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**Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow,
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Table of Contents

1. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to attend ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meetings
2. Ukraine update
3. 80th anniversary of Volhynia massacre
4. UN Security Council briefing on arms supplies to Ukraine
5. Removal of cultural heritage from Ukraine
6. Participation of French citizens in the conflict in Ukraine
7. Mass protests in France
8. US involvement in the Ukraine conflict
9. Developments in Moldova
10. Finland to impose extra entry restrictions for Russian citizens
11. Protests sparked by the Quran-burning incident in Sweden
12. Report by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria
13. Salisbury and Amesbury incidents
14. 160 years since the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands
15. Attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh
16. Eurasian Forum of Young Diplomats, Diplomacy of the New Multipolar World, on the sidelines of the Manzherok Festival
17. Update on a Russian national detained in Poland

Answers to media questions

1. Iran's participation in the SCO
2. Activities of the International Centre for Prosecution in the Crime of Aggression

3. Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant update
4. Human rights violations in France
5. Libya peace process
6. Recruitment efforts targeting Russian diplomats in the United States
7. Finnish Ambassador to Russia summoned to the Foreign Ministry
8. Various aspects of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process
9. Manifestations of neocolonialism in French politics
10. NATO extends Jens Stoltenberg's term
11. Discharge of water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant
12. France considers restricting access to social media platforms during unrest
13. Russia's approaches to reforming the UN Security Council
14. Consular access to Evan Gershkovich
15. Extension of the grain deal
16. Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh
17. Russia's approaches to the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan
18. Implementation of the November 9, 2020 Statement on Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh
19. Trilateral peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia
20. Azerbaijan's contribution to the Non-Aligned Movement
21. Creation of the Baku Initiative Group Against French Colonialism
22. Risks of "artificial Ukrainisation"
23. OSCE PA decision on the Wagner Group
24. Update on the Hermitage branch in Amsterdam
25. Assessments of the current situation in the world
26. Russian-Libyan relations
27. The role and place of international law in the Russian legal system
28. Ensuring Russia's sovereignty

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to attend ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meetings

On July 13-14, Sergey Lavrov will take part in regular meetings of foreign

ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Jakarta, as part of Russia-ASEAN, the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum on Security (ARF).

Our efforts will be aimed at promoting Russia's interests in the Asia-Pacific region, maintaining a balanced, equal and up-to-date regional architecture of interstate relations. We are placing particular emphasis on strengthening interaction with ASEAN, which is one of our most important strategic partners, and enhancing coordination with that association at ASEAN-centric platforms such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum on Security.

The Russia-ASEAN ministerial meeting is taking place in the year that marks the 5th anniversary of the strategic partnership between our country and ASEAN. We intend to give impetus to interaction with the group on all tracks, including capacity building in fighting terrorism and transnational crime, and in knowledge-intensive industries, especially given the impressive results of the Year of Scientific and Technical Cooperation in 2022, as well as in cross-sectoral educational programmes. We will discuss steps to tap new areas for cooperation, including digital transformation and the development of smart cities. Heightened attention is to be paid to energy and food security given the difficult situation on global markets caused by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the anti-Russia sanctions imposed by the West.

The development of ties between ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) will be high on the agenda, considering our common interest in expanding integration and trade liberalisation processes in the Greater Eurasia.

During the ministerial meetings as part of the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum on Security, we intend to bring to our partners' attention the growing risks arising from the West's policy to militarise the Asia-Pacific region by deploying NATO's power potential there and expanding the network of narrow-format mechanisms aimed at deterrence and counteraction. By doing so, they are trying to undermine the security and cooperation architecture that has developed around ASEAN, moving all practical issues in the region to an alternative "Indo-Pacific" system.

Our task is to prevent the transformation of ASEAN-centric platforms into a stage of geopolitical fighting. Russia calls for strengthening them as effective, inclusive, equal and constructive dialogue mechanisms for discussing practical issues in a non-politicised manner.

Discussions in the EAS framework will be focused on preparing

substantive issues for discussion at the 18th East Asia Summit, to be held in Jakarta in September 2023, such as the adoption of a roadmap for EAS activities in the next five years.

We hope that the next meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum on security, which will mark 30 years since its establishment this year, will adopt several thematic statements, including an anniversary statement. Our priorities at this platform include ICT security and nuclear risk reduction. Russia has put forth several practical initiatives on these issues. We will continue to promote them despite the obstacles created by Western countries for us and, in fact, for all ASEAN nations and other interested countries.

[back to top](#)

Ukraine update

On June 30, we commemorated the victims of the Lvov pogroms. During those horrible days in 1941, thugs from the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), guided by the Nazi occupation authorities, killed over 4,000 civilians in the city, the majority of them Jews.

OUN Banderites planned ethnic cleansing campaigns and proposed a Ukraine for Ukrainians programme even before Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Posters with that slogan were posted throughout the city on the first day of the pogroms. The worst part of it is that these Nazi murderers are now being glorified in Ukraine. All of us are witnessing this, as well as Ukraine's search for its identity. The only difference is that we are resisting this process, whereas the West is sponsoring it. Streets are named after these moral degenerates, torchlight marches are held, and young people and children are being educated in the spirit of their criminal ideas.

Today, the neo-Nazis are carrying on the OUN and Bandera's cause by systematically destroying the Orthodox traditions of the Ukrainian people. On June 28, 2023, Vladimir Zelensky submitted a bill to the Verkhovna Rada that would move Christmas Day from January 7 to December 25. Some people argue that this is nothing other than the updating of an old tradition. Those who don't know history may think so, but those who know their history remember that on December 21, 1941, the German occupation administration announced that Christmas was to be celebrated in Ukraine concurrently with the German armed forces on December 24, 25 and 26. Under the guidance of modern-day Nazis, Ukraine is again losing its Orthodox identity. People are being robbed of their religious, cultural and historical legacy again, and the authorities are taking their

cues from their ideological idols – the Third Reich occupiers supported by Banderites.

By encouraging Nazism in Ukraine and shutting its eyes to the doings of the Zelensky regime, the West is opening Pandora's box. The results of this policy are already obvious. Radical nationalists have become inspired and stepped up their activities throughout Europe. They are seeing what is not only allowed today but also well paid. They are supplied with weapons; their desires are indulged and they can do whatever they want. They are treated as “enfants terrible” – it is easier to please them than even try to come to terms.

To believe numerous media reports, neo-Nazi groups are directly involved in the unrest in France. Has anyone in the Elysee Palace thought about this? If not, it is time to. Here's more food for thought – the weapons supplied to Kiev are landing in the hands of protesters and are being used against the police in France. Has President Emmanuel Macron told the nation about this or is it a secret? Then we'll say it ourselves. The weapons supplied by the West, NATO and France in particular, and the funds invested in the support of nationalists, Nazis and fascists in Ukraine is having blowback on their own territory and their people. We predicted this a year and a half ago.

Kiev continues actively using terrorist methods. On the morning of July 4, it tried to launch a drone attack at civilian facilities in New Moscow and Moscow suburbs. The targets include an airport accommodating international flights. We never divide people by nationality but there is one nuance. Once again, the countries sponsoring the Kiev regime should honestly tell their nationals that they may become a victim of a terrorist attack. This time, these plans were thwarted by well-coordinated efforts by Russian air defence and radio-electronic warfare. Four drones were downed and one more lost control and crashed. There were no human losses or destruction. This was yet another act of terror. Such actions would have been impossible without financial, technical and logistical assistance of the US-led Western coalition that is actually sponsoring the Zelensky regime's terrorist activities. Out of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, three countries (the US, Britain and France) are sponsoring the terrorist activities of the Ukrainian President.

Using NATO-supplied weapons, militants of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are systematically attacking residential areas of Donbass. On June 28 and July 3 of this year, Ukrainian bombings killed two and wounded 10 civilians, including five children. On July 1, neo-Nazis attacked the city of Tokmak in the Zaporozhye Region with HIMARS multiple rocket launchers, killing two civilians. On July 3 of this year, the Armed Forces of Ukraine shelled the village

of Troitskoye in the Kursk Region, destroying six houses. On July 4, a devastating blow was dealt to Makeyevka. Damage was done to 40 residential buildings, 12 schools, 13 kindergartens and 9 medical facilities. We are tempted to ask the Western media that regularly publishes footage from Bucha and the maternity home in Mariupol whether they would like to make a photo report on how the weapons of their regimes are used. No need to be modest – it is good motivation. As of today, we know about 41 victims – some people were killed and two children (aged 2 and 7 years) were wounded. Will anyone in the West learn about this from Western media reports? It will never happen because this is a taboo subject. There are no killed or wounded “on the other side”. There are just inventions by Zelensky and Co, that are being visualised with technology from Hollywood and elsewhere.

The Kiev regime routinely and flagrantly violates the norms of international humanitarian law. Every day, the Armed Forces of Ukraine commit monstrous crimes against the residents of Donbass and other Russian regions bordering on Ukraine.

The evil deeds of the neo-Nazis, including those committed during hostilities, will not go unpunished.

I would like to note that the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation will investigate every crime that has been committed. Rostov-on-Don is the venue for trials of Ukrainian militants, including members of the Azov nationalist regiment (an organisation banned in Russia), involved in mistreating and killing the residents of the new Russian regions. These trials are based on evidence that has been collected. Courts in the Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics have already sentenced over 30 Ukrainian nationalists for crimes against the civilian population; some of them will spend the rest of their lives in prison.

This week, the courts sentenced several militants, including A. Petrenko who killed a civilian in Mariupol using a sniper rifle. Two others, A. Pinkovsky and A. Bardash, tossed hand grenades inside private homes in Lisichansk and Popasnaya, seriously injured an elderly woman and destroyed the properties.

We are warning all current “guardians” of the terrorist Kiev regime, who are involved in its activities, who implement the criminal orders of Vladimir Zelensky and who draft these orders, that every criminal acting for the benefit of the Nazi regime and its Western patrons will be severely punished in line with the law. We are urging those who are being compelled to do this, people who are being “motivated” and brainwashed, as well as those who are following their hearts (I am not talking about their souls, which they obviously lack) to think

about their own future and that of their families and potential victims. They should make the only correct choice: It is still not too late to lay down their weapons and to stop taking part in terrorist activities of the President of Ukraine.

Vladimir Zelensky said the other day in an interview with a US television channel that Kiev was not hiding any secrets from the CIA. People have known for a long time that Ukraine is being managed from the outside. This is an established fact. However, the CIA and other US intelligence services actually control all developments on the territory of this country. Ukraine has long since been run from beyond its borders, and its sovereignty and independence have vanished without a trace. Vladimir Zelensky is now making short work of the people of Ukraine. They have told him that this is his mission and purpose. Naturally, the Kiev regime has no secrets from foreign intelligence, nor can it have any.

It may be symbolic, but on July 4, US Independence Day, they illuminated the monumental Motherland sculpture in Kiev, installed by the Soviet Government on May 9, 1981 in honour of liberating the capital of Ukraine from Nazi German invaders, in the colours of the US flag. This is their current motherland. Here is another explanation for this act. Pseudo-historians working in Ukraine advanced various ideas in order to whip up nationalist sentiment among their compatriots. According to a concept proposed by Ukrainian “scientist” Alexander Dubina, Christopher Columbus had Ukrainian roots. It does not matter that documents tell a different story, and that Ukraine did not exist in the times of Columbus. Nationalists care nothing about this; and Columbus is also listed among proto-Ukrainians.

The other day, Vladimir Zelensky sent a bill to the Verkhovna Rada, suggesting that English be granted the status of international language in Ukraine. This project is aimed at converting all spheres of public life to English throughout Ukraine. It is alleged that the bill, if approved, would help to “intensify the process of Ukrainian integration into the European community.” In reality, they are expecting and preparing Ukraine’s territory for occupation by their rightful rulers. Zelensky denies the people of Ukraine the right to rule their own country. They have sold everything for a pittance – land, history, property, industry, and more. What is left? The only thing they cannot sell is the air (although they regularly foul it). They have laid their hands even on the language they took away from the indigenous population and mangled. Now they are preparing to greet the occupation with bread and salt (as in the 1940s). There is no other way to make sense of it.

We are used to all their tricks, but what is shocking about this business

with English is the unbelievable cynicism of the Kiev regime and the absolute helplessness of people living in Ukraine in the fight for their rights. I am not referring to the residents of Donbass. We are protecting them as we did all these years. I am speaking about those who sincerely believed that Zelensky, the US, UK, and EU would lead them to a “radiant future.” These people have no opportunity to enjoy their basic rights. They have been denied this. It is absurd to ban Russian, a native language for millions of people in Ukraine, fully and everywhere, and impose English they have no use for under the pretext that this can facilitate their integration with the EU, where English is a state language only in Ireland. No EU country ever did this. Why is Ukraine doing this absurd thing? The Kiev regime, Zelensky, and the thousands of military instructors and advisers filling Bankova Street and the government agencies of Ukraine are preparing everything necessary for a military occupation. Just imagine if Switzerland had banned French and made English an official language “to better integrate with the European Union.” Anyone suggesting this would have been banished right away. Peaceful Switzerland holds referendums on all issues however small, including the colour of a fence in the main street of a town. I am speaking about the values Kiev allegedly adopted as a model. There is nothing left of those values over there. The goings-on in Ukraine are an anti-value for traditions still lingering in the EU.

Ukraine’s Minister of Defence Alexey Reznikov has once again publicly confirmed that Ukraine is basically used by the West as a convenient testing ground for various types of weapons. This is the reason English is being introduced. They are asking the West to place everything they can on their territory – and no one is thinking about the interests of the Ukrainian people. Nobody even asks about them. According to Alexey Reznikov, in Ukraine, western allies can actually see whether their weapons work, how effective they are, and whether they need to be upgraded. To quote, “You cannot imagine a better testing ground for the global military industry.” It is a shame that the guillotine had been invented before Ukraine was established – the country would have become an excellent testing ground for it, and Ukrainian politicians would have invited inventors to test their “brainchild” on Ukrainians. It’s the same thing, just on a bigger scale. The guillotine was used to execute one person, while these weapons (including depleted uranium munitions) are targeted at generations of people. Representatives of the Kiev regime don’t seem concerned that by providing such a testing ground for foreign military and industrial corporations, they are completely obliterating their country, its population, and all their hope for a peaceful future.

The aforementioned facts show that the tasks and goals set under the special military operation to de-Nazify and demilitarise Ukraine and eliminate serious threats to the security of our country and its citizens that come from Ukrainian territory remain on course and will be achieved.

[back to top](#)

80th anniversary of Volhynia massacre

On July 11-12, 1943, 80 years ago, militants of the OUN-UPA (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army) attacked 150 communities with predominantly Polish populations, in one of the bloodiest instances of the months-long ethnic cleansing in Volhynia, also known as the Volyn Tragedy. In Lvov, they mostly massacred Jews, while in Volhynia, ethnic Poles bore the brunt.

More than 8,000 Poles perished in just two days in July, 1943. The exact number of those brutally killed and tortured there is unlikely to ever be established. Ukrainian nationalists exterminated not only Poles, but also representatives of other ethnic groups such as Jews and Czechs. In July 1943 alone, at least 500 Polish villages and towns were attacked, the toll reaching at least 17,000 people – the culmination of Bandera’s ethnic cleansing of the non-Ukrainian population in Volhynia. This was done by the same people who have now been proclaimed heroes in Ukraine; it is their chants that American politicians and statesmen are reciting.

According to independent historians, a total of 100,000-130,000 Poles were killed in 1943; some of them were Soviet citizens. Polish historians estimate that 150,000 were killed in 1943-1945. In 2016, the Polish Parliament recognised the events in Volhynia as a genocide of the Polish people. Every year on July 11, Poland marks the National Day of Remembrance of the victims of the genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists in 1943-1945 at the state level.

What are the Kiev authorities doing, feeling so at ease while rewriting history? They go along with anything the West tells them to do. They have no problem changing the historical paradigm for analysing and evaluating events. They could have admitted what they had done, repented, and asked for forgiveness. But no, the current rulers in Kiev are trying to present the events in Volhynia as some “local Polish-Ukrainian conflict.” In fact, it was a pre-planned crime on a mass scale; this much is confirmed by historical facts. But that was their systemic approach. They did the same with other ethnic groups, in other

cities and towns. It was not a local conflict; it was about Ukrainian nationalism as an ideology, which permeated the 20th century and sprouted again in the 21st century. Now it's Russians' turn; back then, it was Poles, Jews, Czechs and many others who were targeted.

At the end of 2016, Russia's Federal Archival Agency (Rosarkhiv) published a collection of documents that can be used to trace the history of Banderites' attitude towards Poles and other peoples. The 1938 OUN military doctrine included Ukrainian nationalists' plans for ethnic purges directed against their neighbours. Those plans were largely implemented by the OUN five years later in Volhynia. Was that some local story?

On May 20, 2023, the Polish Foreign Ministry demanded that Vladimir Zelensky make an official apology, emphasising it should have a positive impact on bilateral relations. As far as we know, no apologies were offered, at least not publicly. No surprise. The current Kiev regime is literally full of worship for Bandera and his followers, and has been methodically implementing their anti-human plans targeting the residents of Donbass and southeastern Ukraine since 2014. It is surprising that Poland fails to see or realise this, and continues to supply weapons to those who exterminated Poles several decades ago under the same banners and the same slogans.

Without much hope for being heard in Warsaw, we call on the Polish authorities, for the sake of the memory of those who died in the terrible massacre in Volhynia, to stop recklessly supporting the Kiev regime. The crimes they have been committing against the residents of Donbass, against Russian speakers, are nothing less than an attempt to continue what Ukrainian nationalists did during WWII. If Poles support this now, how are they better than those killers who massacred their ancestors in the 1940s?

I would also like to address the Western handlers and patrons of the current Ukrainian authorities and ask them directly: do you even realise, in your Russophobic fervor, who or what you have fostered in Ukraine? You have nurtured and encouraged a monster made up of the modern followers of the Volhynia murderers. Such monsters are never satisfied.

[back to top](#)

UN Security Council briefing on arms supplies to Ukraine

On June 29, 2023, a briefing on arms supplies to Ukraine was held at the UN Security Council at Russia's initiative. The civil society briefers Russia invited included journalists Max Blumenthal (USA) and Chay Bowes (Ireland).

They provided facts about the Kiev regime using Western weapons to deliver strikes at civilian facilities in Donetsk and to send subversive groups into the Belgorod Region. They supplied evidence that billions of US taxpayer dollars have been invested in the corrupt schemes of fuelling a war against Russia in which Ukrainians are being used as a tool. They concluded that the Western elites and defence industries were the only ones to benefit from the escalation of the conflict.

Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzya pointed out that Western countries were responsible for derailing a peaceful settlement and that their neutral status was undermined by their systematic actions to flood the Kiev regime with US and Western weapons and to turn Ukraine into a puppet private military company.

The Western UN Security Council members led by the US representatives traditionally tried to place the blame for the beginning of the hostilities in Ukraine on Russia, although the real reason is Western support for the anti-constitutional state coup in Kiev in 2014 and several rounds of Maidan revolts several years before that.

The other briefing participants, who represented the Global South, again firmly called for peace, which is largely prevented by the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine.

We will continue to draw the attention of the international community to this issue, including at the UN Security Council.

[back to top](#)

Removal of cultural heritage from Ukraine

The battle against the Orthodox Church continues in Ukraine. It has acquired a cultural dimension. On June 26, 2023, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service reported on plans to take Christian valuables and relics from the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, a component of the UNESCO cultural heritage site designated as Kiev: St Sophia Cathedral and Related Monastic Buildings, Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, to Europe under the pretext of "saving them from Russian missile attacks," although there is no reason for this because the Russian forces are not targeting civilian facilities, let alone Orthodox holy places.

Why is this being done? It is not the first such case. It is the colonial powers' tomb-raiding attitude to the national cultural heritage of other countries, which they regard as their colonies. They obviously regard Ukraine as their colony.

According to available information, the Louvre in Paris has accepted “for safekeeping” 16 exhibits from the Bogdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts in Kiev. Eleven of them have been sent for restoration, and the other five – four Byzantine icons from St Catherine’s Monastery at Sinai that date to the sixth and seventh centuries, and a micro-mosaic of St Nicholas that dates to the late 13th or early 14th century – have been put on display in the Louvre. The collection of “Ukrainian cultural heritage” will grow: the French museum has announced its plans to establish a department of Byzantine and Eastern Christian art in 2027. These elements of Ukraine’s cultural heritage will presumably form the basis of the future exposition.

I’d like to say a few words about the colonial tradition. Western countries have stolen national valuables throughout the world, and their museums can be described as the “safekeepers” of valuables stolen in their colonies, as you can see in the Ancient Egypt departments in the Louvre or the British Museum. Have you ever wondered where these exhibits came from? Those who have visited the Egypt Room of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow know that Russian merchants and patrons of arts bought these exhibits and brought them to Russia. The core of the exposition is the collection of Vladimir Golenishchev, a Russian Egyptologist from a merchant family, who bought it with his own money. Ask the same question in the Louvre or the British Museum. Where did their exhibits come from? Were they stolen, looted, or plundered? Were they taken by force from ransacked countries and later sold? This is how these collections were formed.

Please note that the collections in Western museums are much richer than those in the countries they have been taken from. Why? Because there is practically nothing left there. Look at the museums in Egypt. The country is now trying to retrieve the bust of Nefertiti from the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, the Queen Hatshepsut statue from the Metropolitan, the Portrait Bust of Prince Ankh-haf from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and many more. Britain has removed thousands of valuables from India over two centuries (the 19th and 20th centuries). According to Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the total worth of treasures taken from India is about \$45 trillion, with the Kohinoor (Mountain of Light) diamond being the most famous of them. Now they seem to have found a new source for enriching their private and state collections of art.

The Kiev-Pechersk Lavra holds some unique works of art. I will not even mention their religious value – representatives of the church should speak about

this.

Such blasphemous plans are another example of Vladimir Zelensky's criminal policy to destroy the traditional foundations of Ukrainian society. Moreover, apart from the looting of religious shrines, such actions deprive the Ukrainian people of their religious, cultural and historical heritage. In Zelensky's view, all these things need to be erased from their historical memory. After a couple of years, they will be told that they never had any of this. Right now, they are being told that they have no connections with Russia or its culture – that they were there before Russia or anyone else came into being. In the same vein, they will later be told that those cultural values were never theirs or meant for them. They will have to travel to the Louvre or British Museum to see those treasures as tourists or refugees.

The West has always plundered its colonies. Ukraine is no exception. There is no doubt that no one was going to return the valuables they had taken away from other countries. I recommend everyone to read the story of how British diplomats removed cultural property from Greece. In particular, how they literally looted the Acropolis. The Greek authorities later spent decades trying to get it all back. They didn't succeed. Another question is the role of UNESCO, an organisation aimed at preserving cultural treasures and artifacts, not facilitating their transfer to private or public collections in countries that have nothing to do with them.

[back to top](#)

Participation of French citizens in the conflict in Ukraine

We noted reports in the French media about the participation of French nationals in the conflict in Ukraine. According to these reports, about 320 French citizens took or are still taking part in the hostilities there.

We have repeatedly described the formation of special recruitment mechanisms in Western countries, including France. They recruit so-called volunteers to take part in hostilities in Ukraine. De facto, they are mercenaries that are coming to kill our citizens. We believe this is taking place with at least the connivance of the official authorities. However, it is “highly likely,” as our Anglo-Saxon “friends” say, that there is official support. For our part, the Russian Defence Ministry offered all explanations on this issue. It emphasised that according to international humanitarian law, foreign mercenaries are not considered combatants, with all the ensuing consequences.

We welcome the appearance of realistic journalists in the French

information space. They are starting to ask questions about the legal and moral aspects of this phenomenon. There was a recent piece in *Le Monde*, which concluded that France was “waging a war by proxy in Ukraine.” Finally, the French public at large has begun to get truthful information about the involvement of their country in the conflict in Ukraine. Where will these mercenaries go next? What will they do in the future or are already doing now?

We have long been saying that the countries that are supplying the Kiev regime with arms are actually accomplices in its war crimes and a party to the conflict in Ukraine. France’s military-technical aid to the Kiev regime via different channels has already exceeded 2 billion euros. By building up these arms supplies, Paris will be dragging out hostilities, provoking new military and civilian losses, and contributing to the escalation of the conflict. In addition, Paris will be fueling the black market in weapons and sponsoring international cross-border crime.

In 2023 alone, France is planning to train about 4,000 new nationalist militants. Have the residents of the Elysee Palace figured out where these French trainees will go next? If nobody in Paris can predict this, I will help them out. Nobody should be surprised if these trained Ukrainian militants are seen in future pogroms in the streets of Paris and other French cities. This is not fantasy. Take al-Qaeda for example. The Americans did a good job training its members at different bases and camps, sponsored them all over the world in a big way and supplied them with weapons. At a certain stage, al-Qaeda militants followed US orders. But later something went awry and they started using all they had learned against the US and the West that had created them.

I am sure the French people are aware of the moral responsibility for the deaths of more and more people and of the consequences of the Elysee Palace’s experiments for their homeland.

[back to top](#)

Mass protests in France

In recent years, we have seen flagrant violations of human rights and cases of police brutality in France. The UN Human Rights Council, as well as numerous human rights organisations, have been increasingly turning their attention to their growing numbers. But the murder of a 17-year-old Algerian teenager by a police officer in the Parisian suburb of Nanterre last week, and the wave of mass protests that followed, showed the world the true extent of the problems in the country that calls itself the birthplace of human rights in the

world.

The non-Olympic flame was burning in many French regions and cities for a week. Riots, vandalism, and looting swept the largest cities of the country: Paris, Marseille, Nice, Lyon, and Strasbourg, as well as dozens, if not hundreds of small communes. According to official data alone, over 700 shops were looted in France, more than 5,000 cars were burned, and more than a thousand administrative and private buildings were damaged or burned down. Is it the “roses” rebelling in the “beautiful garden?” About 250 police and gendarmerie stations and about a hundred city halls in French cities were attacked.

The situation spiraled out of control in many cities, forcing local authorities to impose curfews and stop public transport. More than 3,200 citizens were arrested by law enforcement, including many minors. At the same time, more than 700 officers were injured. The government deploys up to 45,000 police and gendarmes on the French streets every day, and many of them, according to French media reports, are in a state of extreme fatigue.

In this context, the Russian Foreign Ministry expresses its extreme concern over the crisis and unprecedented growth of violence in France. This clearly shows there are aggravating problems and deep divisions in French society today. We would like to stress that it is necessary for law enforcement agencies to remain on the right side of the law, and that any form of police violence against citizens is unacceptable, especially if it is driven by a person’s ethnicity.

We cannot help but note the general growth of xenophobia in France in recent years, as well as hostility towards migrants, and manifestations of anti-Semitism. The French authorities should take the growing radicalisation of society seriously and focus more on the growth of xenophobic and racist sentiments in the country. We call on the authorities to immediately investigate the circumstances of the murder that has stirred up France and take the necessary measures to punish the perpetrators. The situation in France must not threaten the security of our common European continent.

The riots that have swept the country once again highlight how inappropriate the moralising that can regularly be heard from Paris against objectionable countries, including Russia, sounds. We would like to recommend that the representatives of the French authorities, when next time they feel like criticising the official actions of Russian law enforcement agencies or pointing out human rights violations in a lecturing tone, think about how things are going at home, and would it not be better to protect their own people from police excesses and the wanton acts of criminals. I would like to ask what the official

representative of the UN Secretary-General, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, or Director-General of UNESCO, Ms Audrey Azoulay, think about the events in France? I have not seen their concerned statements in this regard. I'm worried.

[back to top](#)

US involvement in the Ukraine conflict

We would like to point out that the official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the section White Books on Crimes of the Western States and their Allies contains material with translations in English, French, Spanish and German on the extent of the United States involvement in the conflict in Ukraine.

The document provides a compilation of facts about Washington's real involvement in the creation and escalation of the crisis in Ukraine. There is a lot of facts, figures and evidence. I recommend giving it a look.

[back to top](#)

Developments in Moldova

The Moldovan authorities are recklessly curtailing their involvement in CIS activities. We answered similar questions from journalists. I would like to revisit this topic. They have been affected by unwarranted and extremely dangerous activities in law enforcement security. We have drawn attention to the short-sightedness of this policy, including at the briefing on June 7. Unfortunately, this course of action by Chisinau has already had negative consequences for the citizens of Moldova.

The recent tragic incident at Chisinau Airport is direct confirmation of this. I can confirm this with facts. It is one of the consequences of the termination of the country's participation in the activities of the Bureau for Coordinating Efforts against Organised Crime and Other Dangerous Types of Crime in the Territory of the CIS Member States and the withdrawal of the Moldovan representative from that agency. I can elaborate on this point. It is important that Moldovan citizens understand what is going on.

The basic functions of the Bureau for Coordinating Efforts against Organised Crime are: coordination of interaction between the interior ministries of the CIS countries, including information sharing, in efforts against organised crime, terrorism, drug trafficking and other dangerous kinds of crime; assistance

in preparing and carrying out operational actions, including interstate searches for persons; formation of a specialised database on criminal leaders and participants in international criminal networks.

Perhaps if Chisinau had continued to cooperate with the Bureau for Coordinating Efforts against Organised Crime and had used its databases, it would have been possible to identify the perpetrator in time and thus avoid the deaths of its citizens.

However, the Moldovan leadership rejected such activities solely for political reasons, despite it being an effective mechanism of cooperation within the CIS. Moreover, the regime of Maia Sandu continues to persist in following this strange, ineffective and dangerous path for the citizens of Moldova. They are endangering the security of their own population. That is the high price for all these experiments. Did the people of Moldova want the country to start giving up what has been used for many years and contributed to its safety? Certainly not. It was the Western advisers who advised everything. Here is a thoughtless policy of reckless European integration. There is nothing wrong with integration when it is natural and meets the national interests of the people, rather than being imposed from the outside and destroying everything that was created in the interests of the people.

[back to top](#)

Finland to impose extra entry restrictions for Russian citizens

We took note of the Finnish authorities' most recent move to tighten entry regulations for Russian citizens.

One might have thought they hit rock bottom some time ago, but now we know things can get even worse.

On September 29, 2022, Finland, which unlike many Western countries, took a more sensible approach to building relations with Russia, ended up in the company of EU countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and some others, that have for a long time pursued openly Russophobic policies. The Finnish authorities shut down entry to Russian tourists and revoke valid visas at border crossings. Work and student visas as well as visas for visiting close relatives can still be obtained, though.

At the time, the Foreign Ministry spoke about the political motives behind this decision, the absurd nature of assumptions about threats allegedly posed to Finland's security by the Russian Federation, especially Russian tourists, and the violation of international obligations against discrimination on national grounds,

of which the restrictions imposed by the Finnish authorities on Russian citizens constitute a glaring example.

Now, the Finnish government decided these measures were not enough. Under the guise of alleged abuses, the most recent volley of discriminatory initiatives seeks to make entry into that country for Russians owning real estate in Finland conditional upon providing convincing proof that their personal presence is required during maintenance and repair works, and entry for educational purposes is provided only to applicants for academic degrees at Finnish universities. You do see what this is all about, don't you? This has nothing to do with the special military operation or anything else. This is American ideology. I can back this claim up. In the same way, the Americans seized our diplomatic property. On the one hand, it was state-owned property, particularly in New York, and on the other hand, it enjoyed diplomatic immunity, i.e., it enjoyed double protection against the local authorities' arbitrary actions. They seized this property in 2016 and up until now have made visiting our property, let alone repair or maintenance work, impossible. They won't let us access the grounds, let alone enter the building. It's the same here. The point is the same. "Yes, the property is owned by Russian citizens," "yes, you own it," "yes, an inviolable part of liberal democracy," but "own it remotely" and "don't come," the Finnish authorities are saying. It's our property, but we can't use it. It's a lesson for everyone. Flirting with liberal ideology leads to liberal dictatorship. It's a lesson for everyone, who for years believed the West was flawless and blindly followed their course in a belief that "things are different" there, and that freedoms and private property and inviolability of property guarantees are for real there. This is a lesson for all those who have been unwilling to learn it over the past decades.

Taking such decisions, Helsinki must realise that the Russophobic zeal shown by Finland will not only be appreciated by Brussels, Washington and Kiev, but also taken into account by Moscow as it plans its future Finnish policy. Most importantly, people all over the world who had illusions that buying property in the West, investing in real estate and being able to visit and even live there was a safe bet will take note of it. This is a lesson for everyone who entertained such illusions.

[back to top](#)

Protests sparked by the Quran-burning incident in Sweden

A wave of protests swept through the Middle East and North Africa after

an ugly Islamophobic incident in Stockholm, where an immigrant from Iraq publicly burned a copy of Islam's most holy book, the Quran, on June 28, which is the first day of Eid al-Adha. The believers expressed their outrage at this blasphemous act and demanded that the Swedish authorities, whose connivance allowed this to happen, take measures to prevent such provocations in the future. As a reminder, Stockholm has officially and repeatedly cited freedom of speech and said it would not condemn such antics in any way because they are part of self-expression, freedom of speech and liberalism. The blasphemous act has been condemned by official circles in the Middle Eastern capitals and other Muslim states.

The June 29 statement by the Foreign Minister's Special Representative for Cooperation to Promote Respect for the Right to Freedom of Religion and the Foreign Ministry's Ambassador-at-Large Gennady Askaldovich expressly detailed our approach to the issue. We reaffirm the principled assessments of the provocation itself and the Swedish authorities' actions in this regard, as well as Russia's key approaches to combating religious intolerance and extremism, as spelled out in the statement.

We bring to Stockholm's attention that supporting such xenophobic acts is unacceptable.

[back to top](#)

Report by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria

We have studied another anti-Syrian report released on June 28 by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission regarding incidents of alleged use of toxic chemicals in Syria during the Syrian armed opposition's mortar attacks on positions of the Syrian Army in Kharbit Massasneh on July 7 and August 4, 2017.

Once again, the experts from the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons did not find reasonable grounds to determine that the armed anti-government groups operating in Syria to promote the geopolitical interests of the collective West used chemicals as a weapon in this terrorist act. It would seem that such inconsistencies in the consideration of the convincing facts presented by the Syrian side that confirm the use of toxic chemicals by the armed opposition do not look so cynical when put into perspective by the truly outrageous things the OPCW's Technical Secretariat did on orders from Washington and Brussels. I am talking about the falsification of the FFM reports and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) inquiry on

the attribution of responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in a staged provocation by the White Helmets pseudo-humanitarian NGO with the use of chlorine on April 7, 2018 in Douma. Still, they say a lot.

This report and the preceding expert “research” by the OPCW Technical Secretariat in Syria are evidence of the trend that has taken root at this formerly purely technical international agency, which is finally turning into an instrument in the collective West’s geopolitics in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, similar events are taking place not only as regards the Western-invented Syrian “chemical file” but also as regards fake poisonings and other stories around the Skripals and Alexey Navalny. Apparently, soon there will be other provocations and Russia will be accused of violating its commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention. As far as we know, Washington, London, Berlin and Brussels have long been nurturing such plans. It is no accident that the false assumptions about Russia’s intention to use WMD in the zone of its special military operation in Ukraine are being made in the Western public and political space and the media. We believe the Kiev regime is now ready for everything – be it threats to the physical nuclear security of facilities at the Zaporozhye NPP, or to the safe functioning of chemical plants in the new regions of the Russian Federation as well as central and western Ukraine. There is plenty of evidence of this. It is enough to mention the shelling of the Zaporozhye NPP, acts of subversion at chemical plants in the cities of Sumy, Rubezhnoye and Severodonetsk, and the detonation of the Togliatti-Odessa ammonia pipeline by the secret services of Ukraine.

We are urging the participants in the Chemical Weapons Convention that are still capable of resisting the OPCW’s politicisation, to support by concerted effort the integrity of the convention and the once well-deserved prestige of the OPCW as such. As the not-so-distant history bears out, in part as regards Iran and Iraq, irresponsible military-political games whereby Washington and Brussels accuse “objectionable regimes” of using or threatening to use WMD, are only aggravating global problems and the suffering of the majority of humanity. The unrestrained ambition of the Western countries to preserve and strengthen their military-political, financial-economic and dubious cultural-civilisational domination is doomed to failure. Better to focus on preventing the crimes being plotted by the Kiev regime, in particular, at the Zaporozhye NPP.

[back to top](#)

Salisbury and Amesbury incidents

This year marks the 5th anniversary of the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents that not only significantly strained Russian-British relations but were also used by London to launch a massive anti-Russian political propaganda campaign in order to demonise our country internationally.

Let us briefly go over the timeline of the events.

On March 4, 2018, Sergey and Yulia Skripal were found unconscious in Salisbury, Wiltshire, UK, by British Army Chief Nursing Officer Colonel Alison McCourt, who was on leave and was passing by “purely by accident.” She administered first aid to them. “Completely accidentally” and as a pure “coincidence” it all happened in close proximity to the place where Britain had been experimenting, studying and testing chemical warfare agents for years.

On March 14, 2018, Theresa May read out at the House of Commons a list of anti-Russian steps in connection with the Skripal poisoning, including the expulsion of 23 Russian diplomats. In a matter of 10 days (also a “coincidence”) a successful investigation was held and a verdict was handed down by someone unknown. Theresa May identified the culprit and carried out the sentence.

On July 4, 2018, Wiltshire County Police said that on the evening of June 30, 2018, Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley were found unconscious and brought, in critical condition, to a Salisbury hospital 16 km from the scene of the Skripal incident in Amesbury “on suspicion of being poisoned with an unknown substance.”

On the same day, then British Home Secretary Sajid Javid said the nerve agent that poisoned the couple in Amesbury was of the same group as the substance used to poison Sergey and Yulia Skripal in March 2018.

On July 8, 2018, it was announced that one of the victims, 44-year-old Dawn Sturgess, died in hospital without regaining consciousness, and on July 9, 2018, then Secretary of State for Defence Gavin Williamson said that Russia “has committed an attack on British soil which has seen the death of a British citizen.” Three to four months passed from the first report (March 4, 2018) about the incident to the decision that “Russia attacked.” That's it, the investigation is over, no one has seen anything else, no forms have been made available to anyone, and not one of our letters has been answered.

The dry chronology and the weak “evidence base” show a lot of disconnects in this case and the unproven nature of the accusations against Russia, and that this was the latest performance staged by the British government and the British secret services.

The British ignored over 60 queries from the Russian Embassy in London

regarding the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents and refused to cooperate in any way with the competent Russian authorities to investigate the incidents, leaving unanswered repeated inquiries for legal assistance from the Russian General Prosecutor's Office.

Scotland Yard, which should have at least said something during the investigation, has remained silent for several years now. Why? Because the very people who are conducting the investigation are unwilling to take responsibility for the forgery committed by the British secret services. That's why they have remained silent. We've only seen one news conference take place since then. There was only one more or less meaningful public event with the participation of Scotland Yard. They didn't say much, but at least they held it. The "dirty work" in the media space was done by British tabloids using controlled leaks. "Unspecified sources" provided endless comments to the newspapers. In fact, these false claims were put together by Downing Street, the Foreign Office and, of course, the British secret services. They were distributed to newspapers, tabloids and journalists under the guise of an "official position." In fact, no one ever heard anyone formulate an official position.

On June 29, the Russian Embassy in London sent another note to the British Foreign Office "about the Skripal case" to remind the British once again that the Skripals had essentially disappeared to an unknown destination. No one has heard anything about them for more than five years now. With reference to the Vienna and bilateral consular conventions, the Russian Embassy in London once again demanded access to these Russian nationals. The British have been called on to provide information about the outcomes of the investigation into the incident, which they promised, five years ago, to pass on to all the countries that expelled our diplomats, but never did. They just needed to expel diplomats and to complicate the work of our foreign missions, to create yet another narrative about "bad Russia" and the "good West." There's nothing else to it. Just an information political campaign.

So far, the British side has failed to provide any reliable information about the Skripal poisoning. It can't, because reliable information reveals the British government's criminal activities. Apparently, they are hiding everything not only from us, but from their own people and their partners and NATO allies as well.

All of this clearly shows that the British side is not interested in having a fair and impartial investigation into the incident, and is deliberately dragging out the investigation and ignoring Russia's requests. Once again, this confirms that the incident was a put-up job, the real purpose of which was to damage Russia's international standing and set back bilateral relations.

For more on this issue, we encourage you to read the detailed factsheet posted on the website of the Russian Embassy in London titled “Salisbury: Unanswered Questions.”

[back to top](#)

160 years since the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands

We noted the apology made by King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands on July 1 of this year to the former colonies during the events timed to the 160th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles. As they say, better late than never. It took The Hague 160 long years to acknowledge officially its brutal, humiliating crimes against humanity, the merciless exploitation of the aborigines of these islands and, as the King put it, the “obvious lack of action” in this respect.

Let me recall that the Netherlands was one of the main beneficiaries from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade that lasted until 1883. According to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), slavery accounted for 40 percent of economic growth in the western province of Holland alone in 1738-1780. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Dutch transported over 1.2 million slaves from Africa to South America, Curacao, Indonesia and the Caribbean Islands. Why is the date important? We are not talking about modern transport logistics. In past centuries, there was no possibility of moving masses of people. And yet the Netherlands shipped 1.2 million slaves from Africa to different parts of the world.

In 1830-1870, Africans were replaced with people from the Island of Java in the role of “the human commodity.” Large-scale violence against the islanders also characterised the war for independence in Indonesia in 1945-1949, during which up to 100,000 Indonesians lost their lives.

The paper “The State and slavery -- the Dutch colonial past and its consequences” published in June of this year describes in more detail the gloomy pages of Dutch history. It was issued in Dutch. In this study, Dutch historians have reached impressive conclusions: the colonial empire would not have existed without slavery and the country, including the Orange Dynasty, was deeply involved in slave and human trafficking, deriving huge financial benefits from these pernicious practices. According to the author of the paper Esther Captain, “the Dutch colonial project rested on violence, exploitation and suppression.”

When next time Josep Borrell talks about the wonderful “garden” let him not forget what fertilizer the West was using to cultivate it. It was made of the lives of millions of people all over the planet. This is how the West treated them. All statements on “racial supremacy” and “Western exceptionalism” should be accompanied by an account of the West’s cruelty and the exploitation of some people by others.

Incidentally, the former colonies have not accepted the apology up to this day. Prime Minister of Sint Maarten Silveria Jacobs said this more than once. In 2021, the parliament of this insular state complained about the actions of the Netherlands to the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism. It accused the Dutch of neocolonialism, racism, violations of human rights and the right to self-government, including demands to implement political reforms as a condition of aid during the coronavirus pandemic.

Protests on Curacao came in response to the lack of a proper assessment of the de facto “genocide” of the local population and exploitation of people of Asian descent. There were no legal or financial consequences. Surinam officials raised the issue of reparations several times.

The Dutch King was not the first Dutch official to apologise for the past involvement in slavery. In the autumn of 2022, the Dutch Prime Minister, the Mayor of Amsterdam and a number of local politicians made similar apologetic remarks. All this is wonderful but how many times do we hear today from Western politicians such words as compensation, damage, withdrawal or freezing of assets for compensation? This suggests the following question – when will the Netherlands reimburse its former colonies for the damage they had inflicted on them over centuries? Amsterdam won’t go beyond words. A decision to reimburse the descendants of slaves in the colonial past has not been made. Against this backdrop, statements of Dutch officials about the allocation of 1.6 billion euros in military aid (as of late May of this year) look extremely hypocritical. They do not match the public apology by the Dutch authorities for the colonial past of the Netherlands. This is noteworthy, considering that the problem of migrants is one of the most urgent for this small country. It has deteriorated due to the West-triggered political instability in North Africa and the Middle East.

Has the Netherlands found extra money? Reimburse your former colonies in this case! They have finally deserved your apology. Words of sympathy and requests for forgiveness should have a material reality. Otherwise, they are meaningless.

Obviously, the shameful practices of the colonial past require an honest

and responsible approach on behalf of the Dutch authorities. Let's assume that the apologetic words by the Dutch King will become a prelude to a complicated conversation – not only about the crimes of the past and compensation for the damage done but also about the modern forms of racism that are still manifest in the Netherlands.

[back to top](#)

Attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh

We have taken note of the letters published in mid-June by six MEPs to EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell as well as a number of Democratic US congressmen to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, calling for assistance in conducting "free and fair" elections in Bangladesh. I have never heard that Bangladesh is a member of the European Parliament before. I haven't heard that because it isn't. I didn't know that elections in Bangladesh were connected with the US State Department. By the logic of the West, it is the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the US Secretary of State who should issue some kind of recommendation on the need to form a neutral transitional government there for the pre-election period. What is this but neocolonialism? What is this but a manifestation of the nature of metropolises and their attitude towards their colonies?

This is an attempt at blatant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state whose authorities, as we understand it, have not asked for advice on how to conduct elections. All those who are criticised by the United States or the European Union, as a rule, in the vast majority do not approach them, and ask them not to interfere in their internal affairs but to deal with their own problems at home. The manner in which elections are conducted and organised in Bangladesh is quite clearly defined by national law.

For our part, we support Dhaka in its desire to pursue an independent domestic and foreign policy that meets the interests of Bangladesh itself.

[back to top](#)

Eurasian Forum of Young Diplomats, Diplomacy of the New Multipolar World, on the sidelines of the Manzherok Festival

On July 11-15, the Council of Young Diplomats of the Foreign Ministry, together with the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States

Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, the United Russia party and the Altai Republic Government, will organise the traditional Eurasian Forum of Young Diplomats, which this year will be held for the eighth time. This year's forum will take place on the sidelines of the Manzherok Festival in the hospitable city of Gorno-Altai.

The forum is a prime example of the "horizontal diplomacy" concept, implemented by the Foreign Ministry, which focuses on developing a network of informal communication platforms for young diplomats, government officials and experts. Its purpose is to strengthen the atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding between young staff of foreign ministries of friendly countries.

The five-day forum, with the theme Diplomacy of the New Multipolar World, will feature a full agenda, including a number of expert sessions on topical issues of cooperation between the countries of Greater Eurasia, such as strengthening cooperation in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), building the Greater Eurasian Partnership, developing "soft power," and searching for new areas of growth in the face of sanctions.

The forum will bring together more than 80 participants from 13 countries: Russia, Abkhazia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, South Ossetia, China and Syria.

The official opening of the business and cultural programme will take place on July 12. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will deliver a welcome speech to the guests and organisers of the event.

[back to top](#)

Update on a Russian national detained in Poland

On June 30, the Polish National Prosecutor General's Office press service reported that on June 11 of this year in Silesia Province, the Polish National Security Agency detained Russian national Maxim S., a hockey player with the Zagłębie Sosnowiec hockey club, which is a member of the Polish 1. Liga.

The Russian Embassy in Poland has promptly demanded an explanation from Polish authorities in connection with the incident and official confirmation of this information. It also approached relevant local officials, asking for a visit to the detention centre to see the Russian national, in keeping with the Consular Convention between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Poland of 1992. However, Poland being in the grip of Russophobia and spy mania, its authorities are evading their obligations, which are provided for in international law.

We will continue to keep a close eye on the situation and take all possible

measures to protect the rights and legitimate interests of the Russian national.

[back to top](#)

[Answers to media questions:](#)

Question: With Iran's admission as full member of the SCO, is there anything special that is expected from Teheran's participation in the SCO activities?

Maria Zakharova: Iran has been involved in the SCO activities since 2006 and, in its status as observer, has through concrete actions showed its commitment to move towards strengthening mutually beneficial ties. Proceeding as we do from the good relationship between Russia and Iran, we support Teheran's desire to achieve this.

We believe that after becoming a full member of the SCO, Iran will rapidly acquire an understanding of the specifics of this organisation's activities and will energetically join common efforts. We are looking forward to our coordinated efforts in the interest of enhancing the consolidation of the SCO and boosting its role in international affairs. Of course, Iran's potential will be needed to promote economic cooperation, particularly in ensuring transport, food and energy security within the SCO, while the Islamic world's rich cultural and civilisational traditions will add to the SCO's humanitarian activities. There are many promising areas for interaction.

[back to top](#)

Question: The International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression has opened at Eurojust. It will be comprised of prosecutors from the United States, the EU, Ukraine and the International Criminal Court while at the opening ceremony, Ursula von der Leyen spoke, without mincing words, about the desire to hold "Putin's butchers" to account. Can we expect this centre to conduct an unbiased investigation and devote attention to the crimes being committed in Donbass since 2014?

Maria Zakharova: No, we should not expect this from the centre. A narrow group of countries has created a pseudo-judicial body with an obvious political aim. A centre like this will have nothing to do with justice, law and legitimacy. This is another "observatory for human rights in Syria," which was located, as you might remember, in Britain, on the premises of what once was a pizzeria, or something like that. They are fond of projects like this and know all about them. It would be simply naïve and harmful to expect it to be impartial.

As for the crimes committed in Donbass, Russian law-enforcement agencies are investigating them. They are looking into the Kiev regime's crimes scrupulously and with facts in hand. They have already passed sentences. The organisation you mentioned is another useless project designed to blow hot air and engage in pseudo-judicial work.

[back to top](#)

Question: According to Vasily Nebenzya, Russia's Permanent Mission has circulated a letter in the UN reaffirming that "there are no intentions to blow up the Russian-controlled nuclear power plant." There was also a request to exert influence on Kiev. Was there a response to these two positions from the UN Secretary-General, its Secretariat, and other divisions of the UN?

Maria Zakharova: There was no public response. There was no response via bilateral channels. We know nothing about any response at all. We know nothing about this. We have no such information. Perhaps the UN Secretariat does not care at all that the Ukrainian authorities would not stop trying to commit sabotage against the Zaporozhye NPP (ZNPP). Its unwillingness to openly admit this, despite the facts presented repeatedly by the Russian side, only encourages the Zelensky regime even more to continue terrorist provocations against the plant. It senses its absolute impunity, having received the indulgence of the Western community. One gets the impression that international organisations not only not condemn such Ukrainian actions, but actually encourage them tacitly.

In these conditions, Russia will continue to protect the ZNPP and respond extremely harshly to any Ukrainian attacks on the plant. We once again call on the leadership of the UN and the IAEA not to turn a blind eye to the situation around the ZNPP and clearly state who is to blame for what is happening and where the threat to the safety and functioning of this civilian facility really comes from.

[back to top](#)

Question: How do you assess the situation in France in terms of human rights and racism against ethnic minorities? Were there any threats to life or property of Russians during the riots?

Maria Zakharova: The Russian Embassy in France and Russian foreign missions there do not have information about threats to the life or property of Russians. However, we are still monitoring this, as well as staying in touch with the corresponding French agencies. There were no updates on possible incidents

involving Russians either, or any victims. But we understand that the riots have covered a large territory. In this regard, the Embassy has recommended Russians in the country to refrain from going to disadvantaged areas and the outskirts of large cities, or crowded places, and also be careful when going out at night. Let me also remind you of the emergency telephone numbers for our embassies.

The first part of your question has already been largely covered in the introduction. I can only repeat that in recent years we have repeatedly seen flagrant violations of human rights in France. This was not only Russia's position, but also the reaction of many experts on international platforms.

[back to top](#)

Question: After restoring Russia's full diplomatic presence in the country, the Presidential Council of Libya hopes to develop relations with Moscow. Such influential players in Libya as Turkiye and Egypt also decided to exchange ambassadors. How do you think this can affect the settlement process in Libya?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to note that the normalisation of Egyptian-Turkish relations is intended to have a positive impact on developments in Libya. It is no secret that until recently Cairo and Ankara competed for influence in the former Jamahiriya and supported the opposing Libyan camps. Such competition was one of the reasons why there was dual power in Libya. We hope that now Egypt and Turkiye will approach the issue of the Libyan settlement process from closer positions, and this, in turn, will help overcome the long-standing crisis as quickly as possible.

[back to top](#)

Question: How can Russia respond to the psychological pressure exerted on Russian diplomats in the United States in the framework of "the recruitment campaign"?

Maria Zakharova: Russian diplomats are polite people with a strong spirit and big reserve of patience. As you know, they have passed through several crises in the past few decades. I have already spoken today about expulsions of diplomats under far-fetched pretexts, the seizure of diplomatic property and the closure of our foreign missions without any grounds. The closure of the Consulate-General in San Francisco was presented to the American audience as all but a counterterrorism operation. Helicopters were flying over its building filming how diplomats were collecting and taking out documents. Just imagine – the Consulate-General had worked there for decades and stored archives, documents and other papers, and all of a sudden, it had to

evacuate some documents and destroy others on site. If you remember, the pipes and fireplaces that emitted smoke were presented as evidence of all but illegal activities by Russian diplomats. Spy mania was at a fever pitch in the United States. The American media called our Ambassador Sergey Kislyak a spy, as if by command. A peerless professional with a huge diplomatic record was subject to such harassment. This shows that intolerable conditions are being created for the stay of diplomatic families. Recruitment approaches have increased substantially and become particularly cynical. This is a case when anything goes – family ties, difficult straits, health problems and so on. American secret services are acting like barbarians, at the Neanderthal level. This is how they are pursuing their goals and carrying out their plans as regards our diplomats.

I will say again that we have seen many things and it is probably difficult to surprise us. However, we are still stunned by the extent of their moral and professional decline. That said, we are keeping our fighting spirit in all senses, understanding that we have our country's back. Everyone has his or her own frontline – diplomats have their frontline; people inside the country that are dealing with the economy and production have their own frontline; and soldiers in the trenches have their own frontline. We are all working for the same cause – we are fighting for our own sovereignty, independence, an opportunity to live in real freedom rather than in the suffocating liberal heat. We want to freely dispose of our natural resources; we know and are proud of our history, and we are looking forward to the future. This is what we are fighting for today. Whatever they will ascribe to us, we will overcome with dignity as we did many times in the past. The US intelligence community and other secret services are working hard, while the FBI and the Department of State are inventing new restrictions on the freedom of movement for the staff of the Russian diplomatic missions. They imposed on Russian diplomats a pale of 25 miles (a mere 41 km). A permit is necessary to move out of it. Now even these permits are denied. But all these hostile actions are merely tempering the character of Russian diplomats and making them stronger. They are prompting some people to have a more realistic view of the world. I will say it straight – for many years, we assumed that common sense should prevail and that building a common peaceful future was not just a declaration. These words remain meaningful for us, but for them this is yet another self-exposure episode. Perhaps we had to go through this as well so as not to have any illusions. Of course, we respond to many actions regarding us because in diplomacy the principle of the mirror response remains an important instrument. We also adhere to the principle of reciprocity.

Now that they are complaining about the suffering of US diplomats in

Moscow, you should know that each and every step was taken in response. Nobody in our country has ever created any deliberate obstacles. Their suffering came as a response to the absolutely insane and illegal actions by the US authorities regarding our diplomats. The Americans should blame themselves for this because every action has an equal and opposite reaction and every crime entails a punishment. Incidentally, this is a good thing to remember for those who make these recruitment approaches to Russian diplomats and conduct other provocative campaigns against the personnel of our diplomatic missions abroad.

[back to top](#)

Question: What is Moscow doing to broker peace between Baku and Yerevan through its mediation? As we know, these two countries are also holding talks based on Brussels' mediation, including with the involvement of French President Emmanuel Macron. Recently the French President said he would be putting more pressure on Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev than Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is putting on him over the issues of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia as a whole, and his resolution was beyond doubt. Baku has protested this statement and said that this type of aggressive position towards one of the parties was obstructing the negotiation process. Would you please comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: Before answering your question, I would like to add something. Today, we talked a lot about Finland and the anti-Russia policy that Helsinki has embarked on. In this connection, Finnish Ambassador to Russia Antti Helantera has been summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry today.

The ambassador was issued a strong protest over the confrontational anti-Russia policy that is being pursued by the Finnish authorities in a move to dismantle a relationship of mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and Finland that has been built over decades, to sever diverse trade, economic and inter-regional ties, and direct contacts between people, to discriminate against Russian nationals seeking to obtain entry visas on the grounds of ethnicity and to create obstacles to the normal operation of Russian missions in that country, including personnel reduction by declaring their employees *personae non grata*. A lot has been said to the Finnish Ambassador.

Now I want to get back to your question regarding French President Emmanuel Macron's statements about bringing pressure to bear on President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

It was said today that there are not many things that can surprise us.

However, President Macron sometimes succeeds in doing so, the way it happened on June 28 in Marseilles where he said that he was putting more pressure on President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev than Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and that the French leader was allegedly the only person who had taken a clear approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, being just about the only one who continued to keep it on the international community's agenda.

After hearing these statements, one gets the impression that Emmanuel Macron's modesty is only inferior to his manliness. We never stop feeling surprised at these personality traits of the French President, including the ardour with which he speaks of his personal role and value in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement process, and on other issues to boot. It is a pity that he said nothing about the practical results of his effective efforts. The process is in place but there are no results. He may not have mentioned them because nobody has ever seen the results and not only of his "mediation" in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement process but also as regards many others issues, which President Macron has undertaken to tackle on more than one occasion. We have long since parted with illusions that France can make a positive contribution to resolving the complicated Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

The French "agenda" for this regional conflict, the settlement of which requires knowledge, professionalism and thoroughly considered actions, can be clearly illustrated by the following: the work of the OSCE Minsk Group was obstructed and the group was dissolved in 2022 through, among other things, Paris' efforts; last autumn the French National Assembly and Senate approved a resolution which condemns "Azerbaijan's aggression" and demands that sanctions be introduced against that country and its officials; and a decision was initiated by Paris to deploy an EU civic mission with a controversial mandate in Armenia and without consideration for Azerbaijan's opinion.

I can say that all these showy steps that are not aimed at giving support to the parties to the conflict but rather at squeezing Russia out of the settlement process and achieving his own political and, sometimes, election goals have not only failed to have a positive impact on the negotiation process but, on the contrary, have completely discredited France's role as a mediator in normalising relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, nobody has cancelled self-promotion. In this sense, every person is free to make his or her choice but this is probably the only thing they are left with.

[back to top](#)

Question: Baku is currently hosting a ministerial meeting of the

Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement. Speaking at the meeting, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev demanded that France apologise for its colonial crimes, just as the Netherlands did recently. He also condemned the manifestations of neo-colonialism in the politics of today's France. Do you agree with this demand addressed to France? Can Russia, together with the revived Non-Aligned Movement, become a leader in the non-Western world?

Maria Zakharova: We do not just agree. We believe that if the Western community engages in revising history and decides to once again analyse historical events (as they do with respect to the Second World War, rewriting its history), then they should first of all focus on their own deeds, as a rule, criminal ones, committed as part of their colonial policy. We can see individual attempts by some countries or politicians to address, somewhat superficially, the difficult topic of colonialism and their own crimes in that era (in some cases motivated by self-promotion, in the context of election campaigns, joint “online marathons” using hashtags and memes). It looks like they’ve apologised. They wrote a hashtag, received a delegation of people who stand for rights and the efforts against racism, etc., and it seems that there’s no need for anything else. But this will not work.

The West began the struggle, declared a war on history, began its revision, and reviewed the basic agreements that had been concluded as a result of central, crucial historical events, battles, wars, tragedies. If so, then they need to go further back, to find those pages of the world history textbook that are devoted specifically to their colonial past, look there and start from there. Perhaps even earlier – from the crusades, which in many respects were the forerunner and part of this colonial logic.

As for France, we have repeatedly said that, unfortunately, interference in the internal affairs of their former colonies is part of their policies today. On the one hand, they treat all former colonies as their own protectorates. They do not allow other countries to develop full-fledged relations with these states, treating them with unconvincing “care” that no one asked for. And they are trying to maintain their financial, political, military, and humanitarian presence, not in cases where it is of interest or benefit for their former colonies, but in order to continue to exert influence without letting any other country there. Although their former colonies do have a real need for this, and they openly talk about it. We have regularly drawn attention to this fact. Many of the African states where French bases used to be located are turning to other countries that are ready to develop full-fledged, equal, and mutually beneficial relations with them. They

did not feel sincerity in Paris' attitudes or even falsity when it comes to doing business. At the same time, African countries feel pressure from Paris for their willingness to cooperate with other countries.

[back to top](#)

Question: What influence can the extension of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's term have on Russia-NATO relationship? Why did they decide to extend his term?

Maria Zakharova: The question about extending Jens Stoltenberg's term should be addressed to those who made the decision. The situation involved many intrigues. I suggest that you ask them about it.

As for potential influence on relations with Russia, there will be none, because there are no relations between Russia and NATO now.

[back to top](#)

Question: Tokyo initially limited the IAEA's activities regarding the treatment of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant's radioactive water to only one plan, and it did not give the agency an opportunity to consider any other solutions. The relevant report does not uphold the legitimacy of Japan's plan and does not relieve it of moral responsibility and obligations under international law, as a spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry has said. He added: "The ocean is not Japan's private sewer." Japan's intention to discharge radioactive water from Fukushima into the Pacific Ocean caused protests from many neighbouring countries. What is Russia's stand on Japan's irresponsible decision? Does Russia support the proposals by several countries to consider alternative options in light of the potential environmental risks?

Maria Zakharova: We have commented on this issue many times. Japan, of course, bears full responsibility for the situation around the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, including the mistakes made during its construction and operation, the activities to clear up the consequences of the accident, and all the subsequent steps. We share the opinion that Tokyo should have considered all the options for radioactive water treatment.

Japan claims that discharging water into the ocean is the safest option, and that the radionuclide content will not exceed the levels recorded in the discharged wastewater during the plant's normal operation. Regrettably, we cannot take Tokyo's word for it, considering its actions in the area of nuclear safety. The Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), which is the operator of the Fukushima plant, has been caught concealing information or publishing false

information in the area of nuclear safety. There are also complaints regarding the quality of information Japan submitted to the IAEA and the international community during the Fukushima accident.

We will be working with our Chinese partners to demand from the Japanese government due transparency, openness and truthfulness and the provision of information about its activities that may present a radioactive threat not only to the IAEA and several select countries, but also to all the interested countries in the region, first of all in the Far East. We hope that Japan will not prevent radiation monitoring, if it becomes necessary, in the areas where water will be discharged and will not limit access to collecting water samples.

[back to top](#)

Question: Will you please comment on the restriction of access to social media during the recent protests in France? French commentators have accused Russia of gloating over the unrest in their country. What can you say on this issue?

Maria Zakharova: Both questions are ridiculous, not because of the wording, but because of the essence of the matter.

I have heard them say that access to social media was not restricted. Therefore, there is nothing I can say on that score. If access was really limited, which is possible, then it is a matter of double standards. Once again, we need hard facts. We will certainly take a look at this issue, and I suggest that all of you conduct journalistic investigations into it.

As for the accusations of gloating, I would like to ask Paris about its attitude to Charlie Hebdo's reaction to all developments in France and the world. When was the last time the Elysée Palace [the president] or Quai d'Orsay [the foreign ministry] accused that weekly of anything? Have they ever done that? I don't remember. They said instead that satire and humour are part of the freedom of speech. That's what they told us. When we noted that Charlie Hebdo used tragedies in which dozens and hundreds of people died, like the terrorist attack on our plane to St Petersburg that was blown up over the Sinai, as a subject for jokes and cartoons and demanded an apology or at least a few words of sympathy, they refused to do it. They told us that is part of France's culture. We can respond in kind. Try this on for size.

President Emmanuel Macron's statements about discord in the Russian government and the weakness of the Russian armed forces, and deliberations by Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna about the "deficiencies of the Russian system" leave no room for a delicate response. We are responding in kind, even though more mildly. Our presentation of the mass protests in France, which have

already cost the national economy up to 1 billion euros and have led to the detainment of several thousand people, are a model of restraint and civility. If Paris wants more courtesy, I suggest that it should set an example, and we will be glad to follow it.

Of course, French journalists are free to make any comments about global events. Unlike our Western colleagues, we are not going to tell them how they should cover political developments in their own countries. However, we have to say that the mass protests that rocked France in the past few days could distract public attention from the main cause of the events, that is, the “deliberate” murder of a 17-year-old by the French police, as the local prosecutor’s office put it.

Therefore, we would like to point out again that we firmly condemn both the looters’ vandalism and riots and the law enforcers’ irresponsible use of illegal methods against their own citizens. We call on the local authorities to investigate the circumstances of the murder of a defenceless teenager and take measures to punish the guilty persons without delay. We would also like to note the increasing instances of disproportionate use of force and human rights violations by the French law enforcement personnel. Statements regarding this have been made by NGOs and international organisations, including the UN Human Rights Council and, recently, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which has called on Paris to address the deep issues of racism and discrimination in law enforcement. If even these UN bodies, which France never accused of bias, have taken note of the developments in France, the French authorities should think about their own problems instead of lecturing other countries.

[back to top](#)

Question: Russia often speaks about the need to reform the UN Security Council through the inclusion of Asian, African and Latin American countries. What north African countries and countries in sub-Saharan Africa could you name as strong candidates for the UN Security Council ahead of the upcoming Russia-Africa Summit?

Maria Zakharova: Russia indeed favours a more representative Security Council with new members drawn from a group of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, which can rightly aspire to a more important role in global affairs, given the emerging multipolar world order. We give prominence to India and Brazil, which are natural candidates for a permanent seat on the Security Council, if a decision is taken to expand it in both categories of membership.

On the other hand, increasing the number of already over-represented Western states will not make the Council more democratic or bring closer the emergence of a more just architecture of international relations. For this reason, the ambitions of Germany and Japan to take permanent seats seem absolutely ungrounded.

Another disadvantage is that the West has created a system of bloc foreign policy. They adopt decisions by consensus based on jointly elaborated positions. In fact, their discipline is that of the rod. But this is not the point. The point is that NATO's decisions have to be accepted and implemented identically by all members. If a decision is passed, it is implemented by all NATO members in the areas of geopolitics, military-political affairs, international relations, etc.

You can see all of this in everyday reality. So, why do we need so many countries that have one decision for all? As I see it, all NATO member countries obey its "well-orchestrated logic." They don't even vote, or have a vote in world affairs, but decisions are mandatory for everyone. The grandees like the UK and US adjust the decisions to their aims and goals, while other NATO members have no right to tune the decisions to their interests even in the smallest degree, let alone vote for them. What is decided by the upper crust is handed down in the ready-made form and everyone's duty is to snap to attention and deliver. Does it make any sense to expand their presence, if they hold identical views on what is going on? You can see how they vote. Identically! The best they can do (if this does not sway decision-making to either side) is to abstain from voting, the aim being just to show some diversity and not look grotesque in the Security Council. On all other matters, they have an identical pre-arranged decision (not views), one for all. Therefore, this must also be taken into consideration.

As far as Africa is concerned, we consistently stress the need to repair the historical injustice done to this continent within the parameters defined by the Africans themselves. This means that the African Union should decide on nominating candidates for Security Council seats taking into consideration the opinions of all African countries.

Our common goal is to elaborate a pattern of transformations that would suit the overwhelming majority of countries and ideally be approved by consensus by all member states. Russia would be ready to support this model at the New York-based Intergovernmental Negotiations on UN Security Council Reform.

[back to top](#)

Question: The US Embassy in Moscow reported Monday night that Ambassador Lynne Tracy had visited WSJ reporter Evan Gershkovich for

the first time since April. She also expressed hope that Russian authorities would allow consular officials to meet with him on a regular basis. Is Russia prepared to guarantee regular access, and why was it decided to provide consular access following several refusals?

Maria Zakharova: Let us recall the document and the timeline. Under the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, consular officials can exercise their right to visit a citizen (who has been arrested or taken into custody) of the state they represent in line with the laws and regulations of the receiving country. We are guided by precisely this approach.

Naturally, when we address such issues, we heed the principles of reciprocity and various bilateral circumstances. We have repeatedly noted how the United States treats detainees, and how it takes them into custody. The United States simply abducted many people all over the world. US operatives attacked them, illegally detained them, invented various stories, arrested people while simulating various incidents, etc. Therefore, we analyse many factors when we make such decisions. As you know, the United States took unfriendly steps with regard to Russian media outlets and declined to issue visas for journalists covering the activities of Russia, which presided in the UN Security Council this past April. Consequently, we decided that US diplomats would visit Evan Gershkovich at a later date. This means that a person who has been detained can be visited when all formalities have been fulfilled, and not at a time of US Embassy's choosing. US diplomacy is used to kicking doors open in other countries; however, this diplomatic style does not work in Russia. The sooner they understand this, the better. They should keep the reciprocity principle in mind.

I would like to note that the US Ambassador and consular officials will continue to visit Evan Gershkovich in line with the schedule of visits and at the discretion of the Russian side.

[back to top](#)

Question: Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said that Russia was planning to make July 18 the last day of the Black Sea Grain Deal. A RIA Novosti source told the agency that the UN and Russia were ready to hold talks on the grain deal in the near future. The talks may take place in Geneva. Can you confirm the fact of these talks? What have the sides discussed so far and what are they planning to discuss at the talks? Is it possible to say that the very fact of continued talks is grounds for optimism regarding the extension of the grain deal?

Maria Zakharova: There is no optimism here.

Regarding contacts in Geneva, we posted a comment on June 10, 2023, noting that, on June 9, 2023, Geneva had hosted another round of consultations involving Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin, the concerned Russian agencies and companies, as well as a UN delegation headed by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan. After that, we repeatedly provided our assessments during our contacts with our foreign partners. We have posted the relevant reports and materials on our website stating that the deal has become purely commercial and lacks any humanitarian content.

Moreover, the Ukrainian side is behaving like a real terrorist regime. In particular, it has blown up an ammonia pipeline. In effect, they are destroying the civilian infrastructure that was part of this deal. No one has condemned this. The main parameters of the deal are not working and have failed. Consequently, there is no reason to be optimistic.

[back to top](#)

Question: The blockade of Artsakh has continued for almost seven months. The instances of ceasefire violations by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh have become more frequent in the past weeks. Media outlets linked to the Azerbaijani government have been preparing the public for a military operation against Artsakh (and possibly against Armenia). How will Russian peacekeepers respond to an operation of this kind? Will they ensure that the people and territory of Artsakh are protected?

Maria Zakharova: We are extremely concerned about the increased ceasefire violations in Nagorno-Karabakh and the continuing blockade of the Lachin corridor. It is reported that the humanitarian situation in the region is deteriorating. Unfortunately, it seems to be the case that, due to suspended supplies, the population of Karabakh may be left without stocks of food, essentials or medications. This runs counter to the trilateral agreements between the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, including the statement of November 9, 2020.

We encourage Baku and Yerevan to resolve all issues exclusively by political and diplomatic means. We also call for Azerbaijan to unblock the Lachin corridor and allow unobstructed movement of people, vehicles and cargo for civilian purposes.

As concerns Russian peacekeepers, they will act according to the developments on the ground and their actions will be in line with the agreements

reached between the three parties.

[back to top](#)

Question: Azerbaijan is demanding that the Artsakh Defence Army and other security services in the republic be disarmed, although this demand is not included in the statement of November 9, 2020. Baku has also been in grave violation of the trilateral statement. What is Moscow's approach to this matter? And what does Russia intend to do to get Artsakh unblocked and to restore the full-fledged effect of the November 9 statement, aside from publicly and non-publicly addressing Azerbaijan? I am asking because you criticised Emmanuel Macron for his words about Baku being under pressure, but we can see that Baku has been ignoring the calls.

Maria Zakharova: Do you see Baku ignoring Macron?

Question: No. Even calls from Moscow. You constantly say that Russia demands and calls on them.

Maria Zakharova: My response on Macron's statements was exhaustive. Had there been fewer statements from him, many problems would not have occurred – and there would not have been statements from those who claim to be intermediaries when they are not. We can see well through this sort of statements by the President of France. I believe you do, too.

We also realise and publicly speak about the fact that they are not immersed in this issue deep enough to be real intermediaries. They are not qualified to resolve this particular issue, this very complicated, overriding problem.

As for us, we support contacts with Azerbaijan and Armenia in order to de-escalate the situation in the region. These contacts continue at the political level and through the Russian peacekeeping corps. A lot depends on the parties themselves, their political will and readiness to meet each other halfway. We take all necessary efforts on our part.

[back to top](#)

Question: President of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunyan said the other day that Armenia's early surrender of Berdzor, Sus and Aghavno in the Lachin corridor in August 2022, which ran contrary to the trilateral statement of November 9, had been proposed by Russian peacekeepers, to avoid military clashes with Azerbaijan. Is that true? Why has Russia been trying to resolve all disputes and conflicts with concessions on Armenia's part while also failing to get Baku to fulfil the November 9

trilateral statement?

Maria Zakharova: We are not familiar with the statements you mentioned. We are also not familiar with the posts you mentioned so I am not going to comment. I can tell you about changing the Lachin corridor route: it was changed upon agreement between the three parties, as stipulated by the statement of November 9, 2020.

I believe when it comes to this particular issue, it is simply unfair to speak about a lack of coordination in the actions or about actions of any of the three countries without considering the opinion of any of the three.

[back to top](#)

Question: Can you please comment on yet another three-day round of talks that was held in the United States between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia on the peace treaty? Is it possible that the next round of talks could be mediated by the Russian Foreign Minister?

Maria Zakharova: We welcome the progress achieved in the talks on developing a peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia, just as we welcome any positive steps in this direction. Russia will continue to take efforts to converge the parties' approaches. Our most immediate plan is to arrange a visit to the region by the Foreign Minister's Special Representative for normalising the relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia Igor Khovayev. If we hear about the possibility of a trilateral meeting, we will certainly let you know.

[back to top](#)

Question: It has already been mentioned today that a Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement Coordinating Bureau is taking place in Baku. How can the Russian Foreign Ministry comment on Azerbaijan's contribution to the actualisation of the Non-Aligned Movement and its values, especially against the backdrop of today's geopolitical situation?

Maria Zakharova: We highly value Baku's activities as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement. Throughout its term, Baku has shown a high level of professionalism, creativity and efficiency.

This was confirmed by the Non-Aligned Movement efficiency in the COVID-19 response and relief efforts. In particular, in 2021, Baku and the Non-Aligned Movement sponsored a draft resolution at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly on ensuring equal access to coronavirus vaccines. As a follow-up to this initiative, the capital of Azerbaijan hosted a summit of the

Non-Aligned Movement Contact Group on post-COVID-19 recovery in March 2023. It was attended by over 70 delegations.

Also, the Republic of Azerbaijan co-hosted the 60th Anniversary High-Level Commemorative Non-Aligned Meeting in October 2021 held in Belgrade. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attended the event, which highlighted a common recognition that there is no alternative to the principles of equality and mutual respect in international communication, including in the interests of effectively resolving the challenges of our time, with the central coordinating role of the UN.

This message is especially important given that the West, on the contrary, is showing increasing determination to subjugate developing countries, both politically and economically. The West is trying to push for decisions in an illegitimate, non-transparent and undemocratic way, promoting the “rules-based international order” concept and seeing itself as being exceptional.

As an observer with the Non-Aligned Movement, a status granted to Russia in July 2021 during the Azerbaijani chairmanship, our country plans to encourage the members to pursue an independent foreign policy, to support their measures to counter the illegal sanctions policy, and to expand the scope of joint mutually beneficial initiatives at the UN. These are the goals that guide the Russian delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin at the regular ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Baku on July 5-6.

[back to top](#)

Question: According to recent reports, the Baku Initiative Group against French Colonialism was established as part of the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Baku. Given that the subject of interference in the internal affairs of the South Caucasus was touched upon today, we cannot fail to note that French politicians periodically travel to the Armenian-Azerbaijani border to observe the situation together with the EU monitoring mission, in which France is actively involved. Is this the same scheme for extending their colonial policy to the South Caucasus?

Maria Zakharova: No. I think it’s mostly just campaigning.

[back to top](#)

Question: On July 3, the Foreign Ministry website published your comment on the United States rejoining UNESCO. You mentioned the risks of the United States destabilising UNESCO and the risk of “artificial Ukrainisation. What manifestations of “artificial Ukrainisation” or destructive activity do you expect?

Maria Zakharova: I will explain what artificial Ukrainisation is. The situation in Ukraine is naturally in the focus at all discussion platforms, given its multi-aspect nature and considering that it is just one of the hybrid war manifestations. It is the main issue drawing the entire international community's attention. When we talk about "artificial Ukrainisation," we are trying to say that various international mechanisms, international platforms, any tools created to address very specific and meaningful problems are being skillfully maneuvered towards the Ukraine agenda. Only, it is not the part where they would work to find a way out of the crisis; the idea is to support what the West calls the "narrative," the ideology of total support for the Kiev regime, and impose the Western vision of the situation on everyone else. For example, amid a healthcare discussion at one international platform, a representative of the Western world, the US, Britain, or France, suddenly chimes in with some remark on Ukraine, completely out of the healthcare context or what is happening there, just a political addition. When I was a child, we had this [Soviet] practice called "bundling" – when goods were in short supply, you could only buy something valuable "bundled" with something else that no one wanted, a package deal. You want to buy a good book, you take it in a bundle with a dull one. You wanted to buy a product that was generally in short supply, and you had an unwanted item imposed on you because they're a package deal, and not free of charge of course – you had to buy it. It is the same here. The West imposes the Ukraine narrative in a "bundle" with issues the international community is trying to address, as a political addition. This is unacceptable. It kills all the work.

Regarding Washington's approach to the UNESCO situation. This is another prime example of confrontational thinking. Just think about it, it's the same story again. We were just talking about "forced Ukrainisation," and here they are, imposing Sinophobia and trying to use established mechanisms against someone. How can this be allowed? A country should join an organisation because it wants to be a member, with some constructive intentions, with aspirations to build, create, add value, and achieve a positive result. But the United States, on the contrary, professes the "logic of destruction," penetrating any platform where they can push back. In this case, they are going to push back against China.

I would like to emphasise that such plans are discordant with the ideals and principles of UNESCO. The organisation was established "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are

affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion.” This is what the Constitution of UNESCO says. Now the United States comes and says they have decided to play against China and for that, they urgently need to be a member, even despite the huge debt of \$600 million. They might ask Congress to pay its overdue fees, but this is not certain. In my book, this is insanity.

We do not rule out that, in addition to the Sinophobia inherent in American diplomacy, anti-Russia considerations have also emerged among the main factors in the country’s sudden change of mind. In this regard, we expect another surge in the “Ukrainisation” of the agenda at UNESCO’s conventional, programmatic and governing bodies, including its Executive Board. I do not rule out anything in the foreseeable future. We will see all sorts of hocus pocus on this track.

As for Russia, we adhere to our traditionally constructive and depoliticised approach in the policy we are pursuing at UNESCO, aimed at building truly multilateral, inclusive and professional cooperation on a wide range of issues in education, science, culture, sports, communication and information. Unlike the Anglo-Saxons, acting against someone is not what we do and not in the traditions of Russian multilateral diplomacy.

[back to top](#)

Question: Can you comment please on the decision of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to recognise the Wagner Group as a terrorist organisation? Can this change relations between Russia and OSCE PA? How will Russia respond?

Maria Zakharova: First of all, I would like to remind everybody that the Russian delegation did not attend the meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly because it was held in Vancouver, Canada, whose authorities refused to guarantee the safety of our delegates. This fact is important for assessing the OSCE PA document. We have the same regard for resolutions like this as for the declarations of NATO, EU or Council of Europe assemblies. If not for your question, I would not have commented on that decision at all, not only because our delegation did not attend that meeting, but because statements by the OSCE PA carry no legal weight and are often disregarded even by the initiators of such resolutions.

The Vancouver meeting only reflected the opinion of a small group of delegates from several European and North American countries. The most important element is they expressed an opinion on an issue they are not competent to deal with. There are other bodies that have the competence to

designate an organisation as terrorist, and the OSCE PA is not one of them. On the other hand, that decision has delivered a blow to the OSCE's prestige. The organisation is fighting a deep crisis created by its Western core. That decision is the latest evidence of its systemic crisis.

[back to top](#)

Question: Several days ago, the Amsterdam branch of the St Petersburg Hermitage, which the then President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev and the Queen of the Netherlands opened, announced a rebranding after cutting ties with Russia. Can you comment on that decision, please?

Maria Zakharova: This is taking things too far. There are many words in Western languages that denote the achievements of our scientists, like sputnik. What will they do? Rename them? This is nonsense, a lack of education, a crisis of their own culture, concern for political factors and a result of the many campaigns they like to wage without understanding their true reasons. Everything is being turned into information background, hype and oversimplification.

[back to top](#)

Question: Will you comment please on statements by experts who think that the current situation is more dangerous than the Cuban missile crisis? What else can the Russian Foreign Ministry do to save the world from a nuclear disaster?

Maria Zakharova: I have heard many pro and contra views regarding the two situations. I believe this is a subject for experts, historians and, possibly, witnesses of those events. Our task is to focus on preventing the worst scenario. Regrettably, the worst scenario is being promoted by the West, with its uncontrollable arms supplies and funding of a regime that has mutated from Nazism into terrorism. But it has retained its neo-Nazi essence, considering the threats to nuclear facilities created by the Kiev regime. Taken together, this points to the development of an extremely dangerous scenario in the West. It is dangerous not only for Russia but for the world as a whole.

We talked about the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant today. It has not been fully destroyed and has not been attacked, but the problems created during the accident there are still with us. There is no agreement even on the discharge of the treated water from its storage units, because there are suspicions that must be dispelled by Tokyo based on professional assessment. We can still feel the effects of that accident, even though it was not as destructive as previous

accidents at nuclear facilities.

The current situation is more than playing with fire. It is playing with fire and fuel. You correctly stated that everything possible must be done to avoid a disaster. Our ministry is doing its utmost to prevent the realisation of this scenario.

[back to top](#)

Question: The Western media do not often write or say about Libya. I would like to ask about the long-suffering African continent. What is the real situation there, 12 years after President Muammar Gaddafi was killed and NATO plunged Libya, one of the most prosperous countries in Africa, back into the dark ages?

Maria Zakharova: We talked about Libya today. We have productive long-standing ties with that country, which is living through a very difficult time. We hope the Libyans will weather the current crisis. We have been helping and will continue to help them do this. We have recently reopened our embassy there. On June 26, the new Russian Ambassador to Libya, Aydar Aganin, presented his credentials to the Libyan authorities and was received at the top level. During that meeting, the Libyan leaders demonstrated their resolve for the all-round development of bilateral relations.

[back to top](#)

Question: The Foreign Ministry has expressed support for the UN Charter and has spoken against it being replaced by the so-called rules-based order. At the same time, under para. 4, Article 15 of the Russian Constitution, the universally recognised principles and norms of international law constitute an integral part of our legal system and serve as guidelines. What can you say about this?

Maria Zakharova: Regarding the place of the internationally recognised principles and provisions of international law in the Russian legal system, our country's Constitution focuses on international law, of which the UN Charter is the core. The new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation relies on this premise as well. Under this document, strengthening the legal foundations of international relations is among our state's national interests and a priority area of Russia's foreign policy.

The universal and internationally recognised nature of international law and its effectiveness in regulating relations between states is the key factor underlying its high standing. The provisions of international law are based on the sovereign will of nation states.

In contrast, in their efforts to promote the concept of their rules-based order, the Western countries do not intend to involve the whole world in the decision-making process. There is no such thing as a set of rules. No one has ever drafted them by consensus or by vote. It is an absolutely far-fetched concept made up by the United States and the Anglo-Saxons to cover up their attempted domination based on their exceptionalism that they themselves have declared. This is why the concept of a rules-based world order is only supported by a global minority. This kind of a selective approach (where the West decides which rules it will comply with and which it will not, which international law it considers valid and which it believes is not relevant any longer) leads to double standards and reveals the very neocolonial issues that stem from its conceit- and exceptionalism-based approach in developing rules of behaviour and evaluating compliance by other players. This erodes the legal foundations of international relations and UN centrality in global affairs, and creates a risk of the international community sliding into legal chaos, lawlessness and lack of regulation. That is why we stand for consolidating the efforts of the countries that are in favour of restoring universal respect for international law and strengthening its role as the basis of international relations. A broad circle of partners support our position.

[back to top](#)

Question: Speaking at the Eastern Economic Forum, President Putin said that after February 24, 2022 “As to our gains, I can say that primarily we have strengthened our sovereignty, which is the inevitable result of what is happening now.” How would you comment on this statement?

Maria Zakharova: I don't think there is any need to comment on the President's statement, because it was perfectly clear. I can let you know some of our conceptual approaches that underlie this position. Strengthening the sovereignty of Russia as a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power encompasses several areas, including combat readiness of the Armed Forces and the political will of the country's leadership to pursue an independent domestic and international policy. Next comes the sufficient economic, demographic, raw material, scientific and education potential, which is helping maintain socioeconomic stability and growth amid external pressure. And, of course, there is our internationally significant original culture. Our country has all of that, and it keeps expanding. This is the goal of our progressive development.

Ensuring the sovereignty of the Russian Federation is among the strategic goals of our foreign policy, especially now that we are dealing with illegal anti-

Russia sanctions and the hybrid war unleashed by the West. These developments have shown, among other things, the risk of being dependent in matters of advanced technology, the economy, and finance. The West has shown its inability to follow through on its commitments. At the same time, the crisis gave a powerful boost to efforts to substitute imports and to create new supply and production chains that are not subject to international political fluctuations, and reorientation to the markets that constitute an alternative to Western markets. Given the enormous external pressure, we are navigating this phase fairly well.

Notably, the efforts to strengthen Russian sovereignty go hand in hand with the process of forming a more just and stable multipolar international order. Russia is acting as a centre of global development and carrying out a historically unique mission of promoting the global balance of power and building a fairer international system, as well as ensuring a proper environment for peaceful and progressive development of humankind based on a unifying and constructive agenda. Importantly, we are not alone. We can and we will stand up for ourselves. We are not only being heard, but we are supported as well. Our like-minded partners who constitute the overwhelming global majority stand with us. It is important to be aware of the fact that the majority is on our side. Not everyone can raise their voice, but they clearly share our fundamental approaches.

[back to top](#)



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