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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the NTV network, St Petersburg, June 16, 2022

Question: As the organisers keep saying, this event is an alternative to the Davos forum in terms of the level of the issues on its agenda.

I would like to begin with the most discussed issue. The West seems to be looking for a way out of the situation in Ukraine. Judging by European statistics, the number of supporters of sanctions and sanction pressure is decreasing there because people are suffering from the boomerang effect. At the same time, some people in the US and the UK insist that the war must continue until the “victorious end.” There are different options. Kiev has announced that the negotiating position is weak because they are being pushed to negotiate, and that they want to strengthen this position.

Olaf Scholz, Emmanuel Macron and Mario Draghi met with Vladimir Zelensky in Kiev today. They said before the meeting that they would try to convince him to resume talks. The Europeans' previous visit brought the process to a standstill. At the same time, Kiev says that the upcoming delivery of heavy weaponry will turn the tide and strengthen its negotiating positions.

Do you think that the provision of heavy weaponry and trained personnel is a provocation that will only shift the situation further away from the talks?

Sergey Lavrov: You have raised many issues. I would like to comment on some of your points.

First of all, don't offend the SPIEF by comparing it to Davos, which has long deteriorated into an event that only promotes Western interests. They don't even pretend that Davos is a platform for dialogue among the key players. Second, you said that the West is only concerned with its own problems and doesn't care about the problems others are faced with. The situation is more complex. The West is trying to resolve the problem of the United States, which is leading this movement and has declared itself the master of the (unipolar) world whom all others must obey.

NATO has always been Washington's loyal servant. The EU has surrendered as well. Emmanuel Macron is still fighting for his idea of European strategic autonomy, but he has no support. The Germans have resigned to the idea and are probably happy that the United States has taken over control in Europe and is protecting its security, or more precisely, that it has assumed responsibility for expanding its military presence so that Europe never has to consider autonomy. However, the West is not only trying to attain the strategic goal formulated by the United States. It has to take measures which are harming it here and now, like the sanctions you mentioned or the "defeat Russia on the battlefield" policy of Brussels' foreign policy chief, let alone the Anglo-Saxons, who have been speaking about this for a long time. This is telling a lot.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has stated publicly that the next step should be a ban on Russian gas imports because they have exhausted all other measures.

You know about the European sentiments and protests against banning Russian gas imports, which would inevitably multiply problems. Ursula von der Leyen's initiative is designed to "punish" Russia even though this would harm them and their own citizens. You probably remember that nearly a third of regional countries boycotted the recent Summit of the Americas, which was held very quietly in Los Angeles. The presidents and prime ministers of many Latin American and Caribbean countries noted that the United States and Canada, the other two summit participants, had provided more than \$50 billion to Ukraine over the past few months alone, mostly to build up its armaments. Compared to that, US allocations to other countries and regions, including for combatting the pandemic and the food crisis, are pitifully small.

The West wants to perpetuate US leadership not only in Europe but also in Asia Pacific (where they are creating AUKUS and QUAD), contain China and isolate Russia. It is a global approach. NATO is set to take over the world. Jens Stoltenberg has stated publicly that NATO is an organisation that must assume responsibility for global security. Let's talk about NATO. They assured us that it is a defensive alliance concerned exclusively with protecting the territory of the member states. This thesis has long been buried, just like the claim that ballistic missile defence is designed to deter North Korea and Iran. Everyone knows what BMD is like and who is its target. To attain its strategic goal, the West, first, is ready to hurt its own citizens for the sake of its geopolitical ambitions, and second, is forcing all others to act likewise through open blackmail, threats, ultimatums and other lowbrow methods and moves.

It is not true that the West is trying to settle its own problems and is not concerned about the problems of others. Quite to the contrary, the West is creating problems where there were none.

Long before the special military operation, which was a forced decision taken because of the complete sabotage of the Minsk agreements under the Trump administration, my colleague, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo toured Africa, where he publicly, during televised events, urged Africans not to cooperate with Russia or China, because Russia and China allegedly have mercantile reasons for trading with Africa while they (the Americans) are doing this unselfishly. He called on Africa to revise its position. At that time, nobody was concerned about Ukraine other than when it came to sabotaging the Minsk agreements.

As for the Minsk agreements, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has recently stated that they must ensure Russia's admission of its defeat, that Russia's goals of "occupying Ukraine" will not be attained, and that Russia must be forced to sign agreements that will guarantee the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. The Chancellor is somewhat late, because the agreements that guaranteed the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine were called the Minsk agreements. They were approved by the UN Security Council and stipulated a special status for Donbass as part of united Ukraine. This is the essence of those agreements. But they have been buried by President Vladimir Zelensky with active "support" from Germany and France, which were the agreements' co-authors, and the United States, which did everything they could to pander to Zelensky in his Russophobia. As for the agreements Chancellor Scholz mentioned, the ship has sailed.

Question: What about the deliveries of heavy weapons?

Sergey Lavrov: I hope that along with politicians who irresponsibly demand to supply Ukraine with whatever it wants, there are military people who realise what is at stake and understand the risks involved. Vladimir Zelensky is asking for long-range weapons pledging not to attack targets on the territory of the Russian Federation. Does he consider Crimea to be the territory of the Russian Federation? Is Donbass the territory of the LPR and the DPR? The Kerch Bridge? One of his talking heads (or whatever body parts they talk with) has uttered a threat concerning the bridge. We have a responsible army. All these threats are taken under review. There is no smoke without fire. I am confident that all these plans will fail completely.

It would be a good idea to find out, exactly, where the weapons now available in Ukraine have got to – Stingers and Javelins. They are on the black market already. Some have surfaced in Albania and Kosovo. They talk about it openly. The weapons are resold at a discount. The black market is growing. Most of the weapons will return to where they came from.

As for multiple launch rocket systems, the situation is even more complicated. At this stage, US President Joe Biden said they would supply ammunition with a limited range, but nothing can be ruled out. We are ready for this, I assure you.

Question: Speaking of the “European project,” it is now clear that the Europeans have always said they were beyond geopolitics, that the EU was an economic union. Now there’s a debate whether to give Ukraine membership of the members. Georgia said they were more ready.

Sergey Lavrov: I would give it membership “of the members,” that's for sure.

Question: Moldova is struggling with a drought. They're asking for help, but they're only helped with armaments. Doesn't that look like an attempt to open a second front, when our peacekeepers are in Transnistria? They're sandwiched between Ukraine and Moldova. It looks like a rather dangerous situation, and an attempt to destabilise Moldova.

Sergey Lavrov: You are most certainly right.

As for the EU, it is no longer an economic forum, or the community it used to be at the start. It is an exclusively geopolitical project, which is being crushed and has already been practically crushed by the United States. I've already mentioned this. They have long been discussing a potential EU military component that would be independent of NATO or the United States. But the discussion eventually degenerated into interaction with NATO. A few years ago, the two organisations developed a compatible military mobility plan, whereby EU countries that are not NATO members agreed to provide their territory for the movement of NATO troops and weapons. This is actually one of the main manifestations of a military-political alliance.

The European Union has quite harshly and loudly proclaimed the requirements for potential new members. Even as candidates for membership, while reaching agreement on the so-called chapters of the acquis, they are to fully join any EU foreign policy action, primarily (this is now being publicly stated) the anti-Russia sanctions. That is, candidates for EU membership are not getting any economic benefits – what they get is submission to geopolitical ambitions and, ultimately, accession to the policy of establishing a unipolar world under Washington's command.

My failed visit to Serbia is further proof of this. When Macedonia and Montenegro refused to provide their airspace, we expressed our attitude to this during meetings with EU officials in Brussels. They didn't even blush when they told us it was those countries' sovereign decision and Brussels had nothing to do with it. Two days later (apparently, the right hand not knowing what the left was up to), Peter Stano, the lead spokesperson of the EU diplomatic service said they welcomed the decision of Montenegro and Macedonia, which have followed their instructions as candidates for EU membership.

Question: What did they say off the record? With diplomats, what they say publicly is one thing, and quite another...

Sergey Lavrov: They didn't say anything off the record.

Question: Back in the day (they don't remember this), Yevgeny Primakov told the crew of his plane to make a U-turn over the Atlantic, in order to protect them and stop air strikes against Yugoslavia. And they are now forcing your plane to make a U-turn.

Sergey Lavrov: The Serbs didn't force the plane to make a U-turn.

Question: Nevertheless, we are talking about the Balkan region.

Sergey Lavrov: At the same time, Deputy Prime Minister Zorana Mihajlovic made a strange-sounding statement that I had invited myself to Serbia, and that they didn't want to see me in Belgrade. She said that, if Sergey Lavrov says that he is a friend of Serbia, then he should not have even thought about coming here at a time when they are pressuring Serbia to join the anti-Russia sanctions.

Question: I don't quite follow her logic ...

Sergey Lavrov: If you're a friend, don't come over because your visits will irritate the West. That's it.

Question: That means I am your friend, but it turns out that you are not my friend. This creates a certain logical chain.

Sergey Lavrov: It's hard for me to say. Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin replied to her statement and explained how one should speak with friends, and how one should treat them. Going back to the European Union, if Ukraine receives a roadmap to prepare for EU accession, this will only mean that the EU is once again ready to disregard all its criteria that had always existed for candidates, and that it is now ready to be guided by geopolitical considerations alone. When they started expanding into Eastern Europe in the mid-2000, into the Baltics, and admitting all these countries into NATO, we asked them why they were doing this, since the Baltic countries were not ready to join the Alliance. At the time, the EU had a rather neutral position towards Russia. They told us that the three Baltic countries and Poland had been subjected to "Soviet occupation" and were suffering from phobias. They said that these countries would join NATO, calm down and feel safe. However, everything turned out the other way round. Instead of calming down, they are swaying the entire North Atlantic Alliance to become Russophobic and taking advantage of the rule of consensus and the solidarity principle. This is the most vocal and aggressive Russophobic minority in this alliance, both in the EU and NATO. This minority is dictating its own concepts and rules to everyone.

Question: I remember them saying that the Baltic countries, if they became part of NATO and the EU, would be our best neighbours.

Sergey Lavrov: Yes, that's exactly what they said.

Question: Frankly speaking, I thought it was a hoax. But today even the Americans are publishing positive comments on Boris Johnson's idea of creating an anti-Russia ring of Poland, the Baltic states, Ukraine and the UK. How serious is this? Or is it just a political game?

Sergey Lavrov: Everything they are doing is a mixture of theatricals and serious intentions. There are more theatricals and a lot of fake stories. The processes underway in Europe and the Western world as a whole are reminiscent of the KVN and Quarter 95 fun shows. Everything is orchestrated and performed with clockwork precision. Sometimes they sing out of tune, even from the viewpoint of their own logic, but sometimes they have a thorough production plan, like Bucha and the fake talks which came unstuck after Istanbul. They have admitted that they don't want these talks. It is unclear what instructions Vladimir Zelensky receives from his Washington and London bosses or what alliances they are planning to create. If Boris Johnson continues to pursue this initiative, it will become clear that it is spearheaded against Russia. He has no other ideas. But it is also against the EU, which the UK has left. It now plans to win over the countries that don't like the policy of the European majors, which have a mind of their own and once in a while call for talks to be held, agreements to be signed and for a European security architecture to be built with Moscow. But the "youngsters" call them to order. President Macron recently said that they should come to terms with Russia on major issues of European architecture and that Russia must not be humiliated. A day later, Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky said that Macron probably didn't understand the issue very well. In other words, he rejected Macron's comments on not humiliating Russia. This is their mentality. The Czech Republic could fit into Boris Johnson's alliance.

You have asked about Moldova. Attempts are clearly being made to turn Moldova into another Ukraine. The consumerist policies of the current Moldovan leadership are indicative. They declare readiness to join the EU, and then they say they need to look at what the EU has to offer before deciding whether Moldova should withdraw from the CIS. After that they demand that Russia give them a gas price discount on the contractually agreed price, or payment deferrals. By and large, this is begging and extortion. In other words, if we refuse to give them what they ask for they will quickly run towards Europe and if we comply, they will do the same anyway, only at a slower pace. This is how I interpret these signals. I can assure you that the majority of Moldovans understand this very well, especially in Transnistria and Gagauzia. The EU is acting quite grossly, forcing the countries that have not even been granted candidate status to open a "second front."

They have tried the “second front” approach in Georgia. I must give it to the current Georgian authorities, they have not risen to the bait. Some countries are guided by the interests of their national development, people and economy. We will continue to closely monitor the situation. The EU activities in Moldova (the Americans are there all the time as well, sending a series of high-ranking delegations) are proof of a desire to foster anti-Russia sentiments in the country.

Question: Yes, this is what it looks like to me. The Georgian leadership has taken a surprisingly wise and consistent stand, and most importantly, it is holding out despite the pressure.

Sergey Lavrov: They are concerned about their own interests. If Moldova is thinking about reunification with Romania, about going back home as this is described there, it is quite another matter.

Question: A friend called me from Georgia to quote from an interview with the Georgian president. When somebody shouted: “What are you doing? Why haven’t you joined the anti-Russia sanctions?”, she replied: “I’m saving your son. We don’t want to fight.” This looks like a commendable position, do you agree?

Sergey Lavrov: Was it Salome Zourabichvili?

Question: Yes. In this context, I would like to ask about friends, enemies and national interests. Look at the results of a recent voting at the UN General Assembly. Do you think that unbearable pressure was put on these countries and the results we see do not reflect the current line-up of forces?

Sergey Lavrov: Yes, of course. We don’t just think so, we know that this is the case. Foreign ambassadors in New York (I developed good ties with many of them when they held lower positions; our representative and his deputy are now working closely with our friends) tell us privately about the “methods” being used by the West. For example, an ambassador is reminded before voting that he has a Citibank account or that his son or daughter is studying at Stanford. This is how far they are ready to go.

Question: Remember that famous story from 2003? Before launching attack on Saddam Hussein, the NSA asked British intelligence to bug the phones and emails of key members of the UN Security Council who were to vote on the operation against Iraq, in order to blackmail them with similar things. A similar scenario. Remarkably, their methods have not changed. One would think, the world has become multipolar, they would have had to adapt by now.

Sergey Lavrov: Human nature cannot change. A leopard never changes its spots.

Question: Now, in a multipolar world, Russian sanctions have accelerated this process. When we want to be one of the poles of a multipolar world, we understand that in this situation, it is not just a right and power – it is a responsibility. Because those who are attracted to this pole will expect security, money, resources.

Sergey Lavrov: We do not have a goal to become one of the poles of a multipolar world. We are just stating an objective reality. This world is developing objectively, all by itself. All the current “labours” of the West are aimed at “containing” this objective historical process. How can one even say the World Trade Organisation must be reformed to meet the interests of the United States and Europe? But this is what official government members say.

China, which (as I have already said) has become a global economic leader in recent years (we can state this with confidence), has achieved this result by playing by the rules set by the West. The international monetary and financial system, and the world trading system at that time relied on rules tailored to the interests of the West. But China beat those who wrote these rules on their own court and in accordance with their rules. That is why they began to say the Bretton Woods institutions had to be reformed in such a way that they reflected the interests of the United States and Europe.

They suggested playing by those rules. China agreed and beat them. Take the World Trade Organisation. For many years, the Americans have blocked the appointment of members of the Dispute Settlement Body citing lack of quorum. This body remains inactive. All of China's complaints against the United States, claiming discrimination and violation of WTO rules, complaints which are totally legitimate and based on the facts, are stuck there because the United States does not want to admit that it violated its own rules. They want to write new ones now, proclaiming that reform of the WTO is aimed at ensuring the interests of the United States and Europe.

Question: The next reform they want to carry out is that of the UN Security Council.

Sergey Lavrov: The UN Security Council's reform has been debated for almost 30 years. It was not their idea. They are trying to use it to expand the West's presence on this body. We are totally against this. Today, six of the 15 UN Security Council members represent the West, and when Japan is elected, this number will increase to seven. In this connection, we regard expanding the representation of developing countries as the sole goal of reform. We have said that India and Brazil are strong candidates. The African continent's representation should be increased as well. When we are told that Germany and Japan deserve it, we reply that their inclusion in the Security Council as permanent members does not add any value to this body, nor does it carry anything additional. This will be an obedient majority of Western countries. It is developing countries that are ready to bring a certain added value. It is on this that we should focus. In this regard, our position dovetails with that of the PRC.

Question: Today, referring to the PRC, the Americans said that it was on the "wrong" side of history because it has been friendly towards us and given us all-out support. It has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

Sergey Lavrov: Neocolonialism, boorishness, the lot. They are making overtures to our strategic partner India largely out of the desire to contain China. Their method is to exploit in every way the problems existing in India-China relations. They have created Quad (the United States, India, Japan, and Australia). Our Indian friends – I was on visit to India a couple of months ago – can see through it all and reject any forms of cooperation related to military affairs. This is why AUKUS has been established, where they will try to draw in Japan and Korea. They are attempting to split the ASEAN countries and accept them in some or other form in that alliance. Not so long ago, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman expressed their true attitude to the selfsame India, saying that Indian friends must be helped to understand what their best interests were all about.

Question: At last someone will explain what the nature of the national interests of a country with a population of 1.5 billion is.

Sergey Lavrov: Certainly. US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said recently that they had not yet decided how to punish India for purchasing Russian S-400 systems. They are yet to decide!

As for Europe's independence, the same Austin said at a recent conference that they would expand the US military presence in Europe but were yet to decide whether it would be permanent, rotational, or rotational-permanent. He did not mention the fact that they had not arranged it with Europe. The implication is that they have not yet decided, but when they do, Europe will toe the line, as ordered.

Question: We all just saw Joe Biden in Los Angeles trying to demonstrate his leadership, at least on his continent. But it didn't work, even there. Everyone understands that the US-led unipolarity is weakening. Our partners also see this. How do we find a balance between India, China, and our interests? This is a difficult question for us now.

Sergey Lavrov: Many political scientists use the term agony, warning we should be wary of the United States, because it is almost an animal at bay. This is an exaggeration. I would not underestimate Washington's ability to shamelessly push for its interests, using any means. This reflects our understanding that objective processes now underway are heading in a different direction from the one that would lead to the perpetuation of a unipolar world.

We are always open to such a dialogue. It was for a reason that President Vladimir Putin proposed a summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to discuss serious issues related to the need to reform the international system. We emphasise that general international relations must be reformed to return to the roots, namely, to the UN Charter, which proclaimed that the organisation was based on respect for the sovereign equality of states. The charter says just that. But in practice, in the Western policy, it's totally different. There is no question of any sovereign equality of states. If the West fulfilled its obligations under the UN Charter to respect the sovereign equality of states as a principle of international relations, it would not now be running around coercing others to impose sanctions against Russia, but would give sovereign countries the opportunity to sort things out for themselves. Russia announced what it was doing (after years of trying to reach agreements on security guarantees, without NATO expansion), explained everything in detail. Why don't you explain your vision? Let each party, like an adult, compare these proposals and make its own choice, whether it wants to side with "us," or with "them," or stay "in the middle" maintaining neutrality. They don't let anyone do that. Moreover, demanding that India, China, Turkey, or Egypt join the anti-Russia sanctions reflects a complete lack of an elementary understanding of what respect means in international affairs.

Question: Well, aren't you a bit slow? Wendy Sherman told you she would explain to India what respect meant in international affairs. And you want to explain it again. She will go and explain to them.

Sergey Lavrov: You caught me, I confess.

Question: Summing up our conversation, do you get the impression that developments in Ukraine and the current situation that is the result of a failure to understand our apprehensions and our demands for a common and indivisible security system for everyone on the continent, have launched a certain "chemical" process? This process is bringing everything to the surface. Passion-filled individuals have emerged in Latin America, the Persian Gulf and Asia, and they are ready to carve out their own niche in a new system. The West is playing a game while violating its own rules. Everything established within the Yalta-Potsdam system or after 1991 is now being put to the test. All of us are being tested by this attitude and current developments.

Sergey Lavrov: Yes, that's the way things are. However, you said that they have failed to understand our interests. They understood them completely all these years when we said that it was necessary to convert the indivisible security principle (that all of them approved) into a legally binding form. They knew what we were talking about, but they replied that this was out of the question. They said that they had proclaimed this concept as a political but non-binding slogan, and that they could provide legal security guarantees within NATO alone. By stating this position, they deliberately provoked countries that probably wanted to retain their neutral status, prevented the approval of common and binding European guarantees, and they forced everyone to think of applying for NATO membership.

Regarding the chemical process that is now underway and all that "flotsam and jetsam" rising to the surface, one can say that the concerns of various parties are becoming more obvious. This is probably true. Various countries realise that current developments are not linked with Ukraine alone. These developments have something to do with the international order and the place of every state within this system. These developments will show whether everyone respects these countries, and whether these states will be able to independently address matters regarding the basic interests of their nations or whether they will have to listen obediently to Wendy Sherman and others like her who will explain what their root interests are. This is what we are now talking about. Our contacts with an overwhelming majority of the developing world's countries show that these reflections are now in an advanced stage.

Question: So, we will wait until ...

Sergey Lavrov: Waiting is a passive position. We strive to support all these reflections and to provide facts highlighting specific developments.

Question: We are now turning away from the West. Do I understand correctly that we have already scored positive results in this area?

Sergey Lavrov: We did not turn anywhere. We have always worked due West, East, North and South. The West has terminated all contacts. Objectively speaking, we are working with the East, like we used to in the past, we are expanding our contacts with it, as before. These contacts are expanding in absolute terms, and Europe is no longer our priority, in relative terms.

Question: They themselves have become the sick people of Europe.

Sergey Lavrov: This is a very apt expression.

Question: Thank you very much.

Sergey Lavrov: You, too, be healthy.



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