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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to questions at a meeting with participants in the Znaniye educational marathon, Moscow, August 31, 2022

Friends,

I am happy to be at the educational marathon again, organised for the fourth time now by the Znaniye (Knowledge) Society. In the modern world, knowledge is everything if we are talking not only about acquiring it but also about using it in practical life no matter where we work.

Diplomacy is no exception at all in this respect. Moreover, in diplomacy more than in any other field of human endeavour, it is more important to continuously replenish and update this knowledge, discarding what has become obsolete. Life is rapidly moving forward. International events barely keep up with the development of technology that, in turn, is affecting foreign policy actions. Some people are accepting this technology proceeding from the best intentions in a bid to promote mutually beneficial cooperation. Others are trying to usurp this technology or use it in their narrow-minded interests.

The topic you have chosen for our meeting is Diplomacy of Emotions: Convincing and Keeping. As for “keeping,” we have just had a dispute with the organisers, trying to establish what it means. Probably, it is first necessary to convince a partner about something and then to keep him or her as your soul mate, someone who shares your position. On a broader plane, when you achieve something in the international arena you must also keep this achievement as part of your position. The main word in this title is “convincing.”

Diplomacy is primarily an ability to listen, hear and convince. It's a great regret but over the past few years, especially after the end of the Cold War, everyone thought an era of general welfare had arrived. Some political scientists even announced “the end of history.” They maintained that from now on “liberal values” would prevail forever throughout the entire world. Striving to declare “victory” in the Cold War and to assert one's domination has nothing to do with diplomacy. This is pure dictate, especially if we consider the methods used by the West. It resorts to threats, blackmail, unlawful sanctions, organisation of colour revolutions, and interference in domestic affairs with the use of crude force. This is what happened in Yugoslavia in 1999, in Iraq in 2003 and in Libya in 2011. The same applies to colour revolutions staged in the post-Soviet space, including our much-suffering neighbour Ukraine.

Russia does not accept such logic. What we are now facing in world history is not at all about Ukraine, if we mean the interests of the Ukrainian people. It is about the shameless use of Ukraine by the United States and its satellites. They want to create what President of Russia Vladimir Putin called “anti-Russia” as an instrument to weaken our country. They want to turn Ukraine into a bridgehead for creating material and physical threats to our security. What we are seeing now as the Western response to the implementation of the special military operation clearly shows that the West has pursued global goals from the very start. It wanted to weaken Russia. Now even some political scientists in the West admit that this weakening included an attempt to split our country.

The era we are living in is truly a long historical period. We have to be ready to count only on ourselves. Western countries' inability to negotiate – and they promised us not to expand NATO to the east, declared their values as universal and subscribed to the principle of indivisible security, committed to not strengthening their own security at the expense of others – means that all these promises have been

thrown in the rubbish. Now we can clearly see that the West is unable to negotiate. We will continue to promote our agenda based on the principles of the UN Charter. The key principle is respecting the sovereign equality of states. It has been directly violated by Americans, their allies in Europe and elsewhere. If we take the entire global population, 80 percent of the people on the planet represent the countries that did not join the sanctions imposed by the United States and its satellites, despite the massive pressure put every day (and I am not exaggerating) on the governments of these countries, and the demands to side with the anti-Russian Russophobic policy. What we have on our side is not only the UN Charter but also a big group of countries that see the importance of respecting the UN Charter. They are united in a range of forward-minded and modern bodies. They include post-Soviet space such as the CSTO, the EAEU, the CIS, as well as the SCO and BRICS, and the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, recently established in New York. The group includes around 20 countries and it will grow. We will always defend diplomatic and political approaches to solving any issues and thwart any attempts by the West to deal with them using brutal force, blackmail and threats.

In this sense, yes, we have a diplomacy of emotions. A normal person raised in keeping with the traditions and rich history inherited from our ancestors, including the history of our diplomacy and protecting the interests of our Motherland, cannot promote this tradition without emotions. Because, if emotions run out, our ability to convince others will significantly diminish – and we must keep convincing. The emotions we rely on to be as persuasive as we can in talks with our partners play a big role. On the other hand, we must not give in to negativity and despair. I do not foresee any tragic disasters.

The prevailing tendencies in the world are those in favour of returning to the origins of the UN Charter and equal and mutually beneficial cooperation. When our Western partners get over this stage of obscurantism and decide to return to normal, human and equal communication, we must be ready to accept them into the community of sensible states on conditions satisfactory to all. I want to stress that these conditions are mainly compliance with the UN Charter and respect for the sovereign equality of states.

Question: Today, many countries, mostly Western states, are doing their best to stop the work of Russian diplomatic missions in Western countries. At the same time, we are now invigorating contacts with countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Are the people who previously worked at the embassies relocating to Moscow or to the regions where we are expanding our contacts?

Sergey Lavrov: The process of reallocating our resources to high-priority sectors is quite intensive. We are reallocating resources from sectors that, as you have noted correctly, the West is trying to bleed white to regions where our partners from among friendly countries are located. At the same time, the West wants very much to retain its diplomatic teams here, so as to preserve certain lines of communication. In principle, their position is rather incoherent. It is hard to understand their contradictory logic that tends to harm them. About 200 Russian diplomats have returned from unfriendly states. Of this number, 90 percent have received jobs at the Foreign Ministry or have already agreed to go on assignments to African, Asian and Latin American countries. Of course, we want to considerably expand our diplomatic presence in the CIS region. I do not see any big problem that would prevent people from leaving the Western sector for developing regions. Apart from being developing regions, they are highly promising areas of the international community in the context of economic, cultural and humanitarian ties.

The people in question are highly professional. I am confident that they will have no trouble adapting to new conditions and geographical reference points and working in these highly important areas at full capacity. Instead of staying in Western regions, where all the lines of communication have been severed, they will be able to work constructively at their new workplaces.

Question: The Russian enclave has been blocked between Moldova and Ukraine for 30 years. When will Russia incorporate Transnistria? There have been several referendums on incorporating Transnistria into Russia, and the latest one shows that over 97 percent of those polled want to join Russia. Should we wait for the special military operation to end? Or will this accession take place earlier?

Sergey Lavrov: I would not call Transnistria a Russian enclave. This area is part of the Republic of Moldova, and it has a predominantly Russian and Russian-speaking population, including about 200,000 citizens of the Russian Federation. Indeed, we have established close ties with the region, including ways of ensuring local security. This includes efforts to guard huge ammunition depots and to keep the peacekeeping operation going. We reached agreement on this concept in the early 1990s after ending the hot phase of the conflict. We came close to attaining a peace settlement about 20 years ago. In 2003, a document suiting Chisinau and Tiraspol was drafted, but it did not suit the EU. The EU forbade President Vladimir Voronin to sign the initialled agreements. Once again, this shows that the EU is an organisation that does not pursue altruistic interests.

Speaking of the future, the leadership of Transnistria and Russia are now calling for a resumption of direct dialogue. The Transnistrian authorities are ready for this, and we are urging Chisinau to do this. Public statements by President Maia Sandu and her team show that they are acting under the guidance of the United States and the EU, they do not want this direct dialogue, and they are counting on some non-diplomatic option for resolving this problem. We are closely following the situation. We will do our best to protect the interests of the Russian-speaking population. Do not forget that Gagauzia is also part of Moldova. This region is also claiming the right to obtain a special status, and it already has some elements of this status. I believe that the Moldovan leadership will do the right thing if it stops playing the geopolitical games imposed by the West, and if it starts thinking about the interests of people who are living side by side. We will insist on precisely this approach at the current stage.

Question: How can one act when diplomacy, as a method, is replaced by a policy of sanctions?

Sergey Lavrov: There are many proverbs, and biblical precepts (such as an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) on this account. Other religions, too, suggest how to act in such cases. Of course, last time I checked, the principle of reciprocity was still in use. When illegal sanctions are announced, we act on several fronts. First, we reciprocate. But not thoughtlessly – like most of our Western colleagues do as the sanctions imposed against us actually harm them more than us. We do it in such a way as to avoid shooting ourselves in the foot, not to our own detriment. Second, Russia rallies countries that adhere to the principles of international law to counteract such approaches. In this regard, I mentioned the Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter. One of the practical steps it has already taken is opposing unilateral sanctions. The UN established the mandate of Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures at Russia's initiative, now on a universal basis. It is clear that the matter is not to be resolved quickly. By gradually increasing illegal pressure on us (the eighth package of sanctions has already been announced), the West is undermining the foundations of the current international order that relies on the principles of globalisation, which the Western countries also champion, including open markets, free enterprise, fair competition, and the presumption of innocence. All this was cancelled overnight. So we will respond harshly, but not to our detriment.

Question: We are watching a new international order being formed. What roles will small and large countries play in this process? What will the new international order be like?

Sergey Lavrov: By definition (as stipulated in the UN Charter), large countries always have more potential to influence decisions made on multilateral platforms. This much is obvious. The rules of procedure give advantages to countries that make bigger contributions to the budgets of the respective organisations. The larger the territory, the greater the GDP and the bigger the contributions, and much more, including political influence. Any large country that enjoys the benefits of its standing in the world, participating in the UN or in other organisations being created, should recognise its responsibility and respect the principle of the UN Charter that I quoted today, which says that the UN is based on respect for the sovereign equality of states. Smaller countries also need to be respected. In general, it's wrong to hurt those who are smaller. This is something our mothers tell us when we're young. The same holds true for big politics.

As for the situation around Ukraine and the special military operation, President of Russia Vladimir Putin and other leaders of our country have clearly spelled out its goals and lengthily explained the reasons that

forced us and left us no choice but to start the operation. Through our embassies, we are actively telling other countries about what is happening, and giving our assessments.

The Americans and their “followers” declared their strong condemnation: “aggression,” “annexation,” “unprecedented sanctions,” “sanctions from hell” (they have already announced seven packages, so they are preparing the eighth now). Let’s all be honest: we explained what was happening, and what reasons had forced us to do what we did. They said what they thought about the special military operation. Now leave it and let the others, as adults, figure out who is right and who is wrong. Let them figure it out.

All these months, from the very first day of the special operation, the Americans, through their embassies in all the capitals of the world, have been making demarches, demanding that others join the sanctions, vote against Russia at various international platforms, expel Russian diplomats; they are spreading misinformation about our “harmful activities” in the respective countries. They do not stop short of below the belt tricks, like telling a specific official how they should vote, or telling them to adopt a decision Washington wants adopted, while reminding them of an account at Citibank or children at Stanford. They are just “reminding,” and I am not joking. I know this for certain. It is a matter of civility and upbringing, if you like. These things clearly seem to be in short supply on the other side.

Question: In your opinion, is it acceptable to have fear in international negotiations? What consequences might it lead to, if, for example, the other party is better in some way and the negotiator is simply intimidated.

Sergey Lavrov: Negotiators always have certain strong points in relation to their counterparts. There is no need to be afraid. Believe in what you promote and defend. Be persuasive.

This session is called Diplomacy of Emotions: Convincing and Keeping. Before keeping, one must convince. Going back to knowledge, the more knowledgeable a negotiator is, the better. If we discard ultimatums, which I have just mentioned and which do not help in negotiations, everything else is a matter of knowledge and ability to persuade.

Question: The territories liberated during the special military operation are expressing a wish to become part of the Russian Federation. The Zaporozhye Region plans to hold a referendum in September but the region is not fully under Russia’s control. Will this region be incorporated entirely or just the territory covered by the referendum?

Sergey Lavrov: I do not want to make guesses. We have said many times that we want to achieve the goals of the special military operation. The goals are to remove threats against Russians and the Russian-speaking population of Donbass, including against the republics we recognised, the DPR and LPR. The goal is to eliminate the threat of Nazism. We are pursuing the goal of denazifying Ukraine and removing the threat that the entire Ukrainian nation is suffering from. Another goal is demilitarisation, or preventing any security threats against the Russian Federation coming from Ukraine. These goals are being achieved progressively. President Vladimir Putin speaks about this on a regular basis.

The fate of the territories that we are liberating from the neo-Nazi regime will be determined by its residents.

Question: On newsfeeds today, we see a lot of reminiscences about the Soviet Union and the events of 1991. Could you tell us, the younger generation, what actually happened in 1991? Was it a combination of circumstances or an intentional coup?

Sergey Lavrov: These events have been on people’s minds yesterday and today mainly because of Mikhail Gorbachev’s death. President Vladimir Putin offered his condolences to Mikhail Gorbachev’s family. Our politicians have been making comments and statements. Western politicians are also speaking out, stressing Gorbachev’s unique contribution to bringing the East and the West closer as well as his other achievements.

But here is an interesting thing. Several days ago, the same Western figures who are now praising the age when the East and the West came closer after the Cold War – and declaring themselves victors – participated in yet another mayhem called the Crimea Platform, during which they frantically demanded that Crimea be returned to Ukraine, the “aggression” and “occupation” be stopped, etc. There have been many coincidental events in history. It happened so that several days later, the first and last president of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev passed away. In an interview about a year and a half ago, he was asked the same thing about the Soviet Union and Ukraine. Mikhail Gorbachev said that he is Russian and his wife was Ukrainian. The Ukrainian lands, especially eastern Ukraine, have always been Russian lands. He said that in the interview. It was only as part of the Soviet Union that Ukraine obtained statehood. Mikhail Gorbachev was in great distress over the collapse of the Soviet Union. He said that when the 1991 Belovezh Accords were signed and the Soviet Union ceased to exist, everybody was rejoicing that he will lose his power. Gorbachev stressed that nobody thought about Crimea, which was, historically and in all fairness, a Russian territory.

When the Western politicians, praising Gorbachev's contribution to global politics, ignore these statements of his, the statements essentially aligning with the analysis made in President Vladimir Putin's articles, we clearly see double standards. It is an obvious desire to use a person's name, including after his death, for their own geopolitical goals.

Former US Secretary of State James Baker was among those who spoke out about their relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev. Baker was conducting negotiations with Gorbachev many times and said that he considered Gorbachev an honest negotiator whose word meant something. It is a striking confession. Leaders of the Soviet Union also hoped they could count on James Baker's word, including when it came to the non-expansion of NATO to the East. And were shamelessly deceived.

Question: I recently read the essay What the Dismemberment of Russia Means for the World by Ivan Ilyin. What are the most effective measures for ensuring the integrity of Russia in the future?

Sergey Lavrov: I believe that the most effective way of ensuring the integrity of Russia is to consistently implement our policy that was launched 20 years ago. I am confident that there are no alternatives. Without a doubt, an overwhelming majority of the Russian Federation's citizens would like us to continue this policy and to score successes in this field.

Regarding Ilyin's works, this is not about “ancient” philosophy alone. About two months ago, they started creating a new organisation for the decolonisation of the Russian Federation. People are acting serious, meeting, giving interviews and showing maps used at Western political science centres. Today, these maps are here for everyone to see. They want to divide Russia into 30 parts. There is such a concept as pique vests, inherited from the works of Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov. There is also a Russian saying about a fairy tale character Yemelya the Simpleton. People like Yemelya should mind their own business.

Question: Apart from enrolling [at university], what other steps can I take at my young age to move closer towards attaining my goal?

Sergey Lavrov: This is a sufficiently abstract question. I hope that all those present here have their own goals. You want to prepare yourselves for an independent life in the most correct and best manner. I will not stop repeating: the more knowledge you obtain, the more effective these efforts will be.

Regarding various spheres of human activity, the specific steps depend on the goal. International relations is a huge sphere with hundreds of sub-sections. This is particularly true today when cutting-edge technology is becoming part of our work. We have digital diplomacy, public diplomacy, people-to-people diplomacy, as well as scientific, youth and sport diplomacy. We actively support all this and cooperate with all emergent agencies.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to address these issues as part of your goal and during your studies at the university; I hope very much that you will enrol there.

Today the youth movement suggests holding meetings and resuming contacts, and such initiatives are now highly popular.

Question: Do you think our Western “partners” will continue the same policy they are pursuing now in the near future (the next six months, for example), or will they finally realise it is a losing game, and it’s wiser to have Russia as a friend? Winter is coming, after all.

Sergey Lavrov: It is even more important that after this winter, there will be another one. They are already starting to think about it. We have been hearing sensible voices. Many politicians say publicly that sanctions are all good and well, but some day they will have to negotiate; they are saying we’re on the same continent and everything that is happening is harming them. This approach has not yet made its way into the mainstream or the minds of the governments now in office in Europe. The European Union, European heavyweights, according to our information, are already beginning to think about steps they might take. The “younger” Europeans (the Baltic states, Poland and a number of other states) will probably come to this realisation at some stage down the road. The Czech Republic has become one of the Russophobia leaders, and it is leading the European Union during the current six-month period.

But we now have to concentrate on securing our country and our relations with friendly countries (the vast majority of countries, accounting for 80 percent of the global population, are friendly to us) from any whims of the West, both now and in the future. Relapses cannot be ruled out, of course, given the events we are now witnessing in European politics, with all the undercurrents, trends, and aggressiveness. Nothing can be ruled out. So we make ourselves safe for now, and later, when our partners come to their senses (for want of a better term), we'll see what they can offer.

Question: Russia seems to have many enemies and ill-wishers of late, and they are active in Russophobic propaganda. How could we counteract or hinder it?

Sergey Lavrov: I think this is the simplest question. We just need to continue to live honestly and move towards attaining the goals set by the country's leadership and supported by the people of the Russian Federation. We need to always emphasise our openness. They can come and see for themselves. They may want to visit Grozny and see what kind of city it is. Moscow, St Petersburg...

The Minsk Agreements were signed in 2015. They put an end to the war that Petr Poroshenko’s regime had unleashed against Donbass. As you remember, that was preceded by a coup d’état, and the people who seized power instantly put forward anti-Russian, Russophobic slogans. When the Minsk Agreements were signed and the Kiev regime began violating them, I personally kept asking all my colleagues with whom I had been talking all those long years since 2015, why they wouldn’t visit Donbass to see how people lived there under constant shelling, and why they wouldn’t let their journalists go there.

Let me remind you that all those years, Russian journalists have been working around the clock from the side of the DPR and LPR, showing all the atrocities committed by the Kiev regime; they continue doing it now. But Western journalists weren’t covering what was happening on the Ukrainian side. They were not invited. They didn't go anywhere. If they were there, they would see that Donetsk and Lugansk only responded to shelling, never initiating it, especially against civilian targets.

Therefore, we will stay open. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We are proud of all our republics, including the Chechen Republic. We really are. We invite everyone. And they can invent excuses and turn down our invitations, thereby driving themselves into a corner.



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