



28.09.2023 09:10

№ 1899-28-09-2023

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with TASS News Agency, Moscow, September 28, 2023

Question: My first question is certainly about Ukraine. It is already clear that Ukraine's "counter-offensive" has failed. The Western press increasingly mentions the likelihood of talks as early as this autumn. Do any conditions exist for this?

Sergey Lavrov: We do not see any. President Vladimir Putin, your humble servant, and Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov have commented on this extensively. When starting to circulate provocative rumours like this, the West is obviously testing us for willingness to accept its terms, and they are not particularly subtle about it. They want to take a break for a few months without signing any agreement except a temporary ceasefire in order to gain time and pump more weapons into Ukraine in addition to what has already been sent and is systematically being destroyed by the Russian armed forces. Their logic is the same as it was with the Minsk agreements.

They have confessed after all that no one – Germany, France, let alone Ukraine – intended to implement the Minsk agreements. In 2022, this was stated in plain language by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Former French President Francois Hollande, and former Ukrainian President Petr Poroshenko. They said the agreements were needed to gain time to replenish the Ukrainian regime's military arsenals against the Russian Federation. Had they implemented the Minsk agreements, Ukraine's territorial integrity would have been guaranteed, because this is what the agreements were all about. Territorial integrity would have been restored through the granting of special status to Donbass – the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic. President Vladimir Putin's co-authors with regard to the Minsk agreements openly admitted that they had deceived him. They had no intention of implementing the agreements, and this is why they are to blame for destroying Ukraine's territorial integrity, which they are so solicitous about today.

We see through their plans. We were ready for a settlement not only

during the effort to draft the Minsk agreements but also in April 2022, when Ukraine proposed ceasing hostilities and settling the crisis based on providing reciprocal, reliable security guarantees. But this proposal was recalled at the insistence of Washington and London. Today, everyone knows this very well. Therefore, they cannot reproach us for lack of good will. President Putin constantly says as much. In April 2022, when we were ready to sign the agreements, the Ukrainians assured us that they would also put their signatures to them. As a gesture of good will, we suspended combat operations and even redeployed some of our forces. Those who broke off the agreement seized this opportunity.

President Putin has mentioned this as well. We are ready for talks and will consider any realistic proposal. But it is out of the question to impose a ceasefire during talks, because they already used this trick to deceive us once.

As for a likely ending to all of this, we do not see a single meaningful proposal from the West. There have been visits from an African delegation that advocated a peaceful settlement. China, Brazil, and a number of other countries, including Arab League countries, have offered their own proposals based on the sincere desire to help us achieve an agreement, with consideration for the root causes of the crisis, to remove these causes and guarantee security for all parties on equal terms.

Today, the West is hinting at the possibility of talks, while peremptorily claiming for all to hear that “Zelensky’s peace formula” is the only basis for a negotiated solution. But this is unrealistic, even for discussion, being an ultimatum, pure and simple. No one in his right mind would promote this ultimatum as a basis for negotiation with no alternative. Unless he wants to break off or prevent talks. This is the situation we have.

Our position remains the same: we are ready to come to terms, taking into account the realities on the ground, and based on our well-known position. It is also imperative to take into account our security interests and prevent the creation of a hostile Nazi regime on our borders, one that has openly declared that its goal is to eradicate all things Russian in Crimea and Novorossia, regions that Russians have developed, improved and settled for centuries. This is the crux of the matter. We see no meaningful shift from the West. The Kiev regime continues behaving as if it were the one to call the tune, while the West keeps saying in chorus: “Not a single word about Ukraine without Ukraine” and “President Zelensky will lay down the terms for talks.”

So, it has come full circle. This is an absolute dead end. Either this position reflects the absence of common sense in the heads of those who

orchestrate this war against Russia, or their irreparable confidence that they will “defeat” Russia. Neither is a credit to the West, Western diplomacy or Western thinkers.

Question: I'd like to ask a question about a pressing issue: Armenia. Do you think Armenia may lose Russia?

Sergey Lavrov: There are quite a few people there who are willing to lose Russia and make new friends. Historically, geographically, and geopolitically, it is not possible to lose Russia in the sense of completely disregarding its interests in the South Caucasus. However, some leaders in Yerevan are expressing such hopes openly.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan mentioned something along those lines in his recent statement when he emphasised the need to compensate for the “failed” alliances upon which Armenia had relied for its security and to expand the circle of partners who will ensure that security.

If they are relying on the United States (as indicated by many representatives of the Armenian leadership), perhaps it would make sense to closely examine recent history to see how the United States handled those it sought to bring under its wing in an effort to advance its geopolitical interests in outlying corners of the world. The fate of all those individuals is far from enviable.

Question: I have a question about Georgia. Direct air travel has been reinstated recently between our countries. Additionally, an executive order on visa-free travel for Georgian citizens has been signed. Do you see the possibility of reestablishing diplomatic relations any time soon?

Sergey Lavrov: It was not us who severed diplomatic relations. This move was initiated by Mikhail Saakashvili, who, with the support of the United States, took actions against his own citizens and Ossetians (whom he considered his citizens), as well as peacekeepers. When he received a fitting response, he attempted to use anti-Russian actions in order to compensate for his complete political and military failure.

We have never had a negative attitude toward the Georgian people. We genuinely love them, just like we love all the South Caucasus nations. Georgians have a special place in the history of Russia, the Soviet Union, and our art, culture, and science.

We saw that the current government in Tbilisi is interested in normalising relations, at least in the interests of ordinary citizens. People want to communicate with each other, visit with each other, travel to both countries as

tourists, and engage in business that traditionally linked our economic systems.

We have reached an agreement with the Garibashvili government to resume air service and lifted visa requirements for Georgian citizens. Visa-free travel for Russians has been in place for quite some time now. Many of our citizens have used it. The introduction of visa-free travel on a reciprocal basis for Georgian nationals, along with the reestablishment of air service, makes it much easier and more convenient to maintain ties. There are more flights, and the geography of direct flights is expanding as well. Trade is on the rise. Many traditional Georgian export items, such as wine, Borjomi mineral water, and more, are popular with Russian consumers.

Question: President Putin has expressed Russia's readiness to host the BRICS Games in the summer of 2024. Is Russia willing to host athletes only from BRICS countries (as we know, BRICS is expanding), or also from the countries that are planning to join the group? Can these games potentially become an alternative to the Olympics?

Sergey Lavrov: No, just like BRICS as a group of countries is growing stronger and expanding (and will continue to do so) not against anyone but exclusively in the interests of its member states, similarly, the BRICS sports games are designed not to challenge the Olympic movement but to complement it.

Regrettably, due to the position adopted by the IOC President Thomas Bach, this movement is turning into a Western political tool, which is evident. It is much like the World Anti-Doping Agency turned into such a tool and has for years tried to undermine competing athletes from our country on various international platforms grossly abusing anti-doping rules and repeatedly bringing groundless accusations against our great athletes. In the same vein, the International Olympic Committee is currently taking advantage of the situation around Ukraine to grossly violate the Olympic Charter. While barring the majority of our athletes from competitions, they make exceptions for certain sports and age groups in a neutral status, without a flag or anthem, and present it as a remarkable positive step.

Mr Bach has stated multiple times that the Olympic Charter must be respected. But not to this extent, though. His statements come down to the fact that the IOC cannot ignore the developments in Ukraine. For many years, it turned a blind eye to things the West was doing thousands of miles away from its borders and let it slide. For years, Russia warned the international community that NATO was leading the world toward a major war, openly creating military threats on Russia's borders and emboldening a regime trained by Washington to

contain Russia and to attack our country. Back then, the International Olympic Committee decided to adopt an inexplicably principled stance that was at odds with its obligations under the Olympic Charter.

Moreover, just recently, Mr Bach talked about the importance of avoiding politicisation of the Olympic Charter. Under this guise, he said the IOC would actively encourage the inclusion of transgender athletes in the Olympic Games. So, they don't see any politics in that? May God be their judge.

Returning to the BRICS Games, they are scheduled to be held in Kazan in June 2024. These competitions are open to athletes from all countries, even unfriendly countries. We don't have unfriendly athletes, citizens, or even countries. There are unfriendly governments that have temporarily come to power in some countries whose people have always had good and friendly relations with us. The games will be open to all athletes in full accordance with the Olympic Charter principles. Let the International Olympic Committee use this information to draw conclusions.



https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1906650/?lang=en