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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to questions during the Government Hour in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly, Moscow, January 26, 2022



Esteemed Mr Volodin,

Esteemed Deputies of the State Duma.

Thank you for yet another opportunity to speak before the State Duma deputies during the Government Hour.

The diplomatic service and the Federal Assembly continue to maintain regular and close contact despite the complicated epidemiological situation. In December 2021, I met with your colleagues from the Federation Council. Today, I am looking forward to our intensive dialogue on foreign policy and international issues.

It is especially important for us in the Foreign Ministry to feel the

priorities of the legislative corps. We appreciate your advice on practical issues. The State Duma deputies represent the interests of all strata of Russian society and understand well the attitudes of the people you represent. The creation of safe and favourable external conditions for the country's steady domestic development has been and remains the main goal of the Foreign Ministry. We recorded this goal in the new National Security Strategy that the President approved last July. It will also be reflected in the updated version of the Foreign Policy Concept, which is nearing completion.

Colleagues,

President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly spoken about the international situation, as well as our foreign policy goals and initiatives. He has laid out the important overall goals at the recent expanded sessions of the collegiums of our Ministry and the Defence Ministry and in his other speeches and news conferences.

Deep changes are taking place in the international arena. They are not positive, to put it mildly. The entire system has been thrown into disarray. Like before, the countries of the historical West are not ready to accept the realities of the multipolar world that is taking shape. This new world should be more fair and democratic than a world dominated by one state. The US-led Western countries are trying to counter the objective course of history in a bid to gain unilateral advantage, without thinking much about the lawful interests of other countries (in reality, without thinking about them at all).

Washington and its allies persistently impose their own vision of the world, speaking about the need to establish and respect "a rules-based order." In the framework of this concept, Washington misappropriates the right to draft rules in many diverse areas. In the process it completely ignores the principle of genuine, universal multilateralism that is embodied in the UN, thereby undermining international law and the UN-centric architecture of international ties. "Dissenters" pursuing independent policy, primarily our country and the People's Republic of China, are subjected to punishment through improper instruments, including the various sanctions, demonisation in the media, and provocations by secret services, to name a few.

Recently, the United States and its European allies, who seem to have forgotten some of the culture of diplomacy, have been doubling down on their efforts to contain our country. In addition to illegitimate unilateral sanctions, they are bringing increasingly more military and political pressure to bear on Russia. We only need to review the ever more provocative military manoeuvres near our borders, the efforts to draw the Kiev regime into NATO's orbit, the

supplies of lethal weapons to Ukraine or how it is being incited to direct provocation against the Russian Federation. In this context, demands that we stop holding exercises on our own territory – something we have an uncontested right to do – sound particularly cynical. The double standards in this situation are beyond reason, but we have, unfortunately, long since become used to it.

Clearly, under these circumstances we will not sit on our hands. This situation is in conflict with the principle of equal and indivisible security, which is written into a number of international documents. Last December, we forwarded to the Americans and the NATO member countries, and afterwards made public a draft Treaty Between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Security Guarantees and a draft Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which we had prepared earlier under President Vladimir Putin's instructions. These documents are packaged together and aim to ensure reliable and legally binding security guarantees for our country.

We discussed our initiative with the Americans in Geneva on January 10 and with NATO members in Brussels on January 12. During an OSCE routine session on January 13, our representative drew attention to these documents during the discussion as well. They were handed over to the United States and the Alliance members. On January 21, I had talks on this matter with Secretary Blinken at the request of my US colleagues. He assured me (we hope these assurances will be honoured) that they will provide us with a written point-by-point response clarifying the US stance regarding our specific demands as early as this week. Depending on what this response says (which, I repeat, is expected to come this week), we and our colleagues from other departments will prepare proposals to the President regarding further steps.

We will not allow anyone to bog down our projects in endless discussions. We clearly see this design, especially in the attempts to dump this issue on the OSCE, or in persistent requests coming from the European Union to find a place for it in these discussions. In case of a response that is not constructive, and the West continuing its aggressive policy, Moscow, as President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly stated, will respond as needed. In any case, we want to make clear to everyone that the security of Russia and its citizens is a top priority, and it will be reliably ensured under any circumstances.

As we pursue a multipronged foreign policy (we have been using this term since the early 2000s), we have never fixated exclusively on the western

direction, which, in recent years, has been the main source of threats and challenges. Moreover, the world is no longer “American-centric” or “Western-centric” and will never be unipolar. The vast majority of countries share our fundamental approaches that reject the West’s ideological diktat and zero-sum geopolitical games. Humankind has come of age. There are not so many countries left that are willing to sacrifice their fundamental national interests and pull chestnuts out of the fire for the “senior comrades” from Washington or Brussels.

We have repeatedly stated our view that the centre of global politics and economy has shifted from the Euro-Atlantic to Eurasia. As the largest Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power, Russia is interested in seeing Eurasia’s vast interiors develop as they should, perhaps more than any other country. Today, largely thanks to our efforts, integration within the EAEU is deepening, and its external relations are expanding. This work is coordinated with CIS plans across relevant areas, including trade liberalisation. Major successes in integration building have also been achieved by the Union State of Russia and Belarus. This work continues literally on a daily basis.

We are strengthening interaction with our CSTO allies in order to effectively respond to common threats and challenges, further aggravated by the vague future in Afghanistan. The effective CSTO peacekeeping forces helped Kazakhstan stabilise the domestic political situation following the large-scale foreign-supported attacks on the Kazakhstani state, which is clear evidence of the CSTO’s maturity and reliability.

The Russian-Chinese strategic partnership is a good example of how to conduct interstate relations in the 21st century. In some aspects, it has reached a more advanced level than conventional military-political alliances. The privileged strategic partnership with India is making progress. Our ties with the majority of our partners in the Asia-Pacific region, including with the rapidly developing ASEAN states, are expanding. All of that helps lay the groundwork for realising President Putin's initiative to form the Greater Eurasian Partnership. We see it as a continent-wide approach to economic and cultural cooperation, and in a broader sense, a material basis for building the security architecture of Eurasia. Importantly, the doors to the partnership that we are proposing are open to all countries and associations of our common and vast Eurasian continent.

Cooperation with African countries has expanded to reach new frontiers. Together with our African friends, we are working on preparations for the second Russia-Africa summit scheduled to be held this year. Our partnership with Latin American countries is deepening. We regard Latin America as a

major independent centre of the emerging multipolar world, which is close to us in spirit and has a promising economic future.

Colleagues,

Russia is one of the key guarantors of the UN-centric global architecture and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It is making a big contribution to the maintenance of global security and strategic stability. President Vladimir Putin's proposal for a summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council is designed to promote honest dialogue on key issues. A Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, published on January 3 of this year, is aimed at reducing international tensions. It was drafted at our initiative, which shows once again that Russia stands not for confrontation but for dialogue that must be completely equitable, mutually respectful and designed to facilitate a search for a balance of interests, a fair balance of interests.

The need to ensure international information cyber security, in part by drafting a universal convention on combatting crime in this area, remains one of the priorities in the UN. We have done much in this area with our partners, including the Americans, along the lines of bilateral cooperation.

We are active in other universally recognised multilateral formats, such as the G20, BRICS and SCO. Cooperation in these formats also helps its participants to build up mutual trust. It is through this prism that we regard the advancement of dialogue and cooperation in the Russia-India-China trilateral format that remains relevant for all of its participants.

We are doing much to facilitate the peaceful political and diplomatic settlement of crises in various areas – Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, Libya, the Korean Peninsula as well as Iran's nuclear programme. These efforts help improve the overall state of the world, reaffirming Russia's reputation as a reliable and predictable international partner.

I would like to say a few words about the situation in southeastern Ukraine. Our position on it is invariable. It is only possible to overcome the domestic crisis in Ukraine by fulfilling, consistently and consecutively, all provisions of the Minsk Package of Measures. This document was approved by a resolution of the UN Security Council and, hence, became an integral part of international law. Success can only be achieved via direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict – Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. We are continuously urging the United States, France, Germany and our other Western colleagues that have influence on the Kiev regime to compel it to strictly abide by the Minsk agreements. We will forcefully reject all attempts to blame Russia for lack of

progress, not to mention the outrageous recent attempts of the West to portray Russia as a party to the conflict.

We intend to continue playing an active role in other foreign policy areas as well. Our absolute priority is to protect the legitimate rights and interests of our compatriots abroad and to facilitate the cohesion of the ethnically and religiously diverse Russian World.

We will continue to use the levers of economic diplomacy as much as possible and provide diplomatic support for investment projects with Russian participation abroad. We pay constant, growing attention to promoting the Russian language and the achievements of Russian culture.

The urgency of combating the falsification of history, especially WWII and the Great Patriotic War, is increasing. We strongly oppose any attempts to glorify the Nazis and their accomplices. The overwhelming majority of members of the world community stand in solidarity with us, which is confirmed by the results of the annual vote in the UN General Assembly on our resolution condemning the glorification of Nazism.

Our field of vision includes promoting dialogue between different civilisations and religions. We continue to actively support Russia's participation in international efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic and in general to develop cooperation in the field of global health and overcoming the aftereffects of pandemics.

We will do all we can to promote dialogue among civilisations, and we'll use the opportunities afforded by parliamentary diplomacy and public diplomacy to this end.

The goals that the President set for us are really ambitious. To achieve them and strengthen our positions in the international arena, we are interested in improving our daily, collegial cooperation with the State Duma of the Federal Assembly in every possible way.

We will continue to assist all constructive initiatives through parliamentary diplomacy and inter-party relations carried out by the parties of the State Duma.

Question: The threat of extremists of all kinds penetrating Russia has never been higher. Even before that most migrants, especially from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, benefited from visa-free travel arrangements and arrived in millions, creating major challenges for our citizens and society. They blended into the shadow economy and engaged in illicit production of counterfeit goods, working at unregulated markets, or even joined gangs, organised criminal groups and extremist communities. There are eight to nine migrants per every citizen in

the Persian Gulf countries, but the shadow economy is not an issue there. Would you agree that it is high time we amend migration laws to introduce working visas and official invitations by legal entities and individuals who will be personally responsible for the labour migrants they invite?

Sergey Lavrov: You will find a detailed answer to this question with specific facts in the written materials we have circulated ahead of my speech here today. The gist of our approach is that you cannot compare labour migrants working in the UAE or Qatar with those present on the territory of the Russian Federation. For the Persian Gulf countries, these migrants do not have a history of living together within a single state. For us, this is our recent past. There are different ways of looking at it, but what happened did have a negative impact on ordinary people, including those who were used to freely moving around the large and unified homeland searching for work, etc. We do understand that today these processes give rise to controversy, and see the emotional outpouring every time there is an incident involving labour migrants from neighbouring republics.

Of course, we have been paying close attention to this topic for quite some time now. The Russian Interior Ministry oversees these efforts. For many years now, it has had a dedicated department within its structure that took over from the Federal Migration Service. Its representative sits on the Government Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad, where I serve as chair. Questions on regulating migration are for the Interior Ministry. I know that our colleagues are doing their best to bring order to this field, including by signing agreements with other countries. We insist on signing them with the major countries of origin for our migrants, including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This includes agreements on setting up training centres for labour migrants there for ensuring, among other things, that these people can speak Russian and, even more importantly, that they know and understand the laws and traditions of the Russian Federation. As it happens all too often with any human endeavour, the ideal outcome remains beyond reach. Still, these efforts have an impact on the issues we are now discussing. We are only in the beginning of this journey, with more positive results to come.

Question: The all too famous Russian soft power has not been as effective these past years as we would like it to be, failing to deliver on our expectations. Russian diplomats are getting expelled, the media, such as RT, are under pressure, Russian business leaders face sanctions, and Western social networks are deleting posts with unwanted content. At the same time, we are seeing that our foreign partners are expanding their military presence around the world, upsetting the global balance of power. What can the Foreign Ministry and

you personally do to restore this balance? What are the foreign policy tools that can be put to effective use to this effect?

Sergey Lavrov: I would refrain from talking about the all too famous Russian soft power. The Soviet power was both hard and soft at the same time. You know what the hard power was all about, while soft power was primarily ballet, as well as sports, art, and culture. Overall, this was about reaching out to those interested in our country with what made our state, people, nation and civilisation attractive. Today, the West follows the concept and strategy of containing Russia in every possible way, just as it does with China. This effort does not boil down to attempts to have their allies with their aggressive attitude towards us encircle Russia, or pump weapons into these countries. This is not just about moving their military assets and personnel closer to our borders, but also seeking to undermine Russian culture and damage its prestige. This is the soft power that we have only started to master in the new post-Cold War international order, but we do know how to make the best use of it.

They are trying to discredit the Russian media which are telling the truth or, for the sake of compromise, at least our side of the truth. Even this they seek to cancel out. They are persuading countries across all continents not to work with us. Here is how they did this under the Trump administration: the US Secretary of State travelled across Africa making public statements for everyone to hear and calling on the countries he visited not to trade with us or have any dealings with Russia or China. He would say that we had our own “vested” interests for developing relations with one country or another, while the only goal pursued by the United States is “to bring democracy.” They had no scruples doing this. We are facing serious obstacles for reinforcing our positions around the world, including efforts to promote our culture, traditions and philosophy. Sports provide a glaring example. Senior government officials in Russia have said many times that athletes must not be used in doping experiments. Still, Russia has clearly been treated in an outrageous and unacceptable manner at all sports forums. We are working on all these matters, while also dealing with other objectives you have mentioned, including the escalation of military and political tension by the United States and the developments on European security. That said, right is might, as a German political leader has said recently (turns out he also knows this). For this reason, we will persevere.

Question: State Duma deputies receive appeals from people who have been separated from their children for various reasons because the parents are citizens of different states. Regrettably, there are no agreements on the legal procedure for interaction in the interests of children between Russia and many

states. More precisely, countries have different legal views on this situation. Hundreds of children are living separately from their mothers. How can we change this to meet the interests of the children who have become the victims of their parents' quarrels?

Sergey Lavrov: This is part of the issue of the citizenship of children in mixed marriages, which Leonid Kalashnikov spoke about today. If a child is born into a mixed family in the territory of the Russian Federation, this child is automatically registered as a citizen of Russia. But if such a child is born in other countries, the matter can only be settled with the agreement of the parent who is not a citizen of Russia. Your question is even broader. The main agency in this regard is the Education Ministry. I believe that you should forward your concerns to it to receive a more professional response. The Foreign Ministry's involvement is focused on providing support to our citizens in a difficult situation abroad through diplomatic offices.

We discussed this matter at the Government Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad and the United Russia commission on international cooperation and support of compatriots living abroad, which was established in late 2021 at President Putin's initiative. It is obvious that there is a series of questions we must continue to coordinate. Opinions differ. I am sure that if we give top priority to the interests of our citizens and their children, we will find common ground within our departments and in our relations with the Parliament.

Question: You have pointed out that the collective West is creating "rules" and forcing them on other countries. The Russian Foreign Ministry does not regard them as holy writ, quite rightfully so, and is pursuing an independent policy. Regrettably, when it comes to economic matters, we are still abiding by the budgetary rules of the 1990s that have been forced on us from the outside, investing our hydrocarbon export revenues in foreign countries and therefore exposing them to geopolitical risks. This also concerns the WTO rules, which we are abiding by unilaterally. Maybe we should revise these rules in the economic sphere to satisfy the interests of our national economy instead of complying with the rules that are forced on us from the outside?

Sergey Lavrov: It stands to reason that this matter is not for the Foreign Ministry but for the Government. There are international obligations, and we regularly analyse how we and our foreign partners comply with them at various agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. The relevant agencies, including the Central Bank, assess compliance with the balance of these obligations and the implementation of agreements, in this instance, long-term agreements.

We are trying to reduce our dependence on the US dollar – I am speaking on behalf of the Foreign Ministry, but decisions regarding this are taken by the Government. The Americans are helping us in this regard by taking actions that are undermining trust in their currency and increasing dollar settlement risks not only for Russia but also for any other country in the world. They demand that our partners, including large countries such as India and Egypt, as well as Turkey, break off their military-technical cooperation with us. Therefore, we are stimulating transition to settlement in national currencies. This has prompted anxious discussions among Western political scientists and economists. We are slashing our foreign currency reserves in US dollars, which has not gone unnoticed. Our economic operators can transfer funds more easily now. The Central Bank has invented a system of financial messaging, which is working well. Those who are using it say that it is quite effective. Of course, it needs to be refined, because this system is not as well established as SWIFT, for example, but it is coming along. I believe that we must continue this work. How fast should we work? I don't know, this is not my area of expertise. The important thing is not to disrupt the economic balance we have created. It has come under criticism, but it is helping us to move forward quite confidently.

Question: You have mentioned support for the Russian language in the CIS countries. The number of Russian language schools is decreasing, and many schools don't even have textbooks in Russian. A decision has been taken at the top level to build [Russian] schools in several countries. But the construction of schools will not settle the problem. We need skilled teachers who can professionally teach their subject in Russian. We have started drafting a School Teacher law with Russia's financial support. Teachers with Russian citizenship will be dispatched to the CIS countries. They will have a good salary. The situation has improved after Yevgeny Primakov was appointed head of Rossotrudnichestvo, but we still need support of the Russian Federation. What do you think about drafting a law on sending teachers and textbooks to the CIS countries? Will the Foreign Ministry support this initiative?

Sergey Lavrov: I mentioned the system-wide measures taken in this sphere in my reply to the previous question about the Russian language. I mentioned the situation in Kyrgyzstan and several other countries where the status of the Russian language is included in the national legislation, one way or another. We are giving priority to this matter in relations with all our allies. The Russian language has the official status in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. We hope that our allies will respect and strengthen the official status of the Russian language set out in their legislations.

The year 2023 has been declared in the CIS the Year of the Russian Language as the Language for Inter-Ethnic Communication. Preparations have already begun. This offers an opportunity to look at the current attitude to the great and mighty Russian language and also to implement a number of positive projects, including the Russian School project that you have mentioned. It envisages the turnkey construction of Russian schools, in particular, in Tajikistan. A similar turnkey project is underway in Armenia, where a school is being built to provide Russian tuition.

We are training teachers. There are two main formats: our teachers go there on a rotational basis, with shifts lasting up to a year, or teachers from the partner country come to receive training in Russia. In principle, this system is effective. I am sure that there can never be enough teachers. I regard your initiative as positive.

Question: The integration process within the Union State of Russia and Belarus has picked up momentum. One can only praise that. Plans call for electing the Parliament of the Union State. When, in your opinion, will our countries be ready for the election to the Union State Parliament? What do you think about the proposal to house the parliamentary centre in the ancient city of Smolensk? Maybe Smolensk should become the capital of the Union State? This city has a unique geographical location: it is located at an equal distance from Moscow and Minsk. This decision, if made, will give a great impetus to the development of the city and the entire Smolensk Region.

Sergey Lavrov: The Union State treaty sets out many tasks. Those include not only the creation of the Union State Parliament, but also matters related to the issuing centre and a common currency. These all are future plans. The current priority, as the presidents and prime ministers of the two countries have emphasised, is to implement 28 union programmes that together are an important and determining step towards integration. I know that my colleagues in the Government and their counterparts in the Government of the Republic of Belarus are actively involved in the implementation of these programmes. When we see the results (it was announced it would take two to three years) we will have a new material base, as the classics said, to proceed from regarding our future steps. It is clear that the decision will be made by the presidents, but the Union State treaty and tasks outlined there will remain relevant. The progress, with regard to all circumstances, should be fast, but also considered and balanced, and must take into account all factors related to this most important integration task.

As for Smolensk, it would be a joint decision.

Question: A number of our foreign partners are using soft power systematically and aggressively. For example, they are using NGOs in the CIS countries, working with people, using networks of bloggers and journalists as a policy to isolate those countries from Russia. The Foreign Ministry is doing a great job. Thank you. Russian NGOs and federal executive authorities are working there as well. Their work is somewhat fragmented, each having its own direction. This weakens our positions abroad. Strong measures are needed in this context: a consolidation of the state, the involvement of NGOs, monitoring, and a roadmap. Maybe we need to give additional authority to Rossotrudnichestvo, provide additional funding for the humanitarian policy, and create a coordinated ANO like the Goethe Institute, which will promote the entire package – the Russian language, the Russian cultural code, a stronger international development assistance policy, higher quotas for students at our universities, and approved Russian language textbooks? What options for cooperation with the Ministry are possible?

Sergey Lavrov: I have already said that soft power (for lack of a more recognisable term) is one of the most important parts and one of the most important tools in foreign affairs. You are right: this policy was adopted many years ago and has reached a significant scale by now, with all kinds of non-governmental organisations and foundations planted in world politics and imposing on other countries the development models the West is interested in. As a rule, in the vast majority of cases, they are interested in scenarios where Russia's neighbours would become estranged from the Russian Federation, and more remote countries would not develop friendly relations with Russia or the People's Republic of China. We understand all this. The vast majority of these non-profit organisations were created with government funding. The US Agency for International Development, the Foreign Office in the UK, and other agencies that live off government money are redistributing the funds to non-governmental organisations, usually led by former Western officials. We do not have much experience here. The Soviet Peace Fund and a few other non-governmental and youth organisations was all the experience we had in the USSR. Compared to what is happening now, it is a drop in the ocean. We have specifically created the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund. According to its charter, its mission is to finance Russian NGOs that are ready to reach out at the international level. There is not much money for that. Everyone knows this. In key foreign countries, organisations similar to our Rossotrudnichestvo or Pushkin State Russian Language Institute have budgets that are greater by several orders of magnitude. It is a problem we are well aware of. We are

working on this. There is fundamental support from the President. Their funding has been gradually increased in recent years. We will continue to make efforts towards a more significant increase.

Question: Is the Foreign Ministry considering the development of “community diplomacy” in relations with other countries? Certain international disputes are difficult to resolve at the interstate level. Is it possible to make progress through additional communication channels on environmental issues, education, human rights, or medicine? This could help ease the tensions that official diplomacy is currently unable to deal with, and thereby improve Russia’s image. Are you considering the possibility of creating a specialised agency for this?

Sergey Lavrov: I don't really know what “community diplomacy” is. Therefore, before answering the question of whether we are ready to support the establishment of an agency for this, I would like to understand what it is. If you are referring to what we now call sports diplomacy, scientific (not gunboat diplomacy), then it is about communities of scientists, athletes, and the youth movement. Such agencies are being established now without any prompting from the top. If this is the case, then it should be supported. Moreover, there is no need for any special support, as enthusiasts are active in meeting and international networking anyway.

This is the first time I hear the term “community diplomacy.” If you could send us some information that would make this clear, we will definitely respond and discuss this more specifically.

Question: Quite a few Russian nationals are detained or imprisoned abroad. I would like to draw attention to the lengthy pre-trial detention of our nationals. It is not an uncommon situation concerning the fates of hundreds of Russians, and it happens across the globe. In particular, Russian nationals have faced criminal charges in India, Greece, China, the United States and other countries. What measures does the Foreign Ministry take to protect the rights and interests of our fellow nationals detained abroad, often on trumped-up charges?

Sergey Lavrov: This is a serious issue that takes up a significant amount of time in our work and relations with Russian law enforcement agencies – specifically, the Prosecutor General’s Office and the Investigative Committee.

We take action to insist on immediate access to these people. There have been contrived excuses given and blatant provocations to prevent access, as in the cases of our well-known fellow Russians Viktor Bout, Konstantin Yaroshenko and Roman Seleznyov convicted in the United States and a number

of others. This problem has many aspects. One is we have to insist that the United States fulfil the treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, which US authorities try to avoid in every possible way. In open violation of its obligations, Washington refuses to reveal its suspicions against our nationals – primarily, when it comes to cybercrime. Instead, US authorities demand that the country where the suspect is located detain and then extradite this person. The countries of location (usually European) cannot object to their “older friend” from overseas.

There have been cases when Russian nationals did break the law of a foreign country. Some cases are quite unusual. For example, in Sri Lanka, our scientists collected bugs and, apparently, caught some relict insects which local people worship. We worked hard to have them released, for almost 18 months, and eventually, they went free, with conditional sentences and fines. Our entrepreneurs offered to cover their fines.

One should review the laws of a country where they travel. There is a special section on every country on the Foreign Ministry website exactly for this purpose. We call on our citizens to be extremely cautious. Our general advice is: think back on any relationship that may be of interest to the United States. We cannot predict everything that may happen. Every person should make their own decision, considering Washington's current unacceptable and aggressive conduct. There is a full scope of measures we have to take in specific cases (as we did with Viktor Bout, Konstantin Yaroshenko and other people serving sentences in the United States). There are international legal obligations we must fulfil. And one should exercise extreme caution in this particularly difficult situation before travelling abroad, especially if they have certain knowledge or former contacts in Western countries.

Question: What does the analysis of “colour revolutions” and especially recent events in Belarus, Moldova and Kazakhstan show? It shows that NGOs supervised by embassies of unfriendly countries, on the one hand, and a great number of students whose tuition is paid for from the budget, on the other hand, are used as tools to organise mass protests. For example, some 100,000 Belarusians have studied in Poland and 20,000 Moldovans have studied in Romania in the past 20 years. Also for the past 20 years, all personnel of security and defence services in Central Asian republics have studied in Turkey or the United States, which is then used as a tool to force us out. Don't you think it would be helpful to reestablish and multiply quotas in military and civilian higher schools?

Sergey Lavrov: I think it is very important. We are working on this with

civilian and military higher schools (the Defence Ministry and the Interior Ministry).

I agree that absolute figures are currently incomparable with the examples you cited. The Russian Foreign Ministry has been insisting on a more generous policy in the last few years. It looks like we are saving our current expenditures. But in the long term, it is an attempt to save money on our own security and stability in countries around us. We support this idea.

Question: I cannot but share my concerns about the future of the Eurasian Union. Three weeks ago, administrative buildings in Almaty, Kazakhstan, came under an unexpected attack. Fortunately, in addition to “soft force,” we have the real hard force in the shape of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation’s military units. Under the Agreement on the Eurasian Economic Union, it is Almaty that will, starting in 2024, host the unified supranational financial regulator. Integration is fine only at the level of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, whereas we have under-integration at the level of government agencies in the EAEU countries. The already approved decisions are endlessly shelved, suspended or postponed.

Kazakhstan’s gas price crisis has shown what a narrow interpretation of integration as only a “free trade area plus” can lead to. Even customs instructions continue to serve as a tool conserving the national corruption revenue.

Sergey Lavrov: The Eurasian Economic Union is still young, although it has come into its own as an integration entity. It is a magnet for an increasing number of nations wishing to cooperate with it, including sign free trade area agreements. Its positive development becomes clear if we look at what stage the European Union was during a comparable historical period after its establishment.

I agree that we ought to act more proactively and creatively. As the largest EAEU country, Russia should and does feel its responsibility for its effective development. Here inevitably certain aspects arise related to subsidising. A specialised Eurasian Fund and the Eurasian Bank have been created and their performance is steadily being improved. I think this is one of our key tools, which we must promote.

The EAEU should align the matters it considers with the CSTO’s activities, specifically in the field of biological security. It seems to be related to healthcare research, but in fact there are US (the Pentagon’s) biological laboratories in the majority of countries bordering on Russia. It is hard to understand what these laboratories are doing. We are completing the negotiating

process with all the neighbouring countries in question, those that host such laboratories. We are explaining to our neighbours that these facilities must operate in a transparent mode and have no foreign military members [on their staff], for this is no longer medicine or healthcare but matters related to pathogens that could be used as warfare agents.

This is just one example that should compel us to harmonise the agendas of the EAEU, CSTO, CIS, and other organisations – generally, our associations in the post-Soviet space.

Question: We are strongly supporting the Foreign Ministry's effort to support [Russian] compatriots. You are doing a lot of work. The ideal is still a long way off, but that does not mean this work should not be done. A separate issue is the rights of compatriots who are already citizens of the Russian Federation but live outside of this country. Suffice it to say that the A Just Russia – For Truth party has two million voters who permanently reside outside of the Russian Federation. We are particularly concerned about countries that were former Soviet republics. What additional state guarantees or changes in legislation are needed to reliably protect the rights and interests of the Russian Federation citizens who live there? Do we perhaps need additional legislative regulation? We are ready to listen and provide support.

Sergey Lavrov: If a Russian compatriot has permanent residence in another country, while remaining a Russian citizen, and something happens to him or her (something good or otherwise), then, as a dual citizen, he or she is subject to the laws of the host country. Our law enforcement practice is identical, and we are doing the same.

But there are some unique cases. For example, the Union State of Russia and Belarus. There is a special agreement on “equalising” all and everyone – business entities, economic operators, citizens, etc. A lot has been done, but still not enough. This is just one way to advance on the protection of rights. In the remaining cases, when there are no comprehensive documents stating that all rights of the citizens of both countries must be equally protected, it is necessary to sign separate agreements.

If you have examples of the problems that our citizens face in neighbouring foreign states, I would be grateful if you send them to us. We will respond.

Question: Before the New Year, I was visiting Tiraspol and chatted with our compatriots (there are nearly 200,000 of them there). The most painful problem they have is how to exchange their present passports and get new ones issued. The pandemic year, 2020-2021, has suspended operations of a consular

office. A huge queue has formed. Resources are in short supply. Can more consular assistance be rendered to this particular office to clear the queue? Is it possible to devise additional measures to support our compatriots out there? After all, it is an open secret that a number of neighbouring states are running events to encourage our citizens to come and get another passport.

Sergey Lavrov: You have mentioned the reason behind this situation. There was a state of emergency over there for one and a half years (until last summer). The consular service was frozen for epidemiological reasons. The effort to resume the service has been going on since summer 2021. A queue has formed (numbering tens of thousands of people), mostly those seeking new passports.

As soon as the pandemic let us do so, we promptly sent an inspection there. They visited Tiraspol, studied everything closely, and submitted their proposals on the equipment and personnel that needs to be sent there to help the existing temporary consular office. I think the queue will shrink quite soon.

Question: The United Russia party has the federal historical project, Historical Memory. The party is focusing on maintaining military burial sites. We are following the developments abroad. The Foreign Ministry of Russia is exercising its authority to perpetuate the memory of Russian soldiers buried in foreign states. Are the laws on implementing these efforts effective? What exactly is the ministry doing in this area? Are there any difficulties or obstacles? What can the State Duma of the Federal Assembly do to help in this matter? Would it be helpful if we submit this subject to United Russia's Commission on International Cooperation for consideration?

Sergey Lavrov: You can certainly do this. I would not say, however, that the state of affairs in this area requires any urgent measures. The Defence Ministry of Russia has a unit specialising in military memorial work. They have their representatives in countries that have quite a few gravesites and monuments, primarily in East European countries. I see no need for extraordinary measures. The Government regularly allocates the necessary funds. If setbacks occur, they are, as a rule, about isolated (and few) cases of legal regulation related to a given gravesite.

At present, we are urging our Japanese neighbours to make a final, positive decision on Richard Sorge's grave. There is an initiative to rebury him in Russia, for example, in the Sakhalin Region, in the south of the Kuril Ridge. There are many details here. This topic was among the written questions that were submitted to us. We have detailed answers to them.

Thank you for focusing on this matter. We are constantly monitoring it. In

my view (perhaps you will have a different feeling), no extraordinary measures are required. The work is proceeding as planned.

Thank you for your kind words.

It has been said here that we could have paid more attention to seminal geopolitical issues. I hope our responses to the purely utilitarian questions that we received in writing before this event will be helpful in the everyday work of the deputies.

Gennady Zyuganov spoke about the Russian world in the post-Soviet space. I wholeheartedly agree that this is our major asset. It is the legitimate asset of our history and our development. We must do everything in our power so that these people can live comfortably in these countries. This issue will be a priority, just as it has always been, in our contacts with the governments of these countries. The citizens of both countries must be safe and comfortable in each other's territories. There are many questions that the media in Russia and in neighbouring countries regularly report. We should never take these questions lightly. Yes, this is so.

Vladimir Zhirinovsky said that the Foreign Ministry is responsible for responding to what happens outside Russia and that no question should be addressed to it regarding developments in Russia. But foreign policy is inseparable from internal development if only because the main goal, which has been formulated by President Putin, is to ensure that conditions on the external stage are as favourable as possible to the strengthening of the security of Russia and its citizens and to the country's consistent economic and social development.

We have close ties with members of the Government and the agencies that are responsible for implementing the tasks set by the President in the economy, the social sphere, education, healthcare and science. The more successful our country's development, the more effectively we will be able to uphold our interests on the global stage.

Vivid proof of this is the situation in the military industry. It has made a huge breakthrough, making our Armed Forces what they are now. The overall tone of dialogue with us has changed.

This does not mean that we should rely on crude force in all situations. But as the Americans say, you can do a lot more with weapons and politeness than with politeness alone.

Vladimir Zhirinovsky talked about the persecution of many of those who received an education in the Soviet Union. This really happened. Many people in the former socialist camp countries have been discriminated against only

because they graduated from MGIMO or other Soviet universities. At the same time, a number of Soviet university graduates are standing at the helm there. This fact must not be overlooked either.

We have been monitoring the life of these graduates for years. It is an important aspect that helps us structure our future work.

As for Ukraine, the West is really fuelling hysteria with its evacuation plans and by sending weapons and putting ideas into the heads of the Ukrainian elite. On the other hand, the Ukrainian elite itself has been frightened by excessive Western intimidation efforts. President Vladimir Zelensky, the Ukrainian foreign minister, the Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, and the Defence Minister have said that they do not see anything extraordinary [in Russia's activities], that Russia is doing this in its own territory, and this is nothing new to them. They have called for calm and letting it go. But the West does not want them to calm down and is itself not calming down. The West wants a big provocation.

The goal of this surrealistic Western behaviour is [to justify the] evacuation [of their citizens]. At the same time, they are talking about withdrawing weapons and munitions, are threatening us with a “sanctions bill from hell” and a “mother of all sanctions bill.” I see this as trying to incite Kiev to launch a new military operation in Donbass or otherwise bury the Minsk agreements despite the incantations in Paris, Berlin and Washington about the Minsk Package being the only option to settle the conflict.

Every single word and line in our arguments, which have been set out in our security guarantee proposals mentioned today, reflects the obligations the West has assumed in the form of political documents. This is how it really is. Our initiatives are a condensed presentation of the 30-year experience of our relations with the West, with “Yes, we promised that,” “We have forgotten this,” and “Yes, we did promise that, but only orally.” Well, let's put it on paper then. But they refuse to do this because it was a “political commitment.” Yes, but it was a political commitment made at the level of presidents and prime ministers. However, they do not regard it as legally binding.

In 2009, we proposed making these political declarations legally binding. They put their heads together and replied that legally binding security guarantees can only apply to NATO members. Why did the OSCE waste its breath then?

The Charter for European Security, adopted in Istanbul in 1999, and the Commemorative Declaration towards a Security Community, adopted at the OSCE summit in Astana in December 2010, include a formula of indivisible security, as we have pointed out to our colleagues on numerous occasions. In

particular, I said this, with documents in hand, during my recent meeting with Antony Blinken in Geneva. This formula is very simple.

First, every country is free to choose or change its security arrangements. Second, no state is to strengthen its security at the expense of the security of other states. It is this formula, which has been reaffirmed at the top OSCE level, twice, that we have reminded our partners about. They agree that the indivisibility of security is important, and that no country should be deprived of the right to choose a military alliance. We say that this is set out in the first sentence and that the second sentence reads that no state has a right to strengthen its security at the expense of other countries' security.

They explain the first sentence – the right to choose an alliance – by the right of states to join NATO. And how do they explain the second provision, that no state will strengthen its security at the expense of the security of another state? How does this relate to practice when they discuss NATO's expansion? No answer.

Overall, we have abandoned all hope of receiving a plausible response. I would like to make their attitude to these clearly formulated and absolutely unambiguous formulas the issue of an address to the foreign ministers of the signatory states.

We expect a reply to our questions, which were mentioned today, next week. There is evidence for hope that they will not fail us this time and that they will keep their word.

It has been said that the Americans are encouraging us not to make their response public. If they take this attitude to the current developments, we will probably be unable to publish this document. But the public in Russia and other countries must be informed about the essence of their response to our proposals. I am sure that we can do this.

Once again thank you for your kind words. I would like to reaffirm that we are resolved to maintain close interaction with the deputies.

And thank you for the “home front.” We are also ready to work together on the front lines.



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