



15.02.2022 19:09

№ 254-15-02-2022

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at the joint news conference with following talks OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Zbigniew Rau, Moscow, February 15, 2022



Ladies and gentlemen.

We had useful, substantive talks with Foreign Minister of Poland Zbigniew Rau who arrived in Russia as the current OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

We agreed that quite a few problems have piled up in Europe and that they must be resolved urgently and only through a collective effort. Interstate trust is at its lowest level ever. Confrontation-based approaches and aggressive rhetoric have filled our common space. Unfortunately, this approach is clearly dominating over a spirit of cooperation and the culture of mutually respectful dialogue that was always typical of the OSCE after it was formed. We all want to restore that spirit.

I emphasised that the fulfilment of the chairmanship function is of special importance in the current difficult conditions. This is a great responsibility. On January 13 of this year, Mr Minister set forth Poland's priorities at a session of the OSCE Permanent Council. He spoke about the importance of a proactive, positive approach, a search for solutions and the renunciation of mutual accusations. I welcome this approach. I am convinced that the chairmanship should help create a unifying agenda and reach compromises. To achieve this, it is important to stay within the framework of the Chairman-in-Office's mandate, to adhere to status-defined neutral approaches, as the expression goes, and to avoid non-consensus formulas.

In other words, it is important to play the role of an honest broker. Mr Chairman-in-Office confirmed his willingness to do this today.

We think one of the major challenges before the OSCE is finding a common understanding of the principle of indivisibility of security which is crucial for the entire European security architecture. This principle requires that actions should be avoided that enhance security at the expense of others. All that is enshrined in many OSCE documents starting in 1994 when the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security was adopted. Then the Charter for European Security was approved at the Istanbul summit in 1999. In December 2010, this principle was reaffirmed unambiguously and at length at the OSCE Astana summit. All we are talking about now is following that principle. It is not how our Western colleagues are trying to present it, that it means every country has the right to choose alliances, while conveniently not recalling that it may not be done at the expense of another country's security.

To get a better idea of our colleagues' approaches, I have sent a message to the foreign ministers of the European countries whose leaders signed these documents asking to explain how they understand the set of commitments called the principle of indivisibility of security. I expect substantive replies will be forthcoming. At least I asked Zbigniew Rau not to forget to do it.

In the context of searching for way to overcome the growing tensions in the Euroatlantic, we discussed the initiative of the Polish Chairmanship which suggested launching an informal Renewed OSCE European Security Dialogue. We think it is an interesting proposal because it shows an understanding of the current issues and the will to do something to clear these problems from the agenda. I recalled that at the current stage the key is our dialogue with the United States and the North Atlantic alliance where we are discussing long-term legal security guarantees as formulated in the draft agreements we had sent to Washington and Brussels. In the absence of progress on the US and NATO track,

a discussion in Vienna is sure not to yield any results. Everyone understands that. It will just be yet another discussion format in addition to the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation as well as the “structured dialogue” launched five years ago in December 2016. We are risking (I shared my concerns with the Minister and his delegation) a situation where the entire dialogue splits into “little streams” and we are just going through the motions while the core of the problem remains unresolved. We also need to take into account another consideration: unlike NATO and the US, the OSCE does not have an international legal identity even though Russia and its allies proposed initiatives for many years including the OSCE Charter initiative. Our Western colleagues categorically oppose turning the OSCE into an understandable and structured organisation. It is important for them to have it in this flexible, amorphous and incoherent form because it is easier to manipulate.

Nonetheless, the OSCE retains considerable unifying potential. It is necessary to conduct a broad dialogue on making the OSCE more effective in general -- to remove geographical and thematic imbalances, and to find the right, sustainable balance between the three baskets: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. We hope we will be able to conduct an honest conversation on these issues with all member countries during the Polish Chairmanship.

We are ready for the closest possible cooperation with it in other areas as well. I am referring to the need to counter transnational threats, overcome the socioeconomic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, protect traditional values and the rights of ethnic minorities, and counter attempts to falsify history and glorify Nazism. All these issues are on the negotiating table. We consider it very important not to lose focus on discussions on preventing negative outcomes in our common space.

We spoke about the OSCE's role in settling different conflicts in Europe and paid special attention to the crisis in Ukraine for obvious reasons. We confirmed the lack of alternatives to the Minsk Package of Measures and the need to consistently implement it. We hope the current Chairmanship, in part, via its special representative in Ukraine and the Contact Group, will facilitate progress toward this goal. It must be as fast and responsible as possible because the main task is to ensure direct dialogue between Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk. It is also necessary to ensure unbiased monitoring of the situation by the OSCE Special Monitoring Group. We expect its leaders to maintain constructive practical cooperation with the authorities of Donetsk and Lugansk, as is required by the mission's mandate endorsed by the OSCE Permanent Council. According

to this mandate, the mission must not ignore violations of human rights and press freedom on Ukraine's entire territory. Unfortunately, we do not often see this reflected in the mission's reports. It is also necessary not to look past the alarming facts on the rampancy of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism and numerous cases of discrimination against the Russian-speaking population.

To sum up, the OSCE and its current Chairmanship are facing big tasks. I would like to wish successful work to Mr Rau and his entire team.

Question: The United States expects Russia to “attack” Ukraine no later than in a day or two. At the same time, an hour ago the Russian Defence Ministry said that the units which had taken part in the military exercise were returning to their bases. Was the “attack” reconsidered? Or was it never planned?

Sergey Lavrov: The military exercises which Russia plans and holds – I want to emphasise it – on its own territory, begin, proceed and conclude on our timetable. We have repeatedly said that, as far as military exercises are concerned, be it in the west of the country, or the [Russian] Far East, or joint Russian-Belarusian exercises, they are held according to pre-approved schedules. This is done regardless of what one might think about it, or who might go into hysterics because of it, or who unleashes true information terrorism – I am not afraid of using this word.

In short, the caravan rolls on.

Question: The United States and NATO are already offering to discuss with Russia some de-escalation, confidence building and arms control measures that Moscow proposed in 2014, in part, at the Russia-NATO Council. But there was no desire even to talk about these issues then. Now Russia is demanding more (for instance, NATO's return to the 1997 positions). What does this mean? Is there no more interest in talking about what the situation was like before or is there a chance that this will be discussed?

Sergey Lavrov: The speed with which NATO changed its position shows that not all is lost in this bloc. They are capable of admitting the obvious under serious pressure.

There is no need to recall 2014. In 2019, after the Americans destroyed the INF Treaty, President of Russia Vladimir Putin emphasised in his messages to all European leaders that we had announced a unilateral moratorium on the deployment of such land-based missiles. He said the moratorium would be observed as long as similar US systems did not appear there. President Putin also suggested imposing a reciprocal moratorium on the deployment of these missiles in Europe. He suggested approving a mechanism for verifying the actions of Russia and the North Atlantic Alliance for this purpose. But they would not even

listen to us. Nobody replied but President of France Emmanuel Macron. However, all he said was that the idea was not bad and that it is a pity that other NATO members did not want to discuss it.

Shortly afterwards, the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces sent one more series of specific proposals on reducing military risks. They included an idea of coordinating the distance to which exercises were supposed to be removed from the Russia-NATO contact line. To show what we had in mind and make a goodwill gesture, we moved the main phase of the Zapad 2020 exercises to the Nizhny Novgorod Region. This was not appreciated, either. We received no response. Nor did we receive any reply to our proposals to agree upon the allowed distance of approach between combat aircraft and between warships. What would seem more practical than the proposed commitments? We suggested coming to terms on the use of transponders in military aviation, above all in the area over the Baltic. We proceeded from the premise that NATO officials continuously declared and urged us to adopt measures on building confidence and reducing military danger. But everything I mentioned was ignored for many years.

Now that we received replies from NATO and the US, we see that practically all ideas in this or other form, including the need to limit and refrain from deployment of medium- and shorter-range missiles have been this time reproduced as the initiatives of our partners. I am talking about this in detail because some of our well-wishers are beginning to gloat. They read what the Americans and NATO said. In their opinion, this means only one thing – that supposedly we will now talk on the terms dictated by US President Joseph Biden. I will leave aside the goals of these “analysts.” I will just say that the West replied eventually when it understood that we were serious about the need for radical changes in European security. It positively replied to the initiatives that it had rejected for a long time.

So, is this the “end of the story”? No. Yesterday, I reported the situation to President of Russia Vladimir Putin. I emphasised that our proposals that he approved would be finally completed and sent to our American and NATO partners. They are based on the integrity of the Russian position. The issues we are listing now are important as practical steps towards de-escalation (to use a fashionable term). These steps will be effective if they rely on a durable legal foundation. This primarily applies to interpreting the principle of the indivisibility of security. Our Western colleagues are shamelessly distorting it by interpreting it as only the freedom to choose military alliances. This is untrue, to put it mildly. It is enough to read the documents of the Istanbul and Astana

summits in 1999 and 2010 and the 1994 OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. The code says in no uncertain terms that states have the right to choose alliances but they will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other states.

We will continue our dialogue on clarifying the position of the West on the NATO members' openness to negotiation on concretising the principle of the indivisibility of security. We will conduct expert consultations on coordinating approaches on specific issues, be it medium- and shorter-range missiles or measures to reduce military risks. I think that our comprehensive efforts in all these areas will produce a good package result.

Question (addressed to Zbigniew Rau): Russia has criticised the decision of several countries to withdraw their observers from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), because this is being done at an important moment among other things: when the whole world is hoping for reliable updates from this region. Don't you find this decision strange and illogical?

Sergey Lavrov (speaking after Zbigniew Rau): This is an important issue. We have discussed it today. I hope the reasons that prompted several OSCE members to withdraw their observers from the Mission are solely related to such factors as coronavirus or vacation. Though considering the countries in question are in fact on the frontline of the terrorist information campaign, it is easy to imagine that there is some hidden agenda.

I would not like the sad situation of 1999 to repeat itself at the OSCE. Back then, the American citizen William Walker, head of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, made big news with a completely false allegation of a civilian massacre in the village of Racak. It was proven later that these civilians were armed militants killed in action. The European Union later established this beyond a doubt. Back then, Mr Walker announced publicly that it was an act of genocide. He took it upon himself to announce the withdrawal of the OSCE mission from Kosovo. In fact, this was used as a trigger for NATO's aggression against the former state of Yugoslavia. He did not ask the Permanent Council, even though the deployment, as well as withdrawal, of an OSCE mission is the exclusive right of the Permanent Council.

I hope the approach cited by the Minister will be implemented in practice.

Question (retranslated from Polish): Why, in your opinion, have the states that emerged from the collapse of the USSR, for example, Ukraine and Georgia, chosen to integrate with the West – the EU and NATO – even at the cost of war with Russia, instead of maintaining relations with Russia? I am

asking about this because of Russia's military intervention in Georgia, as well as the presence of Russian troops in Belarus and the persecution of organisations like Memorial in Russia. Might it be more effective to opt for dialogue with Poland, as proposed during Poland's OSCE Chairmanship? Is Russia ready to accept this proposal given the sanctions that the West has already promised to impose and that may have a damaging effect on the Russian economy?

Sergey Lavrov: The main reason for this is that the governments of those countries proved to be incompetent and did so in a situation when someone else was seeking to establish external control over them and, finally, achieved this. The only objective they were pursuing was to have them break away from Russia, so they end up in NATO's sphere of influence. This also flies in the face of the principle of the indivisibility of security, because renouncing spheres of influence is part of this principle. In 2008, when at a NATO summit in Bucharest pledges were made to admit Georgia and Ukraine as members of this organisation, Mikheil Saakashvili seemed to have lost his head, he lost his mind. A couple of weeks before he gave the order to attack the peaceful city of Tskhinval and the position of Russian peacekeepers, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited him.

At one time there was a US representative at NATO, whose name was Ivo Daalder. He called the decision to offer Georgia and Ukraine the prospect of joining NATO a major mistake. The Russian peacekeepers were attacked at a time when neither the president of the country nor its prime minister were in Moscow. Georgia seriously wanted to occupy South Ossetia and afterwards do there what it had wanted to do for a long time. Earlier, Zviad Gamsakhurdia used to say that Ossetians and Abkhazians had to go home. In order to prevent this act of genocide, in full compliance with international law and in response to the attack on Russian peacekeepers, who were in Georgia under the mandate approved by the OSCE and Tbilisi, we sent troops to the area. This was the declaration of war. There is no other interpretation of this in international law. [We did this] to defend these peoples and their aspiration for independence and after they held referenda and asked us for recognition, we recognised them. At their request, we deployed military bases there, so that Georgians do not even think of committing crimes like these.

As for Ukraine, there was no lack of goodwill on our part either. The Western colleagues, including primarily the EU members, behaved extremely arrogantly. This started the processes that eventually "exploded" on the Maidan in February 2014. Let me remind you that Ukraine spent the whole of 2013 negotiating the Association Agreement with the EU, which should have been

signed in December 2013. When Russia learned about this, its representatives told the Ukrainian colleagues that if the agreement contained some elements of a free trade area, Russia and Ukraine had long maintained a free trade area as part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. It was necessary to ascertain that the regimes of both FTAs would not clash, because Russia charged no [customs] duties in its trade with Ukraine, while duties were paid in the course of Russia's commercial exchanges with Europe. While negotiating with the WTO, we have managed to get a fairly strong protection on many points. If Ukraine suddenly lifted the barriers with the EU (Russia and Ukraine have no barriers with one another either), goods from Europe would have poured in despite the agreements we had reached when joining the WTO. We were honest in warning them. We also warned your superiors in the EU, I am referring to Poland as a member of this association. President of Russia Vladimir Putin contacted [the then] President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and suggested that Russia, Ukraine and the EU create a trilateral group to avoid any mishaps in the purely commercial sphere. Mr Barroso declared in his characteristic haughty manner that the EU would not discuss with Russia how it was building up its relations with Ukraine, because, after all, Russia was not discussing with the EU how it was building up its relations with the People's Republic of China.

It was the EU that was "egging on" the Maidan in every possible way. The Maidan was launched after the mobilisation of a "team" that condemned President Yanukovich's decision to postpone the signing of the agreement with the EU until it became clear whether or not differences could arise between the two trade regimes. That is all there was to it. But certain Europeans took advantage of the hitch. European foreign ministers, specifically the foreign minister of Belgium, claimed even before this, and later on reasserted their claim, that the Ukrainians should decide whose side they were on – Russia's or Europe's. This is precisely the mentality that sows the "seeds" you have mentioned.

Why do certain representatives of specific countries want to be friends with NATO rather than Russia? Because these representatives are not moving in that direction independently, they are doing this at the instruction of puppet-masters, who are keen to split Europe rather than enforce the OSCE's principles. When the Maidan led to bloodshed, Poland in the person of Radoslaw Sikorski, Germany in the person of Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and France in the person of Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius held talks in Kiev and convinced the opposition and President Viktor Yanukovich to sign a peace agreement. They guaranteed this peace agreement by their signatures. But the "Kiev junta" that came to

power virtually 24 hours later did not care a dime about these signatures and violated all its commitments. In his remarks following his election as FRG president, Frank Walter Steinmeier called on Russia to “take the noose off” Ukraine’s neck. But this is incorrect from the point of view of the gnosiology of all this conflict. The conflict could have been cut short immediately, if Europe, primarily the three countries that guaranteed the agreement between Viktor Yanukovich and the opposition, had called the latter to order and made them implement what they had signed.

After the coup materialised, the first instinct of those who seized power was to put forward Russophobic demands like renouncing the status of the Russian language enshrined in Ukrainian law, or chasing Russians from Crimea. These calls were accompanied by the sending of teams of armed thugs to storm the Supreme Council of Crimea. All of this is in the history books. I understand that you need to “sell” today’s news: don’t you feel sad seeing everyone flee from you into the arms of NATO and the EU? This is a simplistic approach that will enable you to attract readers, hungry for all kinds of sensationalism of this sort and for the Russophobia that is flourishing, to my strong regret, in Poland, among other countries. We said today that we are interested in having normal relations with Poland, the more so since contacts have never ceased at the level of civil society, artists and culture – to the satisfaction of both sides.

When all this happened, the residents of Crimea had to defend themselves from outright neo-Nazis, who are still staging torch marches in Kiev, carrying portraits of Bandera, Petlyura, and Shukhevich. By the way, their official leader, the President of Ukraine, is supporting them. It was only after the Crimeans refused to obey these mobsters, who had seized power in an unconstitutional coup d’etat, and only when the Crimeans held an [independence] referendum that Europe became agitated and started saying: “Why has Russia annexed Crimea?” But why was Europe silent and unperturbed by the Ukrainian coup? Obviously because those capitals, including the three countries whose ministers signed the agreement, which was later broken by the coup perpetrators, were also willing to side with the people who had proclaimed that they were for the West, not for Russia, despite the anti-constitutional coup and the ensuing bloodshed. That’s it. As the saying goes, this is a two-lane street. Everywhere there are people ready to speculate on the West’s geopolitical plans, but these plans, regrettably, are aimed at disunity, not at implementing the fundamental principles of the OSCE.

Question: The Ukrainian Ambassador to the UK said recently that his country would be ready to renounce its potential NATO membership if this

prevents a war. Soon after that, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry commented that such statements were not serious. Do members of the Ukrainian establishment think that it would be worthwhile to renounce aspirations to join NATO? Would this help de-escalate the current situation?

Sergey Lavrov: I can only say that there are reasonable people there. I am convinced that many of them, including Europeans, would breathe a sigh of relief if this happened. These people take their signatures under OSCE documents seriously and don't try to use these documents as a ruse for covertly implementing a policy to split Europe and draw new demarcation lines. Many Ukrainian politicians and political analysts share these views, and they have no misgivings about making them public.

Specifically with regard to the UK, we know how the government in Kiev responded to the statement by the Ukrainian Ambassador to the United Kingdom. The people of Ukraine wield no power today, and the country's authorities are not inclined to uphold their interests. The people of Ukraine need peace, first and foremost. Politicians in Kiev have lost their independence long ago, and they are playing the "musical instruments" being provided by the West. Speaking in London, UK Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces James Heappey said that, if Ukraine made such a decision, the UK would support it. I believe that this thought will gradually gain in popularity. I would like to note that it offers an option advocated by many people, including in Europe.

Question: You have said that Russia has drafted a reply to US and NATO documents on security guarantees. When are you planning to submit this document? Will it be available for the media and the public?

Sergey Lavrov: We should now comply with protocol and technical formalities. The document will be published soon.

We have nothing to conceal.

Question (translated from Polish): In your opinion, what are the chances that there will be a war? Can you confirm that Russia will not invade Ukraine?

Sergey Lavrov: These questions have been answered multiple times. I have already commented earlier on speculations that the Russia–Belarus military exercise was organised to attack Ukraine from the north and seize Kiev. All these paranoid scenarios have been published numerous times and, unfortunately, by respectable media outlets. Apparently, the commotion and the need felt by the masterminds and scriptwriters of this enterprise felt was driving the media as well.

What is the current stance of the Western countries? The West is demanding that Russia stop the military exercise and withdraw the troops. Russia continues to act according to its plans. It is now time to partially wrap up the drills and the troops are starting to return to their permanent bases. I assure you that, even if the West has not said it yet, it will certainly say: “See, we put pressure on them and, as soon as Joe Biden snapped at them, they immediately got scared and fulfilled our demands.” This is just trading air. Our Western colleagues are pros at that. We should be learning their stunts from them.

I will stress once again: on our territory, we will do whatever we need and deem necessary for our own security. We reject our Western colleagues' attempts to interpret the principles of the OSCE's integral security obligations in such a way that they allegedly know best how to ensure Russia's security. They should drop this arrogance and Russophobia once and for all.

When NATO started to expand once again by including the Baltic republics, we asked our Western colleagues why it was being done in the absence of any threats. We publicly declared that we are no longer opponents, and we are building a common future transparently, fighting terrorism together and more. They responded that, apparently, there were residual phobias lingering since the Soviet times; they wanted to relieve those phobias by accepting those countries to NATO, for them to calm down and be Russia's good neighbours. They said the same thing about Poland when it joined NATO. But the exact opposite happened. We know very well how skilful Western puppeteers are. To my great regret, they go directly against the fundamental documents of the OSCE.

Question: Aren't you concerned that the West and Russia are speaking completely different languages? Is there no chance we can agree even if the situation is perfect?

Sergey Lavrov: I sense you are a Rudyard Kipling fan. “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” The OSCE adheres to a different philosophy. I hope this philosophy will develop practical contours.



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