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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Rossiya 24 and RIA Novosti, Moscow, February 2, 2023

Question: The first question is probably not strictly professional but more human. Still, it worries millions if not billions of people. When will this whole thing end?

Sergey Lavrov: I cannot say that this is my only concern. I think diplomats and military, the men that are now resolving the vital tasks of ensuring our independence and protecting the interests of our culture and the people who want to be part of Russian culture probably are not thinking about when it will end.

They are driven by the desire to do their job accurately and quickly, minimising losses. The more active we are in supporting them morally and politically and the better we explain the gist of what is happening in terms of geopolitical games, the sooner the world will realise the need to end it. We are seeing not even attempts but the stubborn, insistent policy of the US-led West of not ending it ever. They will pursue it until they decide that all threats to their hegemony are removed.

At the current stage, we are acting in line with what our Western colleagues said – there must be a victory on the battlefield. These are their words. They renounced talks and compelled the Kiev regime to quit the negotiations in late March 2022, when it was still possible to end it politically.

But Kiev was not allowed to do this. Since then nobody has even tried to persuade the Kiev regime of the need for talks. Nobody objected when Vladimir Zelensky prohibited talks with the Russian Federation by executive order. Nobody took him down a peg when he repeatedly declared, while in “high spirits,” that he didn’t understand who made decisions in Russia and with whom to talk (if matters come to this). This seems to be straight out of Freud. He feels his dependence and understands that he is being manipulated. We all want this to end. But what matters

at this point is not the time but the essence, the quality of results we will ensure for our people and those who want to remain part of Russian culture – the Kiev junta, with the West's encouragement, was depriving them of all things Russian for many years.

In addition to the laws passed under Petr Poroshenko and Vladimir Zelensky, Kiev did the following - banned Russian education and Russian media, and Ukrainian media in the Russian language (all of them were shut down), arrested deputies that showed any initiative to reach agreement with Russia, and made decisions allowing administrative fines to be imposed on those who do not use Ukrainian in daily life (shops and outpatient clinics). Recently, Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language Taras Kremen came out with an initiative to ban personal communication in Russian. Say, husband and wife are drinking tea in the kitchen, and some snitch (as we used to call them) can easily get them charged with a crime. The upper crust of this regime has good “prospects” indeed.

Question: All of that sounds pretty much hypocritical. For example, the Kiev-Mogila Academy has banned the Russian language. This started within the walls of this hallowed education institution and spread elsewhere. That's their plan. Young Russian-speaking males are literally kidnapped off the streets and shipped to the frontline. It's okay for them to be fighting for independent Ukraine without knowing the Ukrainian language, but other things are off limits to them. The Russian speakers are eligible to bear arms and to defend their Motherland, which is a lofty duty. That's an interesting approach.

However, every international process has some reasoning behind it. We are talking about the end and are trying to picture it. However, it is nowhere to be seen, since the conflict is escalating. It's hard to tell where to stop, because we can't see the bounds. Heavy weapons are being sent in. There's talk about missiles. What should we be bracing for?

Sergey Lavrov: We are operating on the premise of objective realities, primarily, the realities that are enshrined in our legislation, in particular, the Constitution. Following the results of the referendum, four new territories – two people's republics and two regions – joined the Russian Federation. There is no question about that. The West is unable to come to grips with that and, as in a fairy tale with a sad ending, is getting mired deeper and deeper in a swamp with every step. However, it has significant leverage in the operation. We are now trying to move the Ukrainian artillery to a distance that will not pose a threat to our

territories, but the more long-range weapons they send to Kiev, the further they will need to move them away from the territories that are part of our country.

You are absolutely correct, the escalation started snowballing with the helmet supplies for the Ukrainian military followed by small arms supplies, and now they are talking about supplying warplanes. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz swears this will never happen, but he is known for his ability to change his mind quickly. And he is by far not the only person like that there. Chancellor Scholz said NATO would never wage war against Russia, but his Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said they had already joined the effort to fight Russia. Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said that there was nothing wrong with Kiev potentially bombing Crimea. They are either revving themselves up or just don't know what they are talking about.

Olaf Scholz once said that the current crisis began with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He doesn't even listen to what his predecessors had to say, because former German Chancellor Angela Merkel said no one intended to fulfill the Minsk agreements even at the time they were signed in 2015. If anyone fails to acknowledge the fact that the seeds of the crisis were sown back then, they must be a politician who refuses to see the truth. But 2015 is not the most important cut-off date, either. Let's think back to the 2014 coup, which also took place, notwithstanding the guarantees provided by the Germans, the French and the Poles, which were included in the document on settling the situation and holding early elections. The next morning these guarantees were trampled on, and an openly Nazi regime, including the Svoboda Party, came to power. There was this Oleg Tyagnibok (no one had seen him in a long time) who was seen as a neo-Nazi by many European countries back then. There were slogans like "death to Russians, kikes and Polacks." They placed their bet on people like that and neo-Nazis from the Azov, Aidar and other battalions. Now they are painstakingly cleaning up every bit of information that made it clear that the West viewed these groups as extremist and terrorist. Not long ago, the Japanese released apologies and removed Azov from the list of extremist organisations.

Perhaps, here, too, we should apply a Marxist approach and look for the deeper reasons that underlie the unfolding developments. I would recommend going back to at least President Obama's stint in office and read (it shouldn't be a problem since the text is readily available) what he had to say about the exceptionalism of the United States. You can go ahead and read similar remarks by

former President Trump who said that America was an exceptional nation and there was no other nation like it in the world and that they had an enormous responsibility in that regard. President Biden has promoted this idea on several occasions, and his staff then formalised it. For example, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the Americans must implement their leadership and their exceptional ability to lead, because if they don't, the world would plunge into chaos. To be sure, it's a humble statement to make. In 2021, having barely assumed office as National Security Adviser to the President of the United States, John Sullivan wrote an article where he discussed US exceptionalism and stated (I think it's a terrible thing to say) that exceptionalism means that the United States cannot afford to be focused on ethnic or historical identity, but must spread new and free democracy around the world. This means only one thing: everyone else is denied the right to remember their history. The Americans (just as they ran everyone who came to America through the melting pot) also want to melt down the rest of the world for everyone to become, in fact, American.

Question: They smelted the natives, too.

Sergey Lavrov: Right, they almost melted them away so that nothing was left of them. Look at what is going on in the United States right now. Look at how society is split and how the ruling authorities are now trying to suppress it, using (to use their terminology) fairly “authoritarian tools.”

The reasons are to be found there. I believe that the exceptionalism and the absolute conviction in their own infallibility and superiority is the main reason why we are now opposing the countries that are using the Kiev regime to wage a hybrid war against us, although not exactly a hybrid war.

Recently, there was a wide-scale debate about the parallels drawn from the Ukrainian leadership's remarks. I also spoke about the fact that just like in 1812 and 1941, those who wanted to subjugate the world starting with Europe, pulled together a major part of the continent to wage war against Russia. I don't see much difference here. Moreover, during the Great Patriotic War, World War II, Nazi ideology was used against us. Why do people refuse to see the Nazi ideology that is underlying the Kiev regime now? The statements that are being made by its proponents and puppeteers cannot be construed otherwise than an attempt to finally solve the Russian question. Russia must be dealt a strategic defeat. So that it is not able to come back for a long time. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said that the war must end with a Russian defeat that would

make it impossible for Russia to rebuild its economy for decades to come. Does that not sound like racism, Nazism, and an attempt to solve the Russian question? No, not yet in the gas chambers. There are still many decent people in Germany who will not allow the revival of Nazism. But some wouldn't mind at all to see it happen.

So, we are in the midst of a geopolitical battle. There is no need to doubt it. Those who are addressing practical issues at the frontlines are working to fulfil a vitally important task and they are heroes. The feats that they are performing in the name of the future of humankind will make it possible to prevent the creation of conditions leading to the full hegemony of the United States, which are declared in their doctrinal documents.

Question: What I infer from what you said is that the goal is to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia, that is, the West denies the idea of Russia even existing as a state. Russia needs to be either dismembered or divided, now there's even a new term "refederalisation" for it. The Poles are talking a lot about this, as usual. What's left for diplomacy in these circumstances?

Sergey Lavrov: I don't think we will be out of work. We are now working in several areas. First, we are working hard to advance our policy, arguments and the truth in the international arena. No one in the West, Europe or America is trying to seriously ponder whether they made any mistakes. No. It's like everything started on February 24, 2022. Just like in 2014, it all started, in their book, with what they refer to as the "annexation" of Crimea, not the February coup.

I was present at President Vladimir Putin's talks with former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Angela Merkel, former President of France Francois Hollande and current President of France Emmanuel Macron. Vladimir Putin asked why things turned out the way they did. They said that if it were not for the "annexation," things would have been just fine. But the "annexation" took place because the "authority" which committed a power grab in Ukraine said it was important (it was their first gut reaction) to abolish the regional status of the Russian language. It was not done back then. Now they are almost there. But these were the instincts that fully described the nature of that "power." Two days later, they told the Russians to "clear out" from Crimea and sent their thugs there. The Crimeans reacted only to that and nothing else. But the Western politicians kept saying that if it were not for the "annexation," "everything would be fine." "Fine" in what sense? Ukraine would have been ruled by the Nazis, people like Tyagnibok

or Yatsenyuk, who called “subhuman” the people who refused to accept the outcomes of the coup. Vladimir Zelensky didn't stray far from them when he called “species” the people who objected to reunification with Ukraine without Minsk “terms and conditions.” He said that his advice to those who lived in Ukraine and consider themselves part of the Russian culture, tradition and history was for them to make off to Russia for the sake of their children and grandchildren. Has anyone reacted to that? Has anyone seen in that not merely sprouts, but the full flowering of Nazism? No one has. Our diplomats brought all these unacceptable actions and statements to the attention of the relevant bodies of the UN, the OSCE and the (infamous) Council of Europe. Not a single time has the West tried to even wag a finger at its ward and his regime. He was constantly covered for, including by the OSCE Mission, which worked on the ground to promote the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Many mission employees (the facts have surfaced) helped the Kiev military plan their operations and gave them access to the data from the drones that were supposed to be used exclusively for the purposes of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

We must make the truth known and wage a merciless war on false claims. We have a section on our website that is dedicated to these matters. On top of it, we respond live daily to new tricks by those who attempt to distort the real picture.

Diplomatic work with our partners all over the world is also part of our efforts. We are holding delegation exchanges at the level of ministers and deputy ministers. We travel to the countries with which we plan to build constructive cooperation. Delegations come to us. This work is important.

The United States and all other Westerners, whom the Americans have brought to the heel thus stripping the EU of the remaining attributes of independence, are widely known as “grand democrats.” However, they understand democracy as their right to impose their understanding of things on everyone else. However, discussions about democratic approaches to international issues leave them impassive.

Question: This is totalitarian.

Sergey Lavrov: Yes, totalitarian. There is no mention of democracy in the UN Charter, which is possibly for the best. It mentions the main principle, which is more democratic than anything else: the UN is based on the sovereign equality of states. If anyone finds proof of respect for this principle in our Western colleagues' actions, I will nominate that person for the Nobel Peace Prize. If you are a

democrat, you express your view and let your opponent state their positions. Allow all the others to act as adult people and to decide who they support and whose views and positions are more to their liking.

This is how they should have acted with regard to the crisis in Ukraine. President Putin explained in the minutest detail the goals, causes and inevitability of our special military operation. This did not happen all of a sudden but after eight years (or even earlier, from his Munich speech in 2007) of trying to explain that the West was moving in the wrong direction, undermining all the principles they themselves had pledged to respect, such as indivisible security in Europe, equal security interests, the unacceptability for any state to strengthen its security by infringing on the security of others, and, which is extremely important, the unacceptability – unacceptability – of any organisation in Europe claiming military-political domination. NATO did what was unacceptable. These principles were put on paper in 1999 and reaffirmed in 2010. But all our attempts to lead the West to honour the documents our presidents and prime ministers had signed failed. Or, rather, they replied that these were political slogans whereas only NATO could provide legal security guarantees. By doing so, they again violated each and every principle.

We spend many years trying to explain our stand, and ultimately we said that they had heard everything we had to say, and that we have taken the decision. The Western reaction was negative and condemnatory. The majority of developing countries assumed a neutral stand. Well, their neutral stand must be respected. But the West is sending daily – this is no exaggeration – requests through its ambassadors in all countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to refuse to meet with Russian delegations, to condemn [Russia] and to join the sanctions. The overwhelming majority of states have self-respect. Therefore, even small African states, with 1.5 or 2 million population, say they have their own plans for cooperation with Russia. These countries accept our visits and visit our country, receiving threats of punishment for that.

What are the Americans known for? When they ask you to do something they want, they do not promise anything in return. Instead, they say to do it or we will punish you. It is the ultimate form of pragmatism and cynicism. Our diplomats have a great deal to do in this area. We offer explanations, debunk lies, especially the recent lies about our refusal to hold negotiations, and provide facts every day.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has said that “weapons are the

way to peace,” so that Ukraine will win on the battlefield. Vladimir Zelensky has put forth a 10-point peace formula, which is an eclectic mixture of the whole enchilada, including food, energy and biological security. Plus Russia’s withdrawal to the 1991 border, a tribunal to punish Russia, the payment of reparations and, lastly, the signing of a peace agreement. It is not a realistic initiative. I believe that Vladimir Zelensky’s imagination sometimes runs wild. And now the West has to read that piece of work.

Our diplomats will be doing their best to ensure that the anti-Russia events, which the West and the Kiev regime are planning to hold in New York and at other platforms on the first anniversary of the special military operation, are not the only headline news.

We are preparing a survey of what had happened over the past year and the things we have uncovered. It is not only the US military biological programmes, which they are lying through their teeth about (as usual), and not only the United States’ direct involvement in the Nord Stream blasts. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland has actually made a full confession. There are many things we can recall, and we can show which methods the United States is using to secure its hegemony. Judging by the quotes I have mentioned, the Americans have long been preparing or cultivating Ukraine to wage a war against Russia under Western licence. The United States is focused on mobilising the EU for that war, which I am sure it planned to do a long time ago, forcing it to send all its weapons to Ukraine. This process is nearing completion now.

At the same time, the United States is increasing the production of weapons and is forcing Europe to buy them. NATO countries are obliged to spend 2 percent of their GDP on weapons. And they are being pushed to buy US-made products. There is no doubt that those who believe in American exceptionalism and think that it must rule the world also intended to suppress Europe economically.

Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz are publicly complaining about the US laws targeting inflation, which are actually aimed at luring [European] production facilities to the United States. The process is ongoing. German manufacturers are fleeing to where the benefits are. But these benefits are clearly discriminatory and are aimed at undermining European industries.

This is exceptionalism at work. Two or three weeks ago, the EU signed a declaration on cooperation with NATO, under which the EU will do anything NATO needs. The Americans are working persistently towards their goals. This

must be said as loud as possible. Right now it is happening in Europe. But they are already making plans for Asia. Jens Stoltenberg speaks about this at NATO. It was announced at the Madrid summit in June 2022 that they must assume global responsibility and create military blocs spearheaded against China and Russia in the Asia-Pacific region (AUKUS). They have set a policy of drawing in new members. The great Pacific powers, such as Britain and France, are active there as well, taking part in the clearly incendiary anti-China exercises in the South China Sea.

Everyone is looking at the forms that exceptionalism is assuming, like a desire to dominate everyone and to get unilateral economic advantages again so as to prevent an economic crisis in the US, which could be serious because it involves the exploitation of other countries. President Putin has mentioned these actions are fully in line with the colonial philosophy of living at the expense of others.

Question: Turning Ukraine into an “anti-Russia” seemed a successful project in the sense that these aims were attained. What other country from among its entourage may also follow this path? Kyrgyzstan? Kazakhstan?

Sergey Lavrov: Currently, they are “sizing up” Moldova for this role, primarily because they have managed to put at the head of that country – by tailored methods that are far removed from free and democratic ones – a female president who is champing at the bit to join NATO. A citizen of Romania, Maia Sandu is ready to join Romania and eager to do practically anything. It is a revealing fact that, in addition to her pro-NATO and pro-EU drive, the West and Chisinau are refusing to revive the 5 + 2 talks, where there are Chisinau, Tiraspol, Russia, Ukraine, OSCE, and EU and US monitors. The West no longer sees this format as fitting, because it was needed when the Chisinau authorities were still concerned with preserving their country's territorial integrity and reaching an arrangement with Transnistria. But no negotiating formats are needed after a takeover that brought to power a government prepared to solve the Transnistria problem by force and to insist on the ouster of the Russian peacekeepers and the contingent guarding the ammunition depots at Kolbasna. What is needed in this case is just to support the authorities.

I will not go into detail, but Georgia is yet another country that the West wants to turn into an “anti-Russia.” I am closely acquainted with President Salome Zurbishvili. She was [Georgia's] foreign minister between 2004 and 2005. Jointly with the military, we were drafting agreements on withdrawing the two remaining Russian military bases. Here is an interesting point. The withdrawal declaration

contained an understanding that Russia and Georgia would establish a joint anti-terrorist centre at one of those former bases to work together on removing these threats. It was envisaged that Georgia would provide the majority of its personnel (some 700 troops). We were to send a much smaller contingent (about 100 officers). This was a package deal. After we withdrew our bases and carried out our part of the agreement, Mikheil Saakashvili refused out of hand to create the centre. The times were still “benign” and no one suspected that he would attack South Ossetia. But the Georgian President deceived us even in a peaceable situation characterised by the desire to establish a new kind of relations. There is no doubt that he was also told by his “curators” that there was no need for any joint centres with Russia. Today, Georgia has a government alongside a president, who, thank God, does not determine the country’s development path and mostly performs ceremonial functions. I do not want anyone to think that I am going to compromise [the Georgian Government] with praise. I will quote its prime minister and ministers, who say that they are being guided by their national interests in response to unprecedented pressure and demands to join the sanctions and open a “second front” (they have even put this term into use). They have trade and tourism exchanges with Russia and get energy supplies from it. This meets the interests of the Georgian state and people. But I have no doubt whatsoever that they also would like to turn Georgia into another irritant and take the situation back to the aggressive times under Saakashvili.

For a constructive focus on “creativity” to prevail in the region, we are promoting a 3 + 3 format (the three south Caucasian countries – Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan and three neighbour countries – Russia, Turkey, and Iran). The first tentative meeting has taken place. We will move forward with it.

As far as the Central Asian states are concerned, the Russian foreign ministry and security services have had rather frank discussions with them. This is directly related to their security. Our Western colleagues have spent years trying to implant some pro-American, pro-European and pro-NATO NGO’s there. For example, there are organisations like the US State Department’s Agency for International Development (USAID) and others, which are in the business of wielding the “soft power” that would periodically turn into hard power. I think this cannot be denied. The West wants to use these “soft power” tools in order to at least call into question the further development of friendly and allied relations between Russia and its neighbours, including certain Central Asian countries. But I do not see here any

cause to suspect that the West's "labours" are being met with any serious positive response.

Russia's neighbours, allies and strategic partners see through these "games." Yesterday, I had a meeting with committee chairmen representing the CSTO parliaments. They were attending an event at the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in Moscow. We can see that just as the CSTO leaders and foreign ministers, our friends understand what aims are being pursued by the West in our common space. They want to construct and create additional mechanisms designed to ensure further development of our integration plans in forms that are not exposed to Western influences and are protected from illegal outside influence. The West always works against Russia wherever it is present in the post-Soviet space.

Question: Kiev is offering a non-aggression pact to Minsk. Does this concern us as well, in the context of the Union State? What is Russia's approach?

Sergey Lavrov: The Union State is not the most important argument here. Russia and Belarus have treaties, including security agreements, with many other countries. What Kiev has done is "funny" and really shows the Kiev regime leaders' "creativity." They are "talented" people.

It's not even a "two-move game." As President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko announced, the Belarusians were offered a non-aggression pact at a time when their opposition was being cultivated, armed and trained to fight at the front against the Russian Federation, in particular as part of the infamous "Kalinowski Regiment." That unit is openly supported, and they say that it is preparing to perform similar missions in Belarus itself. Apparently, the Ukrainian side has an unusual understanding of non-aggression.

I mentioned this when Alexander Lukashenko met with me in Minsk. He clearly sees such initiatives for what they are – flagrant provocations, pointless at best.

Question: Article 5 of NATO's Washington Treaty says that an attack on any NATO member will be considered an attack against them all. Article 4 of the CSTO is similar: "In the event of aggression (armed attack that threatens a member's security, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty) against any of the participating states, all other participating states, at the request of this state, will immediately provide the necessary assistance, including military assistance." Isn't this the case now?

Sergey Lavrov: It says “at the request of this state.” We have not requested any assistance from anyone. We believe we have every resource to attain the special military operation’s goals, and to end the war launched by the West using the Ukrainian regime after the coup d'état.

We can see that it is NATO fighting us. All those words, those mantras about “only” supplying Ukraine with arms are ridiculous. According to experts, Ukrainians will not be able to use the weapons that have already been partially transferred, let alone those that have been announced, even after a one-two-three-month training course. They are talking about sophisticated systems that Ukrainians cannot be trained to use in the foreseeable future. If NATO supplies such systems, then, most likely, these weapons will be accompanied by combat crews. They will probably “take leave” from the army and go as mercenaries, with the corresponding papers. But Russia will resolve all the issues itself. We haven't asked. I am not going to analyse the reasons why we didn't right now. We don't need assistance.

The CSTO responded in 24 hours when President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev requested help in stabilising the situation in January 2022, during the period of an externally inspired surge in violence, attempts to seize state buildings. As Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to look for ways to stabilise the Caucasus, the CSTO is also ready to help.

After an upsurge in violence in September 2022, when about 300 people were killed on both sides, we received a request from Yerevan. The CSTO Secretary General and a team of experts went to the border bringing a plan for the deployment of a CSTO mission to the region of Armenia bordering on Azerbaijan. That plan was ready a long time ago, but the Armenian side never asked us to expedite things.

The text of the relevant decision was finalised at the summit in Yerevan, but our Armenian colleagues said they would only accept it if it categorically condemned Azerbaijan's actions. Not everyone was ready to do so. Not only because they wanted to shield someone or did not support Armenia. The war in Karabakh goes back decades. Armenia occupied seven districts of Azerbaijan for many years. Russia has proposed numerous options. The previous Armenian leadership did not accept them and claimed territories that it had never claimed before. Azerbaijan despaired to resolve the issues politically, and returned the lands that belonged to it.

Now Armenia, Azerbaijan and the European Union have signed a document

stating they were ready to sign a peace treaty on the terms outlined in the December 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration. This document says: the borders between the newly independent states will be demarcated along the administrative borders of the former republics of the Soviet Union, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, which included the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region.

This situation is multi-layered. I consider it an important achievement that the CSTO has drafted a plan for the deployment of a peacekeeping mission in a difficult situation. This proposal is still on the table. If our Armenian allies and friends are still interested in it, the mission can be deployed within one or two days.

Question: Do we potentially retain the ability to turn to CSTO allies for help in the event that the aggression against Russia escalates?

Sergey Lavrov: It says that any party has this right. I have already answered why Russia does not use it. It should not have to do so in the future. We see no need in terms of the equipment of our Armed Forces and how they operate in the space of the special military operation.

The CSTO is now developing peacekeeping capabilities at the initiative of Kazakhstan. One of the Under-Secretaries-General has also been designated responsible for peacekeeping, and there is the Agreement on Peacekeeping Activities of the CSTO (2007).

For our part, we are working on supplements to this agreement, because it says that CSTO peacekeeping forces are deployed by agreement and with the approval of the UN Security Council. We consider this requirement to be excessive, because a request by a legitimate government is quite sufficient for the deployment of CSTO peacekeepers. As it was in January 2022, during the unrest in Kazakhstan. Such clarifications to the CSTO peacekeeping legal framework will increase its effectiveness.

We see the need for allied support in foreign policy coordination. Not always and not every issue is voted on equally by all CSTO member countries when an issue affecting the fundamental interests of one or another member is put on the agenda. This was discussed at the Council of Heads of State and the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers in Yerevan. Foreign policy coordination takes on increased importance.

Question: The other day, two former Polish foreign ministers Radoslaw Sikorski and Anna Fotyga spoke in favour of “refederalising” Russia. Former Polish President Lech Walesa said it was time to “finally figure things out” with

Russia. What is happening with Poland? Is it playing some special role the same way it did on the eve of World War II? Is our most vicious neighbour pitting everyone against us?

Sergey Lavrov: There are many things to discuss in this regard. Poland has a difficult history with lots of pain in it and no less morbid ambitions clearly showing that a certain portion of the elite is still nurturing expansionist plans (the Three Seas Initiative, allusions to what is now Western Ukraine, Russophobia).

Radoslaw Sikorski worked closely with us. He is not in the camp of Russia's admirers, but a pragmatic and seasoned politician. He hardly does anything that is not calculated. Now that he is a MEP, he has more leeway. Following the blast at the Nord Stream pipeline, he tweeted: "Thank you, USA." It was removed later, but there is plenty of evidence. We worked well with him. Back then, there was a joint commission led by foreign ministers which included deputy ministers of most other agencies which engaged in "mini" consultations between countries. There was a commission of historians as well. It's hard to believe it now, but they wrote textbooks together. Some chapters were written together, and where their views parted ways, they printed two versions. It was a dialogue, a platform where they constantly communicated, and an extra measure of trust was inevitably created. Now it is not.

There is a proposal by Anna Fotyga and a statement by Lech Walesa that Russia must be (they even coined a term) "decolonised." They keep talking about some unpleasant and obscure representatives of the Nogai ethnic groups who want to create an independent state in the Astrakhan Region. The Leningrad Region now has some "indigenous" residents as well. This is the way to embolden certain small peoples by presenting a picture where they are discriminated against in Russia even though everything is the other way round. They can speak their languages, and they don't live on reservations like in the United States or Canada (where they, as it turned out, used to be brutally killed).

At the same time, it is being said that we are simply "too large." They quoted Madeleine Albright as saying that "Russia is large," but then they refuted it. She may not have said this, but it's a fact that there are many people in the United States and Europe who are thinking this and are, in one way or another, sending this message out. It's a shame. We had an extensive mechanism of ties with Poland.

There's one more thing, because they need to finally "deal with Russia." What is this other than a call to finally solve the Russian question? I recently

quoted the masterminds from Hitler's Germany who engaged in the efforts to finally solve the Jewish question. Almost all of US-led Europe is being gathered against us and various slogans are being advanced, but the meaning remains the same and it is to solve the Russian question within the lifetime of the current generation. Maybe not in gas chambers, but still make sure that Russia ceases to exist as a great power, move it into the background and degrade its economy.

Corrupt politicians started claiming that my comparisons insulted Holocaust victims. It means only one thing: they are feeling defensive. They don't have any arguments. I did not insult Holocaust victims. We honour them, hold events, and invite everyone who in one way or another was involved in the historical events.

Unlike the Poles who, even before the special military operation, did not invite us to speak at an event dedicated to the liberation of Auschwitz. We just said that the memory of Holocaust victims does not exempt anyone from making efforts today, so that memory prevents new Nazi movements from appearing. We are witnessing this in Ukraine, Estonia, and Latvia, where neo-Nazi sentiment and practices are being revived.

Question: The EU will hold a summit in early February. Russia is not a EU member state, but we are neighbours on the continent and the agenda they will discuss is not a matter of indifference for us. What agenda items would you suggest as a good neighbour?

Sergey Lavrov: I no longer follow the EU summits.

Question: They will get together and again ask themselves: Who are we, what is to be done, and where are we going?

Sergey Lavrov: The Europeans are cannibalising themselves. It has been announced who will take the decision. They have signed the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation, under which they are committed to supplying NATO with whatever it will want, including the territory of non-NATO countries, if it needs to redeploy weapons of any type closer to Russian borders. All of this is in black and white.

Olaf Scholz went on record as saying the other day that Europe's security depended on the United States alone. It makes no sense for the EU to make any pleas to Washington for it to spare the European economy and industries or be magnanimous with regard to business subsidies in US territory.

As the French Economic Minister Bruno Le Maire said rather long ago, the current cost of electricity for businesses in Europe was four times higher than in the

United States. President Emmanuel Macron declared that they would urge Washington to make adjustments and provide discounts or exclusions. They will, I think.

Question: He was already there with hat in hand. They did nothing.

Sergey Lavrov: This is why I am not particularly interested in what the EU is discussing. I hear they are planning to invite Vladimir Zelensky. I don't know whether this will be via videoconference or live. They will tell us later.

They took the decision long ago and are now in the process of making Zelensky a symbol of democracy's fight against autocracy. This is the very same black-and-white picture of the world being promoted by the Americans, among others.

The second Summit for Democracy they are convening in late March of this year will formulate a simple task: All democrats must fight against all autocrats, with Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Syria and Venezuela to be branded as autocrats. These are all countries refusing to obey the West's demands. If you look at the list of invitees to the first summit, you will see a rather interesting picture. There are countries on it (I don't want to offend anyone), which the Americans themselves had never marked down as democratic before.

Currently, this "revolutionary" team, which is convening the summit of "democracies," is seeking, as far as we know, to submit a draft decision promoting the democracies vs. autocracies philosophy and intended to make it work in practice. The idea, at least at this stage, is, as far as we know, to have democracies formulate their demands to autocracies plus rights of their own to communicate these as a leverage of assistance above the head of the autocratic governments to the nations "oppressed" by these governments.

I wouldn't have believed this a year or even two years ago. Today, it is being discussed in earnest. Roughly, their plan is to arrogate the same rights they would like to obtain, pushing through UN organs, by hook or by crook, in violation of the rules of procedure, the idea of establishing a tribunal against Russia and getting reparations from Russia. All of this represents a gross violation of international law. But they are no strangers to it. They have discarded all their principles at the snap of a finger, principles like the inviolability of private property, presumption of innocence, good-faith competition, market mechanisms, etc., which they were cultivating and imposing on others for decades as part of the globalisation package. All of that was crossed out, when it became necessary to punish the

Russian Federation.

It is another matter that this did not work. The very fact that the Americans have made recourse to these illegal methods is making everyone wary. The current talk about transitioning to national currencies is not accidental. Who knows what side of the bed the US president will wake up on tomorrow, or who he will see as “unsympathetic.”

The presidents of Brazil and Argentina have already discussed a possibility of creating a bilateral currency. Next they went even further by proposing to think about a currency for all the Latin American and Caribbean states. Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva suggested discussing the same within BRICS. This is already a global, not regional, approach to what is to be done with the monetary system in a situation where the Americans with their dollar are committing every impropriety imaginable.

The process is under way. Saudi Arabia sells its oil to China for RMB. Russia is bringing the share of national currencies in trade with its key partners to 50 percent. And the process goes on and on.

Question: A question about China. Relations with Beijing are making rapid headway. We are building a new world order with the PRC. What points of contacts can we have? Or maybe there are even some risks? It is always dangerous to dance with a giant. He may step on your feet. Are relations with China fraught with some risks?

Sergey Lavrov: “Points of contact” is a very modest description of our bilateral relations. Our declarations say that although we are not going to establish a military alliance, these relations are above military alliances in the classic sense of this word because they do not have any restrictions, limits or taboo subjects. They are the best in the entire history of the USSR, the PRC and the Russian Federation.

Our common interest is primarily in being allowed to develop in line with our national plans, in accordance with the norms of international trade (in part, the WTO norms) and the West-created system: the Bretton-Woods institutions, the IMF and the World Bank. When we joined them there were certain rules that we accepted. It took us 17 years to enter the WTO. We accepted the rules that guaranteed fair competition.

Now all this is destroyed as well. The WTO has blocked the work of the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) because China is “outplaying” America on its field

and according to its rules. China has every right to demand compensation and the DSB would surely decide this case in its favour if the United States allowed this body to function. The Americans are simply blocking the appointment of new members of the body for the available vacancies. There is no quorum. This is a purely bureaucratic approach, a “Soviet party approach” in the worst sense. This has been going on for many years. It is because China was winning all disputes against the US that they came up with the WTO reform, having announced in public that it should rely on US and EU interests. Very simple. Others will be shown their place and told how to behave.

The same is taking place in the International Monetary Fund. If you apply the criteria on which the IMF and the World Bank were founded, today the BRICS countries can claim a bigger number of shares and votes that will upset the current situation when the US can block any decisions single-handed (this situation actually took shape several years ago).

If everything were fair, we would listen more attentively to the heads of our economic bloc who spoke about positive features of globalisation. These features do not exist anymore. We realised this earlier because we were the first to “take a hit” in connection with what the US had been planning against us via Ukraine.

Moreover, we are not so deeply involved in this system as China in terms of trade. China has bought \$1.5 trillion worth of US securities. The depth of China's immersion in the current system cannot be compared with ours. China is bound to take steps to reduce this dependence. I have no doubts about that. It has already started taking these steps. There is plenty of evidence of this. Beijing will need more time to create parallel instruments and mechanisms to protect itself against arbitrary rule of the US as the main manager of the world currency, financial and trade system at this stage. However, these mechanisms and instruments should not appear overnight. Otherwise they may trigger serious economic upheavals considering how interconnected the US and Chinese economies are, with trillions of dollars at stake. This issue is not just discussed. There is an ongoing search for ways of creating new mechanisms. This process is leading to the fragmentation of global mechanisms. For the time being, these mechanisms are still associated with the US and its satellites. However, they are no longer global and serve one group of states.

When Latin American and Caribbean countries are urged to think about their own financial instruments, this is more like the “regionalisation” of globalisation.

In our region, President Vladimir Putin suggested looking at integration processes in greater Eurasia. They involve the EAEU, ASEAN with its far-reaching plans, and the SCO that has good transport, logistics and economic prospects in addition to its security agenda. At this point, I would like to mention China's Belt and Road Initiative and the agreement on trade and economic cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and its member-countries on the one hand, and the People's Republic of China, on the other.

At the Russia-ASEAN summit in Sochi in 2015, Vladimir Putin suggested harmonising plans instead of imposing positions of some other organisation on any structures.

Question: Don't these projects contradict each other?

Sergey Lavrov: There is no contradiction. The main thing is to avoid duplication or dissipation of resources. The process has already got underway. There is a Memorandum of Understanding on Economic Cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Memorandum of Understanding between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The SCO has a memorandum with ASEAN as well.

President Putin suggested the process of harmonising integration aspirations should be called the formation of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. As early as in 2015, there was an objective demand for looking at an alternative to globalisation that was imposed on us for many years but was still seen as a more or less satisfactory arrangement. This alternative is the Greater Eurasian Partnership as the manifestation of a trend towards regionalising global processes.

Question: But what about the risks? There is a widespread opinion that China is so big and we are so small. Something may change and we will face something insurmountable. How justified are such fears?

Sergey Lavrov: We are also accused of being big and offending everyone around us. It is alleged that former Soviet republics are not given their due respect. Many will come up with such accusations. And there are many who want to scare us with China as well. In my opinion, this is a game based on wanting to prevent us from cooperating and coordinating our positions in the economy or international affairs. There is no doubt that the plans signed by Russia and the PRC meet the interests of both Moscow and Beijing. They do not define the role of our country as subordinate. These plans are mutually beneficial. They are far from being limited to

energy supplies to China. They also cover outer space, nuclear power engineering and many other high-tech areas.

I would like to recall that the West has called Russia and China autarchies and the main threats. Our country poses immediate danger that must be somehow nipped in the bud at once. The fight against China will take a long time.

The West wants China to abstain from providing military aid to us. This is a routine accusation of the DPRK, Iran and others all over the world. Our defence industry is working. Everything will be fine.

We do not like and consider unacceptable the brazen promotion of decisions that suit only the US and its satellites in the international arena. We will object to this practice.

Question: Did you have a chance to try Russian whiskey as part of import substitution?

Sergey Lavrov: I was presented with it. If I am correct this whiskey brand is called Praskoveiskoye. But I think the place of honour belongs to the bottle with the words “Kyrgyz whiskey.”

Question: Are you for peace?

Sergey Lavrov: I am for peace – unequivocally. I do not remember but someone said in ancient times, if you want peace, prepare for war. I do not share this philosophy.

I would put it this way: If you want peace, be always ready to defend yourself.

I think we will come out stronger from the current geopolitical situation and will be able to defend ourselves even better in any situation.

