolling. Ukraine sent this law to the Council of Europe, the Venice Commission, which did not take into consideration the position expressed by Russian members on the Commission who insisted that this law directly contradicts the Minsk agreements and the relevant UN Security Council resolution. They turned a blind eye to these arguments and focused on the legal technicalities. In the end, they wrote that some corrections and changes must be made, and that was it. We had to make my correspondence with my French and German colleagues public. These are specific matters that were stated on paper. They took this badly, but could not say anything substantial in response. They have been promising to influence Kiev to bring it to its senses for many years now, but nothing happens. On the contrary, Kiev is becoming increasingly brash in its aggressive stance on the Minsk agreements and the Russian Federation, and attempts to provoke the West to support its belligerent aspirations. Everyone must know what is actually going on, what our so-called partners have been promising, and what they are actually doing. We will never lose our composure, and will never say: "That's it for us." Let them say this, while we will keep insisting that the UN Security Council resolutions be implemented.

**Question:** What priority measures are being taken to strengthen the cultural component of Eurasian integration, in part, to support the Russian language and culture, and protect our common history in the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)? How can we help in the Federation Council with the efforts made by the Foreign Ministry in this respect?

**Sergey Lavrov:** In the past few years, the President of Russia

and the heads of the Federal Assembly have paid special attention to this issue. Valentina Matvienko initiated the programme for creating Russian schools, starting in Central Asia and beyond. Armenia will prepare a similar programme. After all, we did a lot for this. That said, if we take our financial support, it was much below what the West is doing through its cultural centres: the British Council, Alliance Francaise, the Goethe Institute and the like. But we also have the Pushkin State Institute of the Russian Language, the government programmes “Russian language abroad” and “Russian schools abroad,” the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the Fund to Support Compatriots Living Abroad and the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) Foundation (that receives decent government funding).

Dmitry Kozak and Alexey Overchuk co-chaired several meetings on this issue that were held in the past year and a half, after the changes in the Government and the Presidential Executive Office. The participants decided to streamline all these programmes that pursued parallel things and were often redundant. They decided to create a comprehensive government programme to facilitate international development (the Government has already approved this decision). All these projects, including support for the Russian language and our compatriots abroad have become part of this programme. Now its only task is to coordinate all these efforts. A substantial increase in funding is planned for the next stage (I hope it will be approved in a year and a half or two years).

The Foreign Ministry is the flagship department in this programme, while Rossotrudnichestvo will act as its chief operator. This is a difficult programme. Its participants will have to overcome many bureaucratic barriers. Every department has

its own projects linked with its work. This is a natural situation in any government system. But there is also political will – to give priority to government institutions.

**Question:** Does the Foreign Ministry rely on the Russian regions? Do you plan to use the special geographical location and potential of the Astrakhan Region in strengthening Russia's positions in the geostrategic Caspian region?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Yes, we do. It is impossible to conduct intensive, practical and effective diplomacy without the regions. In any talks between President of Russia Vladimir Putin and his foreign colleagues, prime ministers, the lion's share of bilateral issues is linked with the regions, including Moscow and St Petersburg. About 90 regions take part in various projects with the PRC.

The picture in the Caspian region is pretty much the same. Since I assumed the office of Foreign Minister, the Astrakhan Region has been among the leaders in developing international ties, primarily with its Caspian Sea neighbours and other states. In 2014, the Astrakhan Kremlin hosted the Caspian summit. It was productive and laid the foundation for completing the work on the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. Four coastal countries have already ratified it. Now it remains for Iran to follow suit (it asked for a pause because of the election campaign). We make a point of returning to this issue. An entirely new situation will take shape when the convention comes in force. The main political and legal conclusion is that the five Caspian coastal states assume full responsibility for what is happening in this region. The presence of foreign armed forces is not allowed in the Caspian Sea. This is a timely decision considering the appetites of some Western colleagues as regards the entire post-Soviet space, especially the Caspian

Sea.

The Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea was signed in Aktau (Kazakhstan) in 2018. Now we are preparing a regular summit in Ashgabat. It was possible to hold it sooner via videoconference (there are already drafts of additional agreements ready for signing) but all parties want to wait for a time when they could meet in person. This is always more effective and allows the parties to discuss important issues in an atmosphere of greater trust.

Our proposal to create a Caspian Council is among the initiatives that will be submitted for discussion at the new summit. We suggest Astrakhan as its location. The parties are now approving details. Nobody objects to the idea but a number of our colleagues fear this will be yet another bureaucratic structure. But it depends on how it is established. It can be created without a huge secretariat. The participants can hold regular meetings on various aspects of Caspian cooperation on a permanent basis, not only during preparations for another summit. Astrakhan is always on our radars.

**Question:** The equipment at the checkpoints on the Russia-Kazakhstan border near Omsk has been in use since 1998 and no longer meets modern requirements. We ask you to support our efforts and to draw the attention of the relevant ministries to this problem.

**Sergey Lavrov:** The issue of Russia's image in the eyes of its foreign partners and its own citizens definitely falls within the competence of the Foreign Ministry. I will look into this matter.

We can see this situation not only on that part of the border but also in several other regions bordering on our neighbours. Numerous requests have been submitted to improve the border

crossing procedure. We will do this within the framework of interdepartmental commissions.

**Question:** Since Recep Tayyip Erdogan became president, Turkey has been actively positioning itself as the centre of the Turkic world. The map of “Greater Turan” recently presented to him includes all Turkic peoples, including those living in the Volga Region and Altai, with the Republic of Turkey as its centre. However, we know for a fact that the ancestral homeland of Turkic peoples is in the territory of the Russian Federation. Can you comment on this and Turkey’s increasing humanitarian offensive in the post-Soviet space?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I have already spoken about this today. There is nothing wrong with maintaining ties with one’s kinfolk and compatriots. On the other hand, compatriots are those who lived in the same country – in this instance, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

There are areas where our kinfolk and compatriots live. We can also paint the map of the world in certain colours of different intensity. It will include the post-Soviet space and our compatriots representing the peoples of the Soviet Union who are living now in Germany and other European countries, Israel, the United States and Latin America. Different colours can be used.

Our Turkish partners have established the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, which has been renamed the Organisation of Turkic States. This was announced at a summit held in Kazakhstan. We are comfortable with that. There is nothing wrong if the issue concerns culture, support for language traditions, humanitarian and educational exchanges. Actually, we should do the same more energetically. We have

just now mentioned this in connection with humanitarian cooperation. But if there are alarming facts (they have not been confirmed or explained yet), such as the intention to introduce elements of military cooperation, this will not benefit anyone. I don't think this would be in the interests of Turkey and its partners in the Organisation of Turkic States.

Our presidents are planning a telephone conversation. Tomorrow I will meet with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on the sidelines of the OSCE summit in Stockholm. We discuss these issues frankly and openly. There is nothing wrong with that, because problems should be raised openly to look for solutions that must take into account the need to balance interests.

There is nothing wrong in pursuing a cultural policy, including in the ways we and Turkey are doing, but only if these efforts are really focused on culture and are not aimed at creating a foundation for something more substantial, something that will affect the interests of other states.

**Question:** How can we stop the alarming decline of the system of international relations to the bottom and return readiness and ability for constructive dialogue and mutually acceptable decisions to the international agenda? As you are well aware, there is a page in the history of Soviet diplomacy when the Soviet Union initiated the establishment of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), known as the Helsinki Agreement, during one of the worst periods in the Cold War. It included the heads of European states, the United States and Canada, and it did much to help turn the tide in that tense situation. Can this analogy be applied to the current period?

**Sergey Lavrov:** You are correct; we often discuss this. It

appears that our Western partners cannot, or more likely don't want to deal with us on the basis of mutual respect, or to look for mutually acceptable solutions such as those that led to the establishment of the CSCE, which was succeeded by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). There is little doubt that during the OSCE Ministerial Council in Stockholm tomorrow we will hear ultimatums and aggressive statements, most of them Russophobic, demanding that we change our policy. We will try to encourage them to talk, but there is a limit to everything. During the expanded meeting of the Foreign Ministry Board held on November 18, 2021, the President instructed us to push for serious legal guarantees of Russia's security on the Western border. He stressed (he repeated this during the Russia Calling! forum yesterday) that we prefer dialogue aimed at reaching mutually acceptable agreements that will ensure collective security as well as the security of all parties to the agreements, most likely the OSCE in the first place. We are ready for this. If our Western partners have lost or are losing (the process has not reached the final stage yet) the culture of dialogue and the culture of looking for compromise, this means that we are knocking on a locked door, which will never open. I hope this is not so. But sometimes, when you hear what some Western speakers say, it looks as if this really is the case.

**Question:** Given that the new National Plan is being developed, do you support the idea of holding consultations with our international partners to prevent this type of poaching activity?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We always support this. It is inevitable. In our country Rosrybolovstvo [the Federal Agency for Fishery] is the main authority on these issues. We have fishery agreements with a number of our neighbours and not only them; both Russia

and our partners in whose waters we legally catch fish have much to gain from them. Under these agreements, relevant commissions meet regularly and a dialogue is being maintained. Issues requiring political solutions are considered by the prime ministers and their deputies. The Foreign Ministry takes part in these inter-governmental and economic commissions. We are very interested in seeing that obligations that our partners are required to meet under international law are honoured. Naturally, no one is without sin, particularly in this field. So, we must also set an example, showing what we are doing at the level of the state and the government to ensure compliance with international requirements. I know that the Federation Council has prepared a recommendation for delivering annual reports that specify who among our partners and how will meet this requirement to put an end to poaching. I believe this is a useful initiative, which allows countries to take a systematic approach to this problem.

**Question:** Would you please comment on Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's statement about the possibility (from his viewpoint) of deploying Russian nuclear weapons on the territory of his country?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I would describe this statement as a serious warning prompted by the reckless policy that is being pursued by the West. You may have noticed that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has become the main orator and biggest actor in the West, although when he was Prime Minister of Norway, he behaved accordingly and maintained the normal negotiating process. Something must have happened to him or else he is being forced to be aggressive to the extreme. When a new coalition was being formed in Germany – it has taken shape by now – it was leaked to the media, among other things,

that some members of this coalition pushed for the requirement to remove nuclear weapons from Germany to be included in the government programme. At a time when this matter was not yet decided, Jens Stoltenberg said that if Germany was unwilling to keep nuclear weapons, they would move them to the east, i.e., to former socialist countries. What else needs to be explained to our Western colleagues to stop this sort of folly? I would say Alexander Lukashenko reacted to these irresponsible statements designed to not only build up confrontation but to try and provoke a military conflict. I don't know what they are hoping to achieve but this is an outrageous position. If they are entertaining an idea like this – to deploy nuclear weapons in Poland, Romania or some other place close to the Russian Federation in violation of all things imaginable, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Russia-NATO Founding Act, – then hardball counterexamples must be used to show the futility of this sort of undertaking.