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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Rossiya television network, Moscow, April 11, 2022

15-19 minutes

Question: I would like to ask you about “strange” statements by European diplomats on the course of Russia’s military operation in Ukraine. EU diplomacy chief Josep Borrell said it must be won on the battlefield. This doesn’t really jibe with the EU’s status as a primarily political and economic organisation. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier expressed regret over his earlier stance on the possibility of normal dialogue with Russia. So now he doesn’t think it’s possible. How is one supposed to talk with these people? How is one supposed to come to terms with them?

Sergey Lavrov: This is a major shift in the policy of the EU and the entire West under the leadership of the US (there is no doubt about that) that occurred after the start of our special military operation. Their current policy is rooted in bitterness and derangement (excuse the non-diplomatic word choice), though it’s not all about Ukraine but rather turning that country into a bridgehead from which Russia can finally be subjugated and subordinated to the global system built by the West even though the Cold War ended and the USSR and Warsaw Treaty disappeared. The West was moving closer to our borders all the time despite its promises not to expand NATO, statements to the

effect that we were no longer adversaries and many other things. Our special military operation is designed to put an end to NATO's unlimited expansion and to keep the US and other NATO countries from achieving total domination in the world arena. They are building this system based on "rules" which they just now started going on about, despite violating international law in the crudest manner in the process. They devise these rules on a case-by-case basis. It is fine to recognise independence in Kosovo without a referendum but not in Crimea even after a referendum that was monitored by hundreds of unbiased foreigners.

A threat to US security was detected in Iraq (10,000 km away from the US). They bombed it but didn't locate the threat and didn't even apologise. They are cultivating neo-Nazis and ultra-radicals on our borders. The Pentagon is setting up dozens of laboratories conducting experiments to develop biological weapons. The documents found there leave no doubt about this. But we are not allowed to respond to a threat on our borders, as opposed to across the ocean. That's the message.

President Vladimir Putin explained in detail the reasons for the decision on the special military operation. These include eight years of sabotage of the Minsk agreements accompanied by the daily bombing of Donbass; the flooding of Ukraine with Western weapons; and the sending of instructors that trained the most extremist units that were later sent to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. They formed the backbone of the groups that are now resisting our operation to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine. Western propaganda immediately used all this to portray Russia as pure evil and themselves, consequently, as purely good. The current Ukrainian regime is described as a model of democracy, justice, freedom and European aspirations in all things, including

the values that Europe has supposedly always preached. The response that followed shows that they understand very well that Ukraine isn't really the point. The point is their own dominance, which far from all countries are willing to accept. Russia, with its history and traditions, is one of those countries that will never accept a subordinate status. We can be members of the international community only on equal terms, on conditions of indivisible security. We wanted to reach some accommodation but were ignored by our Western colleagues.

But what Mr Borrell said – even by the standards of the unprecedented, aggressive level things have reached – marks a serious change in the rules of the game. Until now the EU has never acted as a military organisation. Yes, now they are discussing their “strategic compass.” For the first time in history, Germany allocated an additional 100 billion euros to exercise its military muscles, which represents a qualitative change. This “strategic compass” includes a tangible increase in military spending and the formation of a certain collective structure for defence against potential aggressors. But the upshot of all this independence is zero because the United States is controlling everything that is being done. The EU has not been given any independent role, even internally. Its efforts are being skillfully controlled by the Baltic states, Denmark and Poland, which will not allow any kind of separation between the EU and NATO. Quite the contrary, they will be pushing it back into NATO's web.

Question: A NATO branch?

Sergey Lavrov: So it seems. Whenever the chief diplomat of a country or an organisation (in this case, head of EU diplomacy Josep Borrell) says that a particular conflict can be resolved exclusively by military means, that is how such a statement is construed. This means that either he has a personal grudge, or

it was a slip of the tongue, or he got ahead of his orders. This statement is out of line. We will cover this in more detail in our official documents. I hope we will be able to analyse all this within the next couple of days.

You also mentioned Frank-Walter Steinmeier, whom I know well back from his days as Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is now the President of Germany. In an interview that he gave several days ago, he was asked whether an international tribunal was needed to try representatives of the Russian leadership, starting with President Vladimir Putin and the Foreign Minister, as war criminals. He agreed, saying that everyone who is responsible for the military operation and the political decisions should be held accountable. I leave this to his conscience. I think that the facts will become known in Germany, and the perpetrators of war crimes will become known. This will be determined not on the basis of fakes (such as Bucha or Kramatorsk), but on the basis of the deadly evidence that we present, and that our military discover during the special military operation and on the basis of the testimony of the people who have lived in the divided Donbass under the yoke of these neo-Nazis for many years, cut off from their sons who stayed on the eastern side of the line of contact. As these people are being liberated now, it is impossible to fake the feelings that they have or to make up the hardships they went through living under the control of neo-Nazi and other "territorial" battalions.

Steinmeier said another interesting thing about Ukraine. He said that, as a diplomat, he had never dedicated as much time to any other country as he did to Ukraine. He recalled that when Germany chaired the EU in 2007, he was the one to initiate the talks on preparing an Association Agreement with the EU. In

2013, when the riot began on the Maidan, he brokered the talks between Viktor Yanukovich and the opposition. That's how it was, indeed. Importantly, a half-truth is worse than a lie. In fact, Mr Steinmeier left out some important episodes and turning points in the events that he mentioned. First, the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU provided for the transition to zero tariffs for the vast majority of goods. By the time this Agreement had already been in the works in 2013, we reminded our Ukrainian colleagues that we also have a free trade area with them as part of the CIS. We introduced significant protections against European goods when we joined the WTO. So, if they have zero tariffs with Europe, and we have long had zero tariffs for most goods with Ukraine, then goods from the EU will pour into our country freely contrary to the agreements that we reached when joining the WTO. We told them we need to sit down and decide on this issue so that we are not impacted by their relations with the EU. However, the EU, which (as Steinmeier says) started the talks on the Association Agreement on his initiative, told us that this was not our business and that they would reach an agreement with Ukraine as they see fit. After that, Yanukovich realised that this would be a problem and Russia would be forced to build a barrier on the border with Ukraine against Ukrainian-made goods. The President of Ukraine asked to postpone the signing for several months so that we could resolve these problems taking into account the interests of Ukraine, Russia and the EU. It was after this that Europe, which Mr Steinmeier was so proud of when he said that Ukraine aspired to European values, provoked the Maidan. They rallied the people under the banner of fighting Yanukovich who allegedly wasn't letting Ukraine join the EU.

Mr Steinmeier did not mention that he did not just broker the talks between Yanukovich and the opposition, but also took part in concluding them by signing a settlement agreement. On behalf of Germany and the EU, Steinmeier signed this agreement as a guarantor alongside the foreign ministers of Poland and France. The next morning, they spat on his signature. The opposition tore up the agreement and, from day one, advocated the abolition of the special status of the Russian language (contrary to the Constitution of Ukraine), called for Russians to “get out” of Crimea, sent “friendship trains” there with armed thugs who wanted to storm the Supreme Soviet. After that there was a referendum. Eastern Ukraine completely refused to recognise the coup. They did not attack anyone, but they were declared terrorists and an anti-terrorist operation was announced.

Mr Steinmeier forgot to say that Germany, France, Poland and the entire European Union showed total helplessness and lack of self-respect. Their signatures were trampled on. Tacitly, they even began to encourage this whole thing when they realised that the thugs who came to power would help the West in every possible way and manipulate it. They remained silent when these people burned dozens of innocent people in Odessa's House of Trade Unions and when, on June 2, 2014, Ukrainian Air Force bombed central Lugansk. They just remained silent. Later, during the attempts to resolve the situation months and years later, we asked them how they allowed a coup to happen. They told us it was “not quite a coup.” Then what? “The costs of the democratic process.” How can you say that with a straight face?

Frank-Walter Steinmeier forgot to mention February 2015, when, alongside the Normandy format leaders, he co-authored

the Minsk agreements. Soon after the signing, actually the next day, Petr Poroshenko and his team, speaking in the Verkhovna Rada, refused to act on them. They called the Minsk agreements a “political declaration” which allegedly was not binding. Then we unanimously approved the Package of Measures at the UN Security Council. It has become part of international law and thus binding. They ignored it and in every possible way encouraged the Ukrainian regime as it continued to sabotage its obligations.

We continued our efforts to find compromises, and were ready to make additional concessions and encourage the republics with which Kiev refused to talk to directly to do so as well. At some point during the talks we supported what was called the “Steinmeier formula” as a sign of our flexible approach. When we had to decide what should be done first - granting a special status or holding elections - he came up with a solution that suited everyone and became known as the “Steinmeier formula.” A couple of weeks after the “formula” had been approved and everyone welcomed it, it was consigned to oblivion as well. Petr Poroshenko and Vladimir Zelensky after him were vehemently opposed to following it.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier has to live down a diplomatic disgrace for the second time in several years if he considers himself the initiator (as he proudly stated in that interview) of many things related to the state of Ukrainian society.

Question: Is it possible to speak about a change in the positions of the sides at the Russia-Ukraine talks after the provocations in Bucha and Kramatorsk and considering the collective West, primarily the US, is doing all it can to prolong hostilities?

Sergey Lavrov: President of Russia Vladimir Putin emphasised more than once that we prefer talks. During the very first round of talks when Ukraine suggested contacts and we agreed to arrange them, President Vladimir Putin ordered a pause in the special military operation. When we realised that the Ukrainians were not going to reciprocate, we decided not to make any pauses for subsequent rounds of talks until the final agreement was reached and signed.

The provocations are outrageous. Our military personnel provided chronological arguments and videos made in Bucha (excuse me for going into details but they depicted the positions of corpses and how they looked). They presented all the evidence they could. I don't understand how adults who consider themselves politicians and diplomats can try to say otherwise without any support.

It is revealing that they tried to keep Bucha going as a story for several weeks but quickly stopped talking about Kramatorsk. Evidence was presented on the same day, including ballistic trajectories, the absence of Tochka-U systems in our forces and the like. More provocations will follow.

Recently, the Defence Ministry and the National Defence Management Centre of Russia submitted intelligence data revealing the plans of the Ukrainian regime to stage new provocations with direct support of Western intelligence services, for instance, involving the use of toxic chemicals, mass executions and burials. There will be more provocations. We must respond to them with facts. Our main argument is what is taking place on the ground.

I don't see reasons that could prevent us from continuing the talks even though Ukrainians keep making an about face and

rejecting what they have just suggested.

We are patient and persistent.

Question: What are conditions like for our diplomats working now in unfriendly countries and the UN Headquarters? We are seeing a worrying surge in Russophobic attitudes. Families with children abroad are receiving threats. Did you have to harden security for the employees? How can the interests of our compatriots be protected against the backdrop of mounting Russophobia?

Sergey Lavrov: Diplomats live and work in difficult conditions. There are attacks, actually terrorist acts against our offices and their physical security but our diplomats are more or less protected by their status. We often do not advise people to go out alone.

We are most of all concerned over the situation of our compatriots, citizens, simply Russians living abroad. They are subjected to regular physical attacks. I know that Western capitals and Western embassies in Moscow are discussing this issue. EU ambassadors hold meetings from time to time for this purpose. Some of our good acquaintances said that EU ambassadors in Moscow are expressing serious concern over examples of Russophobia in Europe. They think this is wrong because it spoils the EU's image. I wouldn't say spoil but rather further reveals it for what it is now.

The speed with which the Russophobic wave was set in motion shows (as a US scholar put it) that "latent racism" is alive and well in Europe. At one time, Adolf Hitler mobilised his own society and other European countries against the Jews (and Slavs, for that matter). Now the command to attack is against Russians. The gloves have come off, the pretense and political

correctness are gone. Nothing remains.

Ukrainian politicians say "a good Russian is a dead Russian." All other Russians are bad. Ministers are saying that Europe must discriminate against all Russians without distinction. They want them ostracised whether or not they support Putin because there is no time to determine that. They are openly saying this.

These are serious things. We will use all legal channels at our disposal to protect our citizens. There is the Foundation for Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad. For the most part, it helps hire attorneys for people abroad. We are substantially increasing its financing.

This is a huge problem. We will discuss it.