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Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow 22, 2022

Table of contents:

1. Sergey Lavrov's working visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran
2. Sergey Lavrov's working visit to Azerbaijan
3. Sergey Lavrov's participation in the Caspian states' foreign ministers meeting
4. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's working trip to Belarus
5. 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Russia and Belarus
6. Sergey Lavrov's upcoming participation in G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting 2022
7. 81st anniversary of the start of the Great Patriotic War
8. The 77th anniversary of the Victory Parade on Red Square
9. Update on Ukraine
10. Threats to global food security and Ukrainian grain supplies to world markets
11. New address of the US Embassy in Russia

Answers to media questions:

1. Ban on opposition parties in Ukraine
2. Western arms supplies to Ukraine
3. Kaliningrad transit issue
4. UK plan to adopt a law allowing to ignore ECHR rulings
5. Russia's response to Lithuania
6. Russia's stance on Ukraine's potential accession to the EU
7. Upcoming BRICS summit
8. New allegations of intervention in the US Congress elections in November
9. Quasi-states
10. Accusations of blocking Ukrainian ports

11. OSCE Minsk Group's activity
12. Russian media in Azerbaijan
13. Outcome of the meeting of the trilateral commission on unblocking regional communications
14. Update on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement
15. Outcome of the parliamentary elections in France
16. Certain politicians' statements on the DPR and the LPR
17. Situation with the British mercenaries
18. US embassy's initiatives in Armenia
19. Upcoming meeting of the 3+3 platform on the South Caucasus

Sergey Lavrov's working visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran

On June 22-23, 2022, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will pay a working visit to Tehran, at the invitation of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

The ministers are expected to continue their discussion of a number of current international issues, including the situation around the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme, as well as developments in Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, South Caucasus, Yemen and around the Caspian Sea.

The parties will discuss the bilateral agenda, first of all, its trade and economic part in the context of implementing key joint projects in energy and transport, as well as the prospects for expanding cultural and humanitarian ties.

[Back to top](#)

Sergey Lavrov's working visit to Azerbaijan

As we have already reported at the latest briefing, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will pay a working visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan on June 23-24. He will hold talks with Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and is expected to meet with President Ilham Aliyev.

The whole range of issues concerning the further development of Russian-Azerbaijani relations will be considered in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration on Allied Relations signed by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev in Moscow on February 22 of this year. The sides will also discuss in detail a number of current regional and international issues. Particular attention will be paid to the implementation of the top-level trilateral agreements of November 9, 2020, January 11 and November 26, 2021, designed to ensure the normalisation of Azerbaijani-Armenian relations and the transformation of the South Caucasus into a zone of peace, stability and prosperity.

[Back to top](#)

Sergey Lavrov's participation in the Caspian states' foreign ministers meeting

On June 28, Sergey Lavrov will take part in the meeting of foreign ministers of the Caspian states, dedicated to preparations for the Sixth Caspian Summit, scheduled for June 29 this year in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

The previous such meeting of ministers was held in Aktau, Kazakhstan, on August 11, 2018 ahead of the Fifth Caspian Summit, at which a historic document – the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea – was signed.

The Ashgabat foreign ministers' meeting will review cooperation in the Caspian Sea and discuss modalities of further cooperation in preparation for the upcoming summit.

[Back to top](#)

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's working trip to Belarus

On June 29 – July 1, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will be on a working trip to Minsk. This year it is timed to coincide with the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Russia and Belarus.

The minister is expected to hold talks with President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko. Talks with Foreign Minister of Belarus Vladimir Makei will also be held, where bilateral cooperation in foreign policy, construction of the Union State and topical international problems will be discussed during the upcoming talks. The ministers will also take part in a ceremony to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations, including the signing of a joint statement and cancelling of special envelopes issued to mark this date. Also wreath will be laid at the Stele of Memory memorial sign

In addition to this, in Minsk, Sergey Lavrov will chair a meeting of the United Russia Party General Council Commission on International Cooperation and Support of Compatriots Abroad.

The minister is expected to deliver a speech for students and staff of Belarusian State University and lay wreaths at the Stele of Memory monument commemorating university employees killed in the Great Patriotic War.

[Back to top](#)

30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Russia and Belarus

June 25, 2022 marks the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Russia and Belarus.

This memorable date is associated with the signing of the protocol, which confirmed the intention of the two independent states to follow the path of strengthening their political, trade, economic, and cultural ties based on a common history, spiritual closeness and neighbourly relations, in Minsk in 1992.

During all these years, Moscow and Minsk have been following the path of integrative cooperation. In 1996, they established the Community of Belarus and Russia, followed by the Commonwealth of Belarus and Russia in 1997 and the Union State in 1999. This means Russia and Belarus have consistently strengthened their relations of alliance and strategic partnership.

The Union State Supreme State Council's approval of a package of integration documents, which included 28 sectoral union programmes, as well as the Migration Policy Concept and the updated Military Doctrine of the Union State, on November 4, 2021 was an important milestone. Their implementation promotes the formation of a shared socioeconomic and cultural space, as well as strengthens the positions of the national economies and the two countries' security.

Russia and Belarus have an intensive political dialogue and consistently deepen their cooperation in a wide range of areas, including security, foreign policy, trade, economic and cultural cooperation, and realising equal rights for their citizens.

Moscow and Minsk defend their national interests in the international arena and confront common challenges and threats, including illegitimate sanction pressure from the West, together. The open and trusting relations that have developed between the two countries make it possible to look for solutions to fundamentally important issues for the benefit of our peoples.

We congratulate all people of Russia and Belarus on our shared anniversary.

[Back to top](#)

Sergey Lavrov's upcoming participation in G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting 2022

On July 7-8, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bali under the Presidency of the Republic of Indonesia.

This format is consistently gaining status and is becoming an important mechanism for coordinating the major powers' approaches. The need for diplomatic dialogue is increasing against the backdrop of confrontation in international relations and increasing risks to the global economy.

I would like to remind you of something that many might not know. The G20 was created as a response to the threat to the global economic landscape caused by the depressed US economy. If any of you remember, the real estate market meltdown in the United States led to the collapse of international stock exchanges. That affected sovereign economies and transnational companies, businesses and ordinary people around the world. How could the global economy be saved or restored? None of the formats active at that time provided an answer to this question. So the international community decided to create a new format, the 'Group of Twenty,' designed to find answers everyone realised were urgent after the United States' irresponsible economic activity. Much has been done collectively, together. The US, as a country, a state, and a regime, did not participate in compensating for the costs it had inflicted on the world.

During this year's discussion, the participants will touch on pressing issues such as strengthening the foundations of multilateralism in a polycentric world, as well as increasing food and energy security. Particular attention will be paid to reviving economic growth, to pandemic relief efforts, and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of energy transition and digital transformation.

Russia intends to reaffirm the importance of the G20's coordinating role in global governance. The need to build interstate cooperation on equality and consideration for each other's interests, and coordinated responses to cross-border challenges and threats will be emphasised. We will call on our partners to give an objective assessment of the harm done by the illegal sanctions, unfair competition, protectionism and artificial restraints on building up new economic centres.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has a packed schedule of bilateral meetings. His side meetings with his colleagues from other countries, in particular China, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, as well as consultations with the leaders of invited international organisations, are being organised.

The Foreign Ministers' Meeting will be a milestone in the preparations for the G20 Leaders' Summit on November 15-16 in Bali. We intend to make a productive contribution to the difficult negotiating process. We hope that the imperative to reach an agreement will prevail over certain opportunistic considerations that are clearly out of place during such collective and joint work. We will strive to achieve practical results at the G20 this year.

[Back to top](#)

81st anniversary of the start of the Great Patriotic War

Today's date of June 22 is a difficult day in national history – the Day of Memory and Sorrow, a tragic page in our history. We observe it on a nationwide scale. On that day, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union and the Great Patriotic War began. It lasted 1,418 days and nights, inflicting incredible suffering on our country and people. We sustained enormous human and material losses.

Recalling the start of the war we must certainly again think about the reasons that brought humanity to that fatal brink. The main reason was the aggressive, misanthropic nature of Nazism that came to power in European countries democratically in the early and middle 1930s. Connivance on behalf of the leading world powers helped Nazi Germany realise its aggressive plans. They tried to ensure their own security by signing the Munich pact at the expense of security and sovereignty of other states and peoples. All Soviet proposals aimed at creating conditions for a collective rebuff to the threat of aggression by Nazi Germany and its allies did not receive a fitting response.

In this context, we consider unacceptable, sacrilegious and simply anti-historical the assertions about the “likeness” of Nazism and communism as well as the attempts to assign equal blame to Germany and the USSR for the outbreak of the war (these are destructive lies), play down the decisive Soviet contribution to the destruction of the Nazi war machine and belittle the exploits of the Red Army liberators. Such assertions are not only anti-historical but also insulting for Russia and our people. They desecrate the memory of the millions of Soviet people who perished in the struggle against Nazism.

Our Foreign Ministry made a tangible contribution to Victory. From the first days of the war, the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs embarked on implementing its main task – to create a broad anti-Hitler coalition to take on the enemy together.

The agreement on joint actions by the USSR and Great Britain in the war against Germany was signed in Moscow on July 12. It was followed by the formation of a solid legal foundation that allowed the allies to pool their efforts in the struggle against the common enemy.

Despite the trying times, the employees of the commissariat performed their patriotic and professional duties. Over 360 employees defended our homeland with weapons in hand. As part of the 6th division of Moscow’s Dzerzhinsky District home guard and the third communist Moscow division, commissariat employees participated in the fighting near Yelna and Dorogobuzh. Seventy two of them perished in the Smolensk Region. There is a memorial plaque in their honour in the lobby of our ministry.

The international community highly valued the Soviet Union’s decisive role in the rout of Nazi Germany. True, later it began to forget about this. On February 20, 1945, Winston Churchill wrote to Joseph Stalin: “Future generations will acknowledge their debt to the Red Army as unreservedly as do we who have lived to witness these proud achievements.”

Winston Churchill was wrong. Far from acknowledging their debt, the following generation in the West forgot about it. But we remember and will remember it because we approach history and historical memory with great care. This is what ensures a peaceful future.

While crediting to the contribution of our allies in the anti-Hitler coalition to our common Victory, we will not allow anyone to erase from memory the feat of our people and its army. This is very topical because now some states have started rewriting the history of the war, replacing real historical facts with assertions prompted by their own political interests at home and international interests.

Today, all national flags will be lowered throughout the country. A minute of silence will be observed at 12:15, Moscow time.

We remember!

[Back to top](#)

The 77th anniversary of the Victory Parade on Red Square

77 years ago, on June 24, 1945, a historic parade took place on Red Square in Moscow to celebrate the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War.

On June 22, 1945, central Soviet newspapers published the order of Supreme Commander-in-Chief Joseph Stalin No. 370: “To commemorate the victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War, I order a parade of troops of the Army, the Navy and the Moscow Garrison – a Victory Parade – to be held on Red Square in Moscow on June 24, 1945.” Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief Georgy Zhukov, Marshal of Victory, who accepted the surrender of the Wehrmacht on May 9, took the salute. Marshal of the Soviet Union Konstantin Rokossovsky commanded the parade.

Taking part in the event were 10 consolidated regiments representing all the fronts that fought in the Great Patriotic War at the final stage. Their frontline standards were ordered from the Bolshoi Theatre artistic and production workshops. Hundreds of order ribbons were also made there, crowning the poles of 360 battle banners.

Overall, the Victory Parade involved 24 marshals, 249 generals, 2,536 officers, 31,116 sergeants and soldiers who distinguished themselves in battles and were awarded orders and medals. As many as 1,850 vehicles drove across Red Square.

Representatives of the Polish Army marched with the 1st Belorussian Front consolidated regiment, and the 3rd Ukrainian Front consolidated regiment commanders included the commander of the 1st Bulgarian Army, General Vladimir Stoychev.

The march was accompanied by a combined brass band of the Moscow Garrison consisting of 1,313 musicians.

The parade culminated in the march of a column of soldiers who carried 200 captured banners and standards of the defeated German army. Those banners were thrown to the foot of the mausoleum to the beat of 80 drums.

Frontline soldiers participating in the Victory Parade were the first to be awarded medals For Victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 approved on May 9, 1945.

The parade drew a line under the defeat of Nazism in Europe and celebrated the triumph of the Soviet people and the Red Army. In 1995, which was the 50th anniversary of the Victory, May 9 parades on Victory Day were made a tradition, which supported the continuity of generations and the eternal memory of the feat of the people.

[Back to top](#)

Update on Ukraine

Now, 81 years later, the Russian military is again fighting Nazism, neo-Nazism and that rabid Nazism (which, apparently, they did not finish off back then) and liberating Ukraine from neo-Nazi domination that was nurtured over the past decades by their Western “partners.” Again, our soldiers are being killed with weapons that are now made in NATO countries. The Third Reich’s motto was *Drang nach Osten* which has now become the motto of the Alliance (I didn’t make it up, they are saying so). Remember what representatives of the EU and NATO, in their integration and national capacity, said about the battlefield? They said that nothing positive related to Russia should be allowed, not to mention victory, the denial of Nazism and fascism, raising funds and shipping military equipment right there east of Brussels? All of that is unfolding amid many years of NATO military infrastructure advancing towards our borders.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian armed units are sowing terror among the civilians as they leave the battlefield. Even now, their Western handlers are turning a blind eye to their nationalist and hate-crazed nature. In Lisichansk (LPR), neo-Nazis set up strongholds and ammunition depots in schools. These are brick-and-mortar schools, not schools from social media that have been retouched, totally made up or pieced together from random photographs. These are schools Nos. 9, 14 and 28, Kindergarten No. 6 and blocks of flats in Pobedy Street which were used as machine-gun and sniper nests. Armoured vehicles, artillery and MLRS are deployed on the grounds surrounding the buildings. Civilians are not evacuated from dangerous areas. Instead, they are forcibly kept there. The situation is likewise tragic in other towns controlled by Zelensky regime such as Privolny, Kramatorsk and Zaporozhye, to name a few.

Civilians are known to be taken hostage and placed on the Ukrainian nationalists' positions. According to the LPR Interior Ministry, 1,200 civilians are kept by force at the Azot plant in Severodonetsk alone. There is another instance of the civilians being used as human shield. Clearly, the Ukrainian military learned this at NATO headquarters.

Neo-Nazis have been purposely creating unbearable living conditions for the residents of the republics of Donbass for many years now. The armed forces of Ukraine are destroying residential buildings and leaving people without food, water, medication, power and heating. Following the NATO guidebooks, they deliberately attack civilian rather than military targets.

According to official data provided by the DPR and the LPR, since February 17, when the DPR and LPR started coming under massive shelling by the armed forces of Ukraine, more than 230 civilians, including 10 children, died in these republics. More than 1,000 civilians, including 66 minors, were wounded. More than 5,000 houses and over 1,000 civil infrastructure sites, including dozens of medical and almost 200 education institutions, were damaged. Ukrainian war criminals fired over 50,000 various-calibre shells into urban and rural areas of the DPR and the LPR, including 47 Tochka-U missiles, thousands of MLRS missiles of various calibres, including Smerch (300-mm calibre), Uragan (220-mm calibre), and Grad (122-mm calibre).

Clearly, the Zelensky regime does not plan to stop its criminal activities, which fact completely suits the Western countries, which are encouraging it to do so. They obtained a unique opportunity to dispose of obsolete materiele in Ukraine and to equip their own armies with new weapons, to load their defence plants with work and to carry out a number of financial and other frauds.

Meanwhile, political repression against dissenters is intensifying in Ukraine. This is being done in the worst traditions of totalitarian regimes. Judging by what Ukrainian Minister of Justice Denis Maluska said, by the end of the summer, Kiev is going to introduce the practice of mass requisitioning Ukrainian enterprises from owners who, by the arbitrary decision of the authorities, are recognised as pro-Russia sympathisers. What kind of law, democracy or liberalism are we talking about? This is the worst thing that has ever happened in world history. Members of the political parties, such as the Opposition Platform - For Life and the Opposition Bloc who did not support the 2014 coup, have already lost their property.

The policy of forced Ukrainisation and persecution of everything that is Russian continues unabated. On June 19, the Verkhovna Rada approved the draft laws that effectively ban Russian music from being played in the streets of Ukrainian cities, music halls, stadiums and on radio and television. Most surprisingly, the world-renowned children's composer and a native of Kiev Vladimir Shainsky came under these draconian measures. He died in 2017 and did not live to see this nightmare or he would know that his songs for children are now illegal in Ukraine. Books, newspapers and magazines from Russia and Belarus have been banned in Ukraine and cannot be brought in. Russian-speaking writers are removed from world literature courses. Moreover, this is not being done secretly. This is the regime's open stance. A native of Odessa, Anna Akhmatova wrote, "It's not scary to die by a bullet, not painful to lose home, and we will protect you, Russian speech, the great Russian word."

All of that makes the goals and objectives set by the Russian leadership for the special military operation even more important. We will continue to inform you about developments moving forward.

[Back to top](#)

Threats to global food security and Ukrainian grain supplies to world markets

I would like to comment on the mind-blowing statements and articles that are part of the current information campaign. The focus is on accusing our country of creating a threat to global food security.

Recently, we are hearing an increasing number of statements by Western representatives and, unfortunately, international organisations, including the UN, about the threat of a major food crisis due to the shortage of grain and fertiliser in world markets, which has been ostensibly triggered by Russia's actions in Ukraine. These false accusations are becoming a pronounced leitmotif in statements by American and European officials. In this context, I have to recall again the real root causes for the problems that are arising now.

As regards the blocking of Ukrainian grain shipments by sea, we would like to emphasise again that Russia has never prevented grain export from Ukraine's Black Sea ports. Safe navigation in Ukraine's territorial waters and the use of ports are currently impossible because of the high threat of mines and shelling. Kiev has created this threat. According to the available information, the Ukrainian authorities have installed about 420 anchor mines in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Some of these mines are now drifting in seas, in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and the coastal waters of Black Sea countries, including Turkey and Romania. In addition, Kiev has blocked and is holding up 70 foreign ships from 16 countries in six ports – Kherson, Nikolayev, Chernomorsk, Ochakov, Odessa and Yuzhny. Very little is said about at least several more ways that exist to ship grain from Ukraine, for instance by railway and river. Nothing is said about ways of bringing Western arms to Ukraine.

Illogical statements are being spread all over the world on this issue. Everyone is saying that nothing (primarily grain and other food) can be taken out of Ukraine. At the same time, practically the same people daily report about the deliveries of weapons to Kiev. Weapons are big and heavy. And the amounts of supplied weapons are comparable to the enormous scale of cargo traffic. Here's a question. It appears that the West can easily bring weapons to Ukraine but nobody can take anything out of it? In the meantime, videos on social media show how processions of lorries, obviously loaded with food, cross Europe after exiting Ukraine or unload their cargo from Ukraine at some EU location. How can these contradictory statements coexist? The same Western politicians are making them. I don't think it's possible to compile these false assumptions and endlessly accuse others of problems of one's own making, but as we see they are managing

For their part, the Russian military have created the necessary conditions for the safe functioning of two marine humanitarian corridors: in the Black Sea for the exit from the afore-mentioned six Ukrainian ports towards the southwest of the territorial waters and in the Sea of Azov for exit towards the Black Sea. Now there is an opportunity to use the ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk for agricultural exports. In addition, Russia has confirmed its willingness to facilitate the safe exports of Ukrainian grain by foreign ships on condition they not smuggle arms and Kiev not stage provocations or create mine threats and tensions in the Black Sea.

Speaking about food security, I would like to recall that prices on food products and energy soared since early 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, bad climate conditions and, importantly, systemic miscalculations in the financial and economic policy of the Western countries. This created difficulties in the world markets (higher freight and insurance rates and transport breakdowns). I am putting it mildly. Transport logistics and insurance collapsed due to the pandemic. Unilateral sanctions were imposed on top of all that.

These sanctions introduced by Washington and the EU under its pressure exacerbated the situation to the utmost. I would even call them not just unilateral sanctions but sanction harassment of our country. The disruption of the payment system and freight logistics, the closure of foreign ports to Russian ships and a ban on entering Russian harbours, and threats of mass confiscation of dry cargo and denial of insurance are just a short list of the destructive consequences of sanctions. They are wrecking the opportunities for supplying food and fertiliser to the world markets. Meanwhile, the Western regimes must see the response of the world public to their actions. They may hope to mislead the world public but there are specialised agencies in independent countries, such as ministries of agriculture, industry and trade and transport that understand what the Western regimes are doing to totally block the European continent and prevent even the slightest chance of restoring normal economic activities. These actions are causing problems with food and many other things. Why are they doing all this?

During this nightmare, Western representatives are talking about humanitarian exemptions for agricultural products, but in reality these exemptions are reduced to naught by strict enforcement of anti-Russia sanctions, up to and including criminal punishment and intimidation.

So, on the one hand, they are talking about the need to minimise the threat to food security and on the other are doing all they can to create one by blocking transport logistics and financial payments and sanctioning suppliers and all their partners. Why are they doing this? The goal is obvious – to isolate and inflict maximum damage on the Russian economy and Europe (this is now obvious). This must be admitted – this is one of the goals of Washington and its current administration. They are not interested in the inevitable consequences for the world economy and losses of other countries. Washington has always considered itself exceptional and put its interests above everything else. This is how it is acting now, too.

In turn, we confirm our willingness to continue fulfilling our commitments on the export of grain, fertilizer, energy and other critical products. We will be able to supply world markets with about 25 million tonnes of grain and at least 22 million tonnes of fertilizer before the end of the year.

Despite unprecedented sanctions pressing, we continue commercial supplies of food via bilateral channels and food deliveries to the needy via the World Food Programme, in particular, to Yemen, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Sudan, Tajikistan and Cuba.

In light of this, we urge representatives of the Western countries and the UN to refrain from groundless accusations and to find the underlying cause of the current crisis that was primarily provoked by their own myopic and vicious actions.

I am looking at how Western regimes are stockpiling food. I have only one question: Might they not choke knowing that the world is going hungry? That's all okay? Have they not swallowed their conscience?

[Back to top](#)

New address of the US Embassy in Russia

The US Embassy in Russia has changed its official address in Moscow. The US diplomatic mission is currently located in buildings 1-9 at 1 Donetsk People's Republic Square.

The initiative to honour the memory of the defenders of Donbass in Moscow was made by deputies of the Moscow City Duma. We appreciate how the US Embassy fully supported this initiative and thank American diplomats for their consideration, support and promotion of this move. Residents sent numerous proposals for the new name to the Moscow Government. The American diplomatic mission's contribution in the form of a free consultation was invaluable. Thank you. Write more.

Moscow residents voted for the name through the Active Citizen online project. The winner was supported by about 45 percent of the 278,684 participants.

I hope that the United States will not take too long to recognise the new republics of Donbass. They have excellent industrial potential, let alone human resources. My advice to everyone: use the new address for your letters.

[Back to top](#)

[Answers to media questions:](#)

Question: The Administrative Court of Appeal in Lvov recently banned the activities of the Opposition Platform – For Life party in Ukraine. The organisation’s property, funds and other assets will be transferred to the state. Could you comment on this situation?

Maria Zakharova: This is totalitarianism in its extreme form. It most definitely is. When laws don't work, it's just the reign of terror. On the other hand, it is painted over with such rosy, democratic, liberal shades and colours. That's how totalitarian regimes have always operated in history. Actually, that's what is happening now.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Last week, the leaders of Germany, France and Italy visited Kiev. Following the visit, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the European Union and Germany, in particular, will continue to arm the Armed Forces of Ukraine. How long will this orgy of weapons continue?

Maria Zakharova: They aren't hiding their goals. They aren't calling for peace, for negotiations, or for diplomacy, but insisting on resolving the problem on the battlefield. They are quite frank in this respect. Problem is, they contradict themselves. They say they champion international law, but in fact they are engaged in something else entirely.

We understood this position and took note of it. As for how many more weapons they have in their arsenals, you had better ask them. We have drawn our own conclusions. Historically, the European Union has revealed its role. I'd say there is no one to blame here. This is no longer a matter of some blunders or miscalculations, something that could have been discussed in those eight years, when, unfortunately, they totally failed in their mission as mediators to resolve the internal Ukrainian situation. Now we are no longer talking about miscalculations or mistakes made by the European Union and Western regimes; we are talking about their intentionally aggressive policy.

[Back to top](#)

Question: The EU Ambassador was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry yesterday. The Russian side demanded the ban on the transit of goods to Kaliningrad be lifted immediately and pointed out that retaliatory measures can be taken. We would like to know what measures that implied and when they can be introduced.

Maria Zakharova: I would like to point out that every government agency has commented on this, including the Foreign Ministry, the Presidential Executive Office, and the Russian Security Council. In particular, Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev made a statement.

Our approach is well known. In addition to public channels, it was also communicated to the perpetrator of this absolutely illegal move – to Lithuania – via the country’s embassy in Russia, and to the EU representative in our country. Reports on this score were published on the Foreign Ministry website as well.

As for response measures, they are now being worked out between various government agencies. The Russian side has pointed out to both Lithuania and the European Union, via their diplomatic missions in Moscow, that such actions were unacceptable and they needed to change the steps taken and return the situation to a legitimate course. If this is not done, retaliatory actions will become inevitable – Moscow has emphasised this at all levels.

You asked what kind of measures could be taken. I received a lot of questions about this. One of the main questions is whether they would be entirely diplomatic. The answer is no. They will not be diplomatic; they will be practical. Their nature and timeframe will depend (as we have said today and all these days) on what steps the EU and Lithuania take now. If this does not happen, measures will be taken.

What kind of measures? I think we will talk about this when the decision is coordinated and announced.

[Back to top](#)

Question: How do you assess London drafting a law to override ECHR decisions?

Maria Zakharova: Britain and human rights? Give me a break. All they have is words and declarations. Look at what is being done there. There are a huge number of examples in recent history that involve killing citizens of sovereign states – Iraq, for example. Britain has played a major role in this. There are examples of individual infringement, not so much on human rights, but ruining individual lives. Consider Julian Assange – he has been tormented and destroyed, as a personality, by British services, acting at the behest of the United States, for years. Even though UN special rapporteurs actually described this as torture. No person should, in theory or in practice, be subjected to what he has been subjected to for just one reason – because he had the illusion that, being on the territory of those very liberal Western regimes, he could invoke their own laws and their own statements about the primacy of freedom of speech and the protection of the rights of journalists. He is paying in his health and now also his life for the erroneous belief that it worked that way.

I understand that this is about Britain's relations with an international institution, but it will be really interesting for me to watch this. It'll be fun to see the wording.

They have “simply” cut our journalists out of their media landscape. First, they pressured and persecuted Russian journalists and media outlets, and then they just cut them off. More than that, they unleashed a full-blown harassment campaign on them. So much for respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Do I understand right that there is nothing to say about concrete, tough measures on Lithuania for blocking transit to the Kaliningrad Region, that is, there are basically no concrete measures?

Maria Zakharova: As I have already said, they are being worked out. This is an inter-agency issue. Given that the measures will not be diplomatic but practical, they are being worked out in an inter-agency format. We are not speaking about them not because we have something to hide, but rather because they are being coordinated and endorsed. Let me stress again (for the third time at today's briefing): we told the EU and Lithuania that they must change course. Perhaps the other party will make changes, and then our response will be different.

I would like to draw your attention (you are highly unlikely to write about it, yet I would like you to quote me) to the fact that it defies logic for the EU and its individual members to say, on the one hand, that global food security is in jeopardy, while, on the other hand, to block cargo delivery routes to themselves or on their own continent. We either proceed from the fact that EU food security, as they claim, is of paramount importance and they care about the world, but then it is necessary to release whole sectors of the economy, logistics and transport so that they can contribute to food security. Consumers will not be fed until food reaches them, no matter how many times you say “food.”

The same is true here. Food must be handed over, delivered. It must be paid for. If all that is blocked, and now with this single-point decision, what is there to speak about? It applies not only to food security but first of all to the humanitarian area.

Question: When you mention the practical aspect, can we see it as the economic aspect?

Maria Zakharova: When I speak about the practical aspect, I mean that practical steps are involved rather than diplomatic measures. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. We have to wait until a respective decision is made.

[Back to top](#)

Question: I want to ask you about Ukraine being invited to join the EU. On the one hand, Russia doesn’t seem to object, because the EU is sort of an “economic organisation.” On the other hand, Sergey Lavrov said in his June 16 interview with the NTV Channel that the EU was a geopolitical project and that the United States had brought Brussels to heel. So it seems we have now a Euro-NATO Union?

Maria Zakharova: I don't see any contradictions. All types of economic integration are fine, if the case in point is economy and finance. But things are absolutely different when this economy is "managed" by political centres or is based on political choices. Then it is political economy rather than economy pure and simple. Of course, geopolitics, economics, and national interests are closely interconnected, but there should be no diktat. Either they are liberal democracies or they are totalitarian regimes. A liberal democracy is about law and freedom, while a totalitarian regime means political regulations that dominate and weigh on everything. Their economic objectives are incompatible ideologically with international actions undertaken by this or that country. This is certainly possible. But they should abide by law and international legal commitments, which, as they claim, are sacred to them. If a country's policy is run along these lines, then certain measures are introduced due to the fact that the country's political and economic actions are unacceptable for the EU. In that case the country can shape its own economic activity accordingly. Everything must be done in accordance with the law. If the perpetual keynote is the political "whip" (not even their domestic whip but an overseas one), the domineering "manipulative leverage," then the economy is neither here, nor there.

The invitation to membership (or, as they say, "membership of members") is largely linked to the current political situation rather than the objective economic reality, or a potential, or economic development. There are no criteria that the EU members themselves could present to the public as an explanation of their steps. Otherwise they are at odds with the criteria declared six or twelve months ago, which served as a basis for denying something or, on the contrary, for adopting a positive decision with regard to other states. But there must be a single criterion. This mostly looks like a political manipulation, not political fine-tuning. On the other hand, they do not conceal this and this is the reason why they call what they want to live in a "rules-based world order." These rules are changed on the go as distinct from law, which is immutable and cannot be changed based on political expediency.

An invitation to the EU has ceased to be something predictable, logical, and based on objective indicators related to European states' economic, social and legal development. The current EU leaders, who are infected with anti-Russian sentiments, are scorning the criteria that have been clearly outlined in their own documents. And they are contradicting each other. What is the EU based on in its actions? Where is that "golden book of rules" that one could peruse? One has the impression that their main criteria are Russophobia and an anti-Russian oath they must take in Brussels. Then new promises are made and lip service is paid to boundless opportunities opening before candidates and "members of members." All of this looks like manipulation and machinations.

At the current stage in the EU's "evolution," decisions are taken on the basis of time-serving considerations and in line with the policy of expansion and acquisition of new territory and "spheres of influence" in Europe, not on the basis of truly economic criteria. All of this is to say that the EU is failing to meet the core interests of its member states or states aspiring to join it. Socioeconomic development, deep integration and peaceful prosperity have ceased to be the goals of that alliance, which is being militarised at an increased pace. The EU's aims and methods can hardly be distinguished from those of NATO. They bespeak unity of intentions. The EU is losing its identity; it is being completely transformed and is turning into a political tool in the hands of the United States. The Americans, in turn, are exhausting the financial and economic resources of European states and ordinary Europeans in order (as they say) to contain Russia. Throughout the recent years, the White House has egged Brussels to confront other states too. Russia is not the only target. There is also China, among others. This directly weakens the European continent, which is using up its resources or absolutely rejects resources solely in order to please Washington.

All of this undermines the EU's prestige as an independent actor and prevents it from attaining independent self-fulfilment.

[Back to top](#)

Question: China released its first comprehensive Global Development Report ahead of the BRICS Summit. It discusses, in particular, the rise of emerging economies and developing countries in the years to come, the shifting global economic balance and the fact that the realignment of the global governance model is gaining momentum. This could serve as a new development driver for developing and emerging economies and give them a new voice on the international arena. What is your overall assessment of this report? What could be the role of BRICS in reshaping global governance?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov talked at length on this topic in his June 21, 2022, interview with your corporation.

I can now repeat that BRICS is a group of five leading countries in their respective regions. This by itself demonstrates that they have a lot of potential when it comes to shaping the international agenda. In fact, facilitating the emergence of a more democratic and representative global governance framework was the objective that led to the creation of this format, which included giving developing countries a stronger voice on key international issues. Today, the BRICS countries consistently champion collective approaches to resolving the key present-day challenges, and act as custodians of genuine multilateralism – we were the ones who coined this term – rooted in international law, and respecting the interests and sovereign choices states make as they choose a development path for themselves.

Our countries have a total population of over 3 billion people, or roughly 42 percent of the world's population, while covering about 30 percent of the land surface. The five BRICS nations have substantial natural resources, and their global economic role is increasing all the time. According to the IMF, the GDP in purchasing power standards could have reached \$45.5 trillion as of the end of 2021, leaving the G7 countries behind. These figures are an eloquent illustration of the global role the BRICS nations play.

The five BRICS countries must emerge as one of the pillars of the new world order. They can play a leading role in working out solutions to challenges and threats the world is facing today, such as terrorism and transnational crime, including the use of new technology, the growing number of conflicts, climate change, etc.

BRICS is already equipped with a branched cooperation architecture. Let me mention the New Development Bank, whose lending portfolio has already exceeded \$29 billion. The process to expand NDB's membership is underway, which demonstrates the global role this mechanism plays. In particular, decisions to grant NDB membership to Bangladesh, the UAE, Uruguay and Egypt have been taken. We are discussing ways to give national currencies a bigger place in our settlements and creating effective payment mechanisms.

BRICS is open to the world and is ready to take into consideration the interests of a wide range of countries, primarily in the developing world. It is committed to further strengthening dialogue with its external partners, including within its outreach and BRICS+ mechanisms. It is in this format the foreign ministers met recently (May 19, 2022, via videoconference). On June 24, 2022, the High-Level Dialogue is scheduled to take place as part of the BRICS Summit, bringing together leaders from several developing countries. We are looking forward to building a system that would offer more justice, while distancing itself from the neo-colonial paradigm of inequality and double standards.

It is with great interest that we read the Global Development Report released by the Chinese Centre for International Knowledge on Development, and hold a positive view of its contents, as well as Beijing's efforts to facilitate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In today's turbulent international environment, we can only welcome initiatives aimed at stimulating and deepening integration processes instead of imposing artificial restrictions and fragmenting the international economic space.

We stand ready to step up coordination with our Chinese partners in this sphere at various international platforms, including the UN and BRICS.

[Back to top](#)

Question: According to a CNN article of June 19, 2022, US homeland and national security officials have serious concerns regarding Russia's alleged intentions to benefit from the political crisis in the United States by interfering in the election process during November mid-term elections in order to discredit the American democracy, just as it happened during the 2020 election. How will the Foreign Ministry respond to these attempts to blame Russia for America's domestic woes? Are you concerned that there may be new scandals involving Russian hackers?

Maria Zakharova: Let me assure you that there is no need to discredit the American democracy any further.

[Back to top](#)

Question: President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said during the recent St Petersburg International Economic Forum that he does not recognise the independence of the Lugansk and Donetsk people's republics from Ukraine. After that, head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov spoke harshly about the CSTO leaders who have not recognised these republics. What does Moscow think of its allies' refusal to support Russia's policy? Will Moscow insist that they change their attitude?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to note that Ramzan Kadyrov remembers better than anyone else who did not recognise Russia's sovereignty over the Chechen Republic in the 1990s. The situation has changed dramatically. His current statements are based, in part, on his theoretical and practical knowledge of political science.

We interpret the statements made in St Petersburg as Kazakhstan's readiness to continue developing all-round cooperation with Russia and enhancing the effectiveness of Eurasian integration based, of course, on its own national interests. This was stated explicitly. We share the resolve of our Kazakhstani colleagues to implement all our mutual obligations and to deepen our industrial cooperation. Our countries remain priority trade and economic partners for each other. This is objective reality that cannot be disregarded. We are interested in a harmonious interaction in all spheres, as evidenced by the practical results achieved on the sidelines of the St Petersburg forum.

Moscow and Nur-Sultan continue pursuing a policy of developing close allied relations and mutually beneficial integration ties. Our presidents' meeting in St Petersburg has reaffirmed this.

It is yet another clear practical example of what we point out in theory when we try to explain our radical difference from the Western regimes. We may have different views on current issues, including international ones. Our approaches to them may differ. We respect our partners, unlike the Western regimes, which do not accept dissent despite their declarations of commitment to democracy and pluralism. We uphold our national agenda and look for points of contact, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit.

Since we are talking about the CSTO, I would like to mention the main political document adopted at a recent meeting of the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers, the joint statement they adopted on June 10, 2022. It expressed the member states' deep concern at the continuing degradation of the international security system and reaffirmed their position on the assertion and strict observance of the principle of equal and indivisible security, enshrined in the fundamental documents of the OSCE.

[Back to top](#)

Question: President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky said in his video address to the African Union Commission that “Africa is taken hostage” by Russia, once again accused Moscow of blocking Ukrainian ports and described the conflict as a colonial war. Could you comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: As a showman, he has opted for a standout – as he understands it – and easy to understand form of address, but he has failed once again.

[Back to top](#)

Question: US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said in an interview during her visit to the South Caucasus that the United States supports the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair process, continues to believe that it is a very important format and is ready for fresh contacts with Russia within that format. What is your assessment of that statement? What is Russia's position as a Minsk co-chair?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to express doubt of Karen Donfried's sincerity. If Washington and Paris really regarded the unique format of the OCSE Minsk Group co-chairmanship as important, they would not have neglected its mandate, which was unanimously approved by all the member states, by severing any contacts with Russia's co-chairmanship on February 24, 2022, openly and without any consultations. This has done largely irreparable harm to this trilateral format. And now they make such a statement. We have not received a clear explanation of reasons for their outrageous decision. Likewise, there are no guarantees that such irresponsible moves will not be made again. They cannot pretend that nothing happened. They will have to take new realities into account. They hoped to push us into isolation, but they have failed again, their scheme has fallen through. They have isolated themselves because the outside world is not limited to the Euro-Atlantic region.

Russia is more interested than any other country in normalising relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. We cannot allow the politicised moves by some external players to hamper the far from simple efforts to restore peace and stability in the region. We will continue doing all we can to ensure the implicit fulfilment of the commitments and the attainment of the goals set out in the statements of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia adopted on November 9, 2020 and January 11 and November 26, 2021.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Azerbaijani officials blocked the website of the RIA Novosti news agency. Baku also rejected temporary residence applications from employees of the Sputnik agency. What is your assessment of this situation? Is this yet another encroachment on the press and freedom of speech or political blackmail?

Maria Zakharova: Issues related to media outlets and their operation must be addressed based on the fundamental aspects of compliance with the law, respect for the freedom of speech and journalists' rights secured by national and international law.

We handle existing and newly arising issues with our partners in a bilateral format. Hopefully, there will be as few incidents like this as possible. We will develop media relations proceeding from the general need for countering fakes and misinformation. We have issues to address in cooperation with all the countries in the world, collectively and based on the above stated principles.

[Back to top](#)

Question: A meeting of the commission on unblocking regional communications, headed by the deputy prime ministers of Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan, took place during the St Petersburg International Economic Forum. What is the current stage of the talks? When can we expect specific results?

Maria Zakharova: We welcome these proactive steps of the trilateral working group co-chaired by the deputy prime ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia on unblocking the economic and transport links in the South Caucasus.

On June 3, 2022, in Moscow, the group held its tenth meeting where the parties coordinated their positions on a number of issues. The discussions continued on June 16-17 on the sidelines of SPIEF.

Russia will continue to provide full assistance to this process. I would advise you to reach out to the co-chairs of the trilateral working group for comments and details.

[Back to top](#)

Question: On June 19, 2022, an Armenian conscript was killed in Vardenis as a result of a ceasefire violation by the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan. What is your assessment of the fact that Azerbaijan continues provocations at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border despite the peace talks?

Maria Zakharova: The occasional incidents in the border regions of Azerbaijan and Armenia confirm that it is relevant and important (as it has been said repeatedly) to continue the consistent and regular work of the Commission on Delimitation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Border. We are ready to host, in the nearest future, the commission's second meeting in Moscow, as it was agreed upon by the parties on May 24, 2022. It is also important to take steps toward increasing the stability and security at the border as it was envisaged in the statement by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia in Sochi on November 26, 2021.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Speaking about the parliamentary elections in France, experts foresee a major political crisis and dismissal of the government. How would you comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: This is a purely internal political issue of an independent sovereign state. We must not give any assessment to this. It does not concern our country. It is their internal agenda.

[Back to top](#)

Question: How would you comment on President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's remark at the SPIEF that the republics of Donbass are quasi-states?

Maria Zakharova: To give a correct comment, one needs to rely on terminology. The term quasi-state was coined by Robert H. Jackson, a professor at the University of Vancouver, Canada, at the turn of the 1990s. Jackson used it with regard to "Third World" countries that gained independence when the colonial system collapsed after World War II. In this logic (I am relying on terminology), the DPR and the LPR find themselves in a highly respected company of Asian and African states. Some of those states have negotiated a long and painstaking path towards sovereignty and emerged as major economic and political subjects of international law.

However, if we take the modern interpretation of this term, I would call by this name the countries that are obeying unilateral US sanctions to the detriment of their own national interests and international legal obligations.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Russian Ambassador to the UK Andrey Kelin said on Rossiya 24 TV channel that the Embassy had received a note concerning two British nationals, Aiden Aslin and Shaun Pinner. What kind of assistance did the Foreign Office ask for, exactly? Was the request rejected? What was the response?

Maria Zakharova: This document is being considered in Moscow. I will find out what the reaction will be. We will certainly share our impressions.

[Back to top](#)

Question: The US Embassy in Yerevan has pledged \$400,000 to anyone who can reconcile Armenia with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Any interested party can enter the race – organisations, young people, or journalists. We have repeatedly seen the Americans trying to increase their influence in the South Caucasus. Now they have resorted to “people’s diplomacy.” How does Moscow assess such an initiative? Will Moscow take any action?

Maria Zakharova: Can countries participate? Lately, the actions of the American diplomacy have raised some questions about their state of mind.

Yesterday I “admired” the photos of the US naval attaché in Moscow talking to lamp posts. And this is not a joke.

Our principled approach is that any initiative that promotes a peaceful settlement is good as a heartfelt impulse towards a lasting peace. But if we are talking about professionals, they cannot afford to slide into populism. This takes serious, painstaking work. If it were possible to solve problems this way, no one would ever seek professional help. There would be no demand for professionals in diplomacy, international law, economics, jurisprudence or disarmament. You could put up an ad, announce an amount and the job would be done. But world history shows that things aren’t so simple. Professionals (pardon the tautology) should be professionally engaged in conflict resolution. They have no right to slide into populism.

If the United States is so adamant about establishing peace, perhaps they should stop engaging in provocations that lead to an aggravation of the conflict. I sincerely believe in the power of people's diplomacy and the initiative that comes from civil society. But it should not be used as a tool to achieve opportunistic goals; it should come from the heart and be sincere. There are many such manifestations, including in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. A huge number of zealots, cultural figures, artists, concerned and empathising, are trying to use their personal opportunities, resources, and talents to unite people. They usually do this without participating in competitions for a prize.

[Back to top](#)

Question: Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said the second meeting of the 3+3 platform on the South Caucasus is scheduled for the end of June. Are preparations underway now? When can it take place?

Maria Zakharova: I can confirm that we continue to coordinate the dates and venue of the second meeting of the 3+3 Regional Platform. We assume that this information will be provided by the organising party. For our part, we will give additional comments.

[Back to top](#)



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