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

1. **Upcoming talks between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Deputy Prime Minister - Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tleuberdi**
2. **Upcoming talks between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Foreign Minister of the State of Eritrea Osman Saleh**
3. **Update on Ukraine**
4. **Evacuation of Bulgarian sailors from Mariupol**
5. **New Zealand's military aid to Ukraine**
6. **UK is funding anti-Russia propaganda and hired guns**
7. **Decision by a UK court to extradite Julian Assange to the United States**
8. **Finnish media's distorted presentation of events in Ukraine**
9. **Ordinary Nazism exhibition**
10. **Annual Human Rights Report released by the US Department of State**
11. **Launch of For Compatriots' Rights international humanitarian project**
12. **The anniversary of ending the Red Army's East Prussian strategic offensive operation**
13. **The Berlin strategic offensive operation**

Answers to media questions:

1. **The futility of anti-Russia sanctions**
2. **Russia's exclusion from the Bologna Process**
3. **Resolving humanitarian issues in Ukraine**
4. **9th anniversary of the Belgrade-Pristina agreement**
5. **Accusations against Russian diplomats of spreading misinformation on social media**

6. **Loss of trust in the Ukrainian negotiators**
7. **Statements by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson**
8. **Ukraine update**
9. **Russia-Kazakhstan cooperation against the backdrop of sanctions**
10. **US biological laboratories in the South Caucasus**
11. **Appointment of Foreign Ministry's special representative for promoting normalisation in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations**
12. **Russia-US communication channels**
13. **New world order**
14. **Future of Russia-US relations**
15. **Possibility of having anti-Russia sanctions lifted**
16. **St George's Ribbon campaign abroad**

Upcoming talks between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Deputy Prime Minister - Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tleuberdi

On April 22, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tleuberdi who will be in Moscow on a working visit.

The ministers will discuss pressing bilateral political, trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian matters and explore the prospects for expanding the legal framework underlying our strategic partnership and alliance. They will focus particularly on interaction within integration associations, including the CSTO, the EAEU, the CIS, the SCO, as well as the five Caspian coastal states, which will meet for a summit in Turkmenistan this year.

The ministers will compare notes regarding existing regional and global security risks and exchange views on pressing international issues, including the situation in Ukraine.

A Plan for Ceremonial Events will be signed in the context of the 30th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan coming this autumn.

Sergey Lavrov and Mukhtar Tleuberdi will visit an exhibition of archival materials dedicated to the above seminal event, which was put together by the Foreign Ministry's Department of History and Records.

[back to top](#)

Upcoming talks between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Foreign Minister of the State of Eritrea Osman Saleh

On April 27, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with Foreign Minister of the State of Eritrea Osman Saleh during his working visit to Moscow.

The ministers will discuss key issues of Russian-Eritrean relations including political, trade, economic and investment, as well as education and humanitarian cooperation. They will focus on promoting mutually beneficial bilateral economic ties.

It is also planned to review pressing items on the global and regional agendas, ways to normalise the situation in Africa's hot spots and the situation in the Horn of Africa region.

[back to top](#)

Update on Ukraine

Russia continues its special military operation to protect the population of the DPR and the LPR, demilitarize and denazify Ukraine. The national leaders regularly comment on the situation.

The Russian Armed Forces are very careful, doing all they can to avoid civilian victims. They view only military installations and places that Ukrainian armed units (extremists) have turned into strongholds as targets, as well as logistics centres through which Western weapons arrive in Ukraine.

Contrary to the statements that combat operations in Ukraine must end as soon as possible, the NATO countries are doing all they can to drag out the active phase of the operation. They are building up supplies of hardware, weapons and ammunition and are urging the Kiev regime to continue the aggression against the DPR and the LPR.

They are encouraging neo-Nazis to commit more war crimes. On April 13, 2022, the United States announced a new package of military aid worth \$800 million. Kiev will receive dozens of howitzers, thousands of artillery shells, hundreds of armed personnel carriers and even Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters. The latter will be used to fire at peaceful cities in the DPR and the LPR and probably, as some Ukrainian figures have said, Russian territory as well. Interestingly, the Pentagon is now sending helicopters to Ukraine, helicopters it had previously ordered for the army of Afghanistan – a country that the Americans finally dumped. Will Ukraine repeat the fate of Afghanistan? The helicopters did. American politicians are true to their words in this respect. The art of betraying their closest allies is in their political blood.

The collective West is supporting Ukrainian nationalists not only with weapons but also with personnel – mercenaries and extremists brought in from different parts of the world. Ukrainian embassies are making their own contribution to the formation of an international neo-Nazi legion. In violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, they are recruiting mercenaries from all over the world. Just as simple as that. A number of countries are emphatically opposing their efforts but others cannot afford this because they are under pressure from Washington. US political forces fully support this mission, including the recruitment of mercenary battalions

Ukraine has turned into a place that has accumulated mercenaries of all stripes with combat experience in the world's hot spots. They definitely have not been providing humanitarian aid in these hot spots. They have not saved people but brutally murdered them, tortured them, took hostages, and demanded ransoms. They committed many terrible acts. Now Ukraine has become a magnet for them. The Kiev regime has attracted over 6,800 mercenaries from 63 states to Ukraine since the start of the special military operation. This is based on open data alone. We are not talking about Ukraine's actions before this and whether it has any other resources. Citizens of Poland, the US, Canada, Romania, the UK and Georgia are the majority of mercenaries in Ukrainian nationalist groups.

The number of foreign militants is on the decline due to the Russian Armed Forces' combat operations. They have already killed over a thousand mercenaries. Another thousand or so refused to fight and returned to the places of their former extremist deployment. We advise the remaining 4,800 foreigners to follow the example of their fellows in misery and return to their own countries. According to international humanitarian law, foreign mercenaries do not have the status of "combatants" and cannot hope for relevant legal defence. Instead of easy money, they will at best bear criminal responsibility and serve long prison terms. However, life sometimes makes its own sad adjustments.

The Western countries' role in training the Ukrainian military, or rather militants from the Azov nationalist group, is quite notable. The Russian Foreign Ministry has mentioned this before, more than once, and the media from different countries have started covering it as well, lately. Russian journalists have been covering this and reporting on it from southeastern Ukraine for many years now. Finally, this "news" has reached the major Western media outlets. One would be hard pressed to suspect these media of sympathy for Russia. The other day, Radio Canada released evidence that Ottawa used its military programme, Unifier, in Ukraine to train Nazi gunmen and radicals, including from Azov units. We have been talking about this for a long time now, not just in February, but for eight long years. Now, eight years later, this story has finally reached the Canadian radio station. Where were you before?

Many cadets who went through NATO-standard training at a training centre in the town of Zolochiv, Lvov region, openly used Nazi symbols on their sleeve patches, but the Canadian officials turned a blind eye to it as well as many other developments in Ukraine, including Kiev's eight-year aggression against civilians in Donbass. Everyone, including politicians, the public and the media turned a blind eye to it.

Now the "graduates" of these Western programmes, along with other militants from nationalist groups, are holding civilians hostage and using them as human shields. There are many foreign nationals among the hostages. The governments of these countries asked us to help them free their citizens. We can do that, but the people who are holding them hostage are the ones that have undergone training in NATO countries. These cadets (who received training in NATO countries or under the tutelage of NATO instructors) are torturing people whom they only suspect of some kind of involvement or friendly attitude towards Russia. Things that are terrible to see in the 21st century are happening now.

The scope of atrocities committed by these fighters in Ukraine has yet to be determined by the DPR and the LPR. However, this major effort is already underway. Russia's Investigative Committee has partnered up with the International Public Tribunal for Ukraine represented by experts from over 20 countries to gather information about the Kiev regime's criminal actions. Interagency working groups have begun a systematic search for mass burial sites and missing persons in the Donbass republics. They are working to create a single database of such persons and to collect evidence of crimes committed by the Ukrainian armed units. The materials will be scrutinised, attached to criminal cases and presented to the court. Every single Ukrainian nationalist involved in crimes against civilians and Russian service personnel will be held accountable.

Humanitarian aid for residents of Ukraine, in the DPR and the LPR, is an equally important effort for specialised Russian agencies. According to the WHO, about 18 million civilians have been affected by the hostilities in these countries. Over 15,500 tonnes of Russian humanitarian cargo has been delivered to these territories since the beginning of the special military operation. More than 22,000 tonnes are waiting to be delivered. The Russian Armed Forces are creating humanitarian corridors on a daily basis in order to remove civilians from harm's way. Almost 900,000 people have left for our country, including 158,000 children. A sea corridor is now open so that foreign ships blocked in the ports of Ukraine can leave. However, the Kiev regime continues to deny civilians the opportunity to evacuate to Russia and to keep 76 foreign ships from 18 countries and their crews from leaving.

Russian-Ukrainian talks to resolve the situation in Ukraine, to ensure a neutral, non-aligned and non-nuclear status continue. The agenda focuses on demilitarisation and denazification, and restoration of the official status of the Russian language, recognition of modern territorial realities, including Crimea as part of Russia and independence of the DNR and LNR. The Ukrainian negotiators are trying to delay the negotiating process by refusing to take a constructive approach to priority issues and promptly respond to Russia's materials and proposals. If the Kiev regime is genuinely committed to its publicly expressed and confirmed commitment to negotiate, it must begin to look for realistic options for reaching an agreement.

[back to top](#)

Evacuation of Bulgarian sailors from Mariupol

On April 13, 2022, the DPR People's Militia and the Russian Armed Forces evacuated 15 crewmembers from the Bulgarian ship Tzarevna, which was blocked in the port of Mariupol. The sailors – 14 citizens of Bulgaria and one Ukrainian were accompanied to Donetsk where they received assistance from the local authorities. They received hotel accommodations and food. Then they were taken to the Russian Federation for a subsequent flight home.

Russia promptly issued a permit for a special Bulgarian humanitarian flight on the Sofia-Sochi-Varna route on April 18, 2022, to take the sailors home as soon as possible.

We are happy about the ending of this alarming case.

Evacuation of foreign citizens from the zone of hostilities has been a priority since the very start of the Russian special operation to protect Donbass civilians. We will continue doing all we can to resolve these problems.

This is a successful example and far from the only one.

[back to top](#)

New Zealand's military aid to Ukraine

We noted Wellington's decision to render military aid to the Kiev regime. This aid includes equipment and uniforms, and the allocation of \$5 million for the purchase of weapons and ammunition with Britain's mediation, as well as \$1.9 million to Ukraine's military intelligence for commercial satellite cartography services.

The services provided by the collective West through London's mediation cost money. These funds are allocated not to Ukraine, not for humanitarian aid, and not even to the political forces of that country, they are returned to the Western pockets that "allocate" them to Ukraine. What are they spent on? On the murders and maintenance in the West of those who encouraged these murders for many years. This is a simple scheme.

We have always said that loans, grants, tranches and financial aid to Ukraine have never reached Ukrainian citizens, the local consumers. Everything was instantly returned to the same accounts in the same banks. A small share landed in the pockets of corrupt Ukrainian officials, bureaucrats, all those who distinguished themselves as champions of democracy and builders of a new Ukrainian state. The pattern is the same. The only difference is that before it was linked to Ukrainian corruption, deception and the collapse of the state, whereas now these funds are spent to kill not only Ukrainians but also Russians and citizens of foreign countries (some of their mercenaries are there through the call of their heart, but many do not even understand what promoted them to go there).

It sounds wonderful to the Western ear when information agencies report on the allocation of money and the shipment of arms “to support Kiev and the Ukrainian people.” What does this mean in reality? These funds are instantly returned to the NATO countries as payment for the supply of arms (used to kill people) or for satellite communications services, geo-locations and analytical materials. I think speeches for Ukrainian figures, representatives of the Kiev regime, are also paid for with the same assistance. Is this cynical? Yes, it is. This is bloody cynicism and this is the most terrible thing.

The cabinet of Jacinda Ardern assigned seven army servicemen to British headquarters to take part in intelligence activities in Ukraine and sent an S-130N Hercules transport aircraft to Europe. Another 50 people were delegated to ensure the transportation of Western military cargo and eight people were sent to a NATO logistics centre in Germany, which is a transshipment base for arms supplies. Business has been established. The UK is playing the key role.

Thus, as in 1939, today New Zealand's soldiers are sent to Europe at the appeal of the British parent country, this time to take part in NATO's geopolitical adventures. The course towards a "Pacific reset" as declared by the Ardern cabinet with its priority on the country's regional foreign policy vector looks absurd against this background. All this graphically shows once again that Wellington is just nominally trying to play the role of a peaceful Asian-Pacific player, whereas in reality it remains an invariable member of the Anglo-Saxon family and a loyal satellite under London and Washington. The invariable thesis of New Zealand's political class about "strategic autonomy" and the country's independent role in the world arena is beneath criticism. Are arms supplies to regions New Zealand has nothing to do with evidence of "strategic autonomy"? New Zealand is not linked with these territories in any way and is not threatened by them. In reality, a loyal Wellington is again ready to fulfil the instructions coming from both its former parent country and the main conductor of "the Western collective effort" – the United States. New Zealand instantly says "yes" and all "strategic autonomy" disappears. The ruling circles of New Zealand are directly and wholly responsible for the adverse consequences of this course.

I think the countries of the Asia-Pacific Region will draw their own conclusions when they see the "peaceful" character of New Zealand's policy. This is how it is manifest in practice.

[back to top](#)

UK is funding anti-Russia propaganda and hired guns

Not long ago, the British Embassy in Moscow sent a note to the Russian Foreign Ministry stating that its diplomats are unhappy with what we are saying about them. I would like to thank my British colleagues for the feedback. We learned our lesson and decided to continue.

We are delivering on our promise to London to satisfy the Russian people's interest in the cases of Britain's interference in Russia's domestic affairs and illegitimate projects funded by the British that are aimed at not only splitting our society, but also pitting our neighbours against us through the "fight against Russian propaganda and aggression." There are several messages that, against the general background, could pass as just another piece of news, but only for those who are not following the events.

In late March, the British government announced in a press release that it would make over £4 million available to the BBC media giant to wage an information war against Moscow. Specifically, the funds will be used to finance the BBC's Russian and Ukrainian services and to "counter disinformation about the war in Ukraine." According to the source, these costs will be covered by the British Foreign Office and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Additional funding for the BBC will be part of an updated package of measures to support Ukraine which Prime Minister Boris Johnson will announce at the NATO and G7 summits.

The BBC is thus obtaining a propaganda contract publicly and directly from the British state treasury. It remains only to change the nameplate to "BBC by Foreign Office."

The concern is already working under the corresponding instructions, which can be seen, for example, from the coverage of the Tochka-U rocket strike at the railway station in Kramatorsk, which is a great example of "fighting" the propaganda. This British media outlet stopped mentioning the tragedy right after the missile serial number showed that it had been fired by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. That's all there is to journalism paid for with the money from the British government. RT and Sputnik journalists working in the West are denied the right to a profession and are called "propagandists" without any grounds. Now it's clear why. It's because they are covering for real propagandists such as the BBC and the like.

Previously, the concern acted as a contractor for the Foreign Office in a more "discrete" manner. We only learned about this from leaks or materials obtained by hackers, among others.

Britain has allocated a sizable amount of money to carry out its plan of information expansion that was published a year ago by Anonymous. According to the budget sheet, almost £9 million (about \$12 million) were to be spent on the project and related grants over the span of two years (from March 2019 to March 2021). London was getting ready itself and preparing its underlings in advance.

Another document contains questions and answers for a group of junior executors of the project, that is, Ukrainian journalists. It argues that most of the budget allocated by London will be used to finance Ukraine's state television broadcasting. "Keep focus on the public broadcaster. Timescale this FY is really tight," reads one of the 2018 documents.

At the same time, the overseers of the project are particularly concerned about confidentiality. One of the leaked documents covers security and secrecy. “No unauthorised disclosures of activity on this work... For security reasons, some grantees will not wish to be linked to the UK Foreign Office. It should be noted that the Programme Team would prefer the programme documents do not end up in the Russian media. We know that they are following us,” the document says. Apparently they saw it coming. Now, it has become part of a single information space, which, despite the collective West’s attempts, cannot be completely choked off.

Moreover, undercover dealings with the Ukrainian media were just a part of London's comprehensive Russophobic programme in this area. The media found out that the British Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, sponsored by the UK intelligence community, which we mentioned earlier, provided Ukraine with 61.3 million pounds in four years (about 6.7 billion roubles). Among other things, the money was used to fund the military reform and the training of Ukrainian military personnel.

Open sources show that British military specialists trained the Georgian Legion among others. This is the name of a battalion of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which was formed primarily from ethnic Georgians who are not Ukrainian citizens.

On February 21, 2022, the Euronews TV channel showed the legion’s training session. The foreign military specialists that were on this base concealed their faces from the journalists. An instructor called William explained that he didn’t show his face because a couple of his colleagues had been identified and put on the FSB search lists. He didn’t want to be knocked off by the Russians, he said. At that time, they didn’t yet know that the British government would disavow them. What did London say about its subjects when an opportunity of their exchange was mentioned? “They went there on their own will.” This brings to mind a surprising, far-sighted and historically accurate film (albeit a fiction film) – The Professional. First, the secret services of NATO countries send their instructors. Then they are left to their own devices. The British government is not responsible for them.

According to the British under secretary for defence, British military specialists stayed in Ukraine at least until February 12. On April 15, The Times reported that military instructors from the UK Special Air Service (SAS) returned to Ukraine.

At the previous briefing, we spoke in detail about the problem of torture practices introduced by the British in the colonial era all over the world. It is now clear why the trainees of British instructors are capable of such inhuman, bestial cruelty.

After this, Mamuka Mamulashvili, the founder of the Georgian Legion, went on record as saying that his militants would not take Russian prisoners. After a video depicting the massacre of imprisoned Russian paratroopers by Mamulashvili's commandos, the Investigative Committee of Russia instituted criminal proceedings against the legion and identified all those who are involved in it. The Investigative Committee should not stop at that but should follow the trail. Who trained the legion's members? The British.

In conclusion, I would like to return to our domestic admirers of the generous British grants. The Underside website continues analysing the conduct of those who got into London's humanitarian networks, for instance, the participants in the Chevening project (aimed at selecting talented young people in our country and bringing them to study at the UK educational institutions). Russia's special military operation in Ukraine has been a litmus test that showed how many of those who studied there feverishly rushed to follow the Foreign Office's guidelines one after another.

We hope they realise that most likely Britain has already written them off as used propaganda material. There could be only one goal behind this exposure of its personnel in Russia: to show for the Western media the large-scale reprisals of the pro-Western youth by the authorities. In just one moment, they leaked information about all those they had trained and inspired in Ukraine and exposed the recipients of their grants in Russia. They are no longer needed by anyone in the United Kingdom. This is the issue of methodology.

[back to top](#)

Decision by a UK court to extradite Julian Assange to the United States

Today, we learned that the Westminster Magistrates' Court in London approved the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States, which in fact amounts to a final scene in the burlesque play which could go under the title of 'British justice' or 'England's worst traditions.' They acted at the right time, on the quiet, while the Western community immersed the international public opinion into an alternative reality, focused as it is on Russophobia. In this situation, the sky is the limit – everything goes, even handing Julian Assange over to the United States despite all the submissions by human rights activists and even public protests. The goal always justifies the means for the Western community.

The document will now be submitted to UK Home Secretary Priti Patel. It will be up to her to draw a line under this shameful process. With the entire Anglo-Saxon repressive machine intent on taking down the journalist, his lawyers will try to persuade the home secretary. However, the sad truth is that the scenario, pre-approved by Washington, will be played out by the script.

In the United States, Julian Assange faces up to 175 years in prison, which tells a lot about the "developed democracies," the so-called liberal values, freedom of speech, human rights, and the rights of humans. This person is being punished on ostentatiously absurd charges, while he has already suffered many years of isolation for his beliefs, faced overt mental pressure and torture. Still, this punishment is presented as being nothing short of mercy. A 'pardon' replaces persecution, in the form of 175 years in prison.

The US attorneys used the promise to refrain from seeking capital punishment for the defendant as their primary justification for extraditing him. The same old system is at work. Just a few days ago, these people were devouring the US human rights report and human rights violations around the world, except in the United States. As a bonus, they promised to show mercy to Julian Assange, after seeking to destroy him for so many years, saying that he will not be executed. At the same time, the very same people are telling the entire world and release a report exposing all countries without exception of human rights violations. All except the United States, that is. There is not a single word about Washington in this report. This is worthy of a work of fiction. Many of our compatriots, for example Maria Butina, can tell us whether people persecuted on political charges can feel 'comfortable' when serving their sentences in American prisons. All you have to do is read her book to understand what US-style mercy means.

Those who are after Julian Assange were relentless in their efforts to destroy him morally and psychologically rather than physically, break him and alter his personality, his personal settings, if I may say so. IT professionals talk about ‘personal settings.’ We believed that it is up to every person to build his or her personality, to adapt to the environment and develop. It turns out that this is not the case. The liberal system took on the role of setting and tuning people’s characters in their place. It knows better what people need, how they must act, talk, think, etc. This is what they are doing with Julian Assange. They want to alter his personality and present him to society as a different person.

The collective West embarked on this effort to destroy, persecute and humiliate him in every possible way after he exposed the truth about the war crimes perpetrated by American and British soldiers in Iraq and many other shameful aspects in the workings of the ‘advanced’ democracies, both in the New World and the Old World. Maybe they believe that with the verdict by the court in London they succeeded in their relentless effort to accomplish their revenge. What they probably fail to recognise is that with this verdict they delivered a definitive judgement on all the demagogic rhetoric by Washington and London on the freedom of speech and plurality of opinion, as well as their aspirations to moral leadership in today’s world.

They can try to erase this story from history, but it will always be part of it. No matter how much they try to rewrite history, these facts will exist, and future generations will know them. No matter how hard they try to cast themselves as fighters for human rights and freedoms, this crime will always be a stain on Western democracy.

[back to top](#)

Finnish media’s distorted presentation of events in Ukraine

We have taken note of a comment published recently by Simo Ortamo, a Russia-based news correspondent of the Finnish national television network Yle. He claims, without giving any evidence, that the Russian media provide distorted coverage of the events in Ukraine, and that the bulk of Russian media reports are fake news. While claiming this, he himself went as far as to doctor facts and draw comparisons between the events in Bucha and the 1999 incident in Racak, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. He writes that the massacre of civilians in Racak is similar to what happened in Bucha, and that the Racak crime has been “solved” with the help of Finnish forensics experts.

It is truly shocking that a Finnish journalist has mentioned that tragedy. The truth is that the conclusions drawn by the Finnish experts working on the EU commission were later overturned by many other European experts, including at the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Hamburg. Although the allegedly “unbiased conclusions” drawn by the Finnish experts were questioned by many people from the very beginning, NATO used the staged Racak massacre as a formal reason for an armed intervention in the Yugoslav conflict. Why did the Finnish journalist cite an example that is working against them? It’s an open sham. Who is it designed for? For those who can’t distinguish between left and right and will accept this sham as the truth?

Mr Simo Ortamo from the Yle television channel has demonstrated the same “open mind” these days, instead of respecting the basic international principles of journalistic ethics such as the right of people to reliable information and objective coverage of events.

[back to top](#)

Ordinary Nazism exhibition

The Ordinary Nazism exhibition dedicated to the origins of the Ukrainian version of Nazism and its history to the present day opened yesterday at the Victory Museum.

Over 200 exhibits, including dozens of photographs and documents, the flags and symbols of Ukrainian nationalists such as Azov, modern publications that glorify Bandera and Shukhevich, expose the atrocities committed by Ukrainian nationalists during World War II, as well as the modern-day neo-Nazis’ crimes and terror against Ukrainian citizens in 2014-2022.

The Nazism Today section features evidence of pro-Nazi sentiments in Ukraine, including books, uniforms, propaganda merchandise of Ukrainian neo-Nazis and items with Nazi symbols, as well as photographs and evidence provided by the witnesses of recent neo-Nazis’ crimes against Ukrainian citizens.

The central part of the exhibition is an installation dedicated to the dead children of Donbass, the children whom the Finnish and other Western journalists choose not to notice. The “progressive” collective West has turned a blind eye to those children. They don’t exist to them. The overwhelming majority of Western media outlets have not written a single line about them.

The exhibition includes material from the Victory Museum, the Donetsk Republic's Local History Museum, the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, and the special RIA Novosti project Donbass. Genocide. 2014-2022. Many of the exhibits have been placed on public view for the first time. The exhibition is open until July 17.

We urge foreign correspondents accredited in Russia and Japanese diplomats who are working in Moscow to visit this exhibition so that their governments don't have to express regret again that they were not aware of what was happening.

[back to top](#)

Annual Human Rights Report released by the US Department of State

The US State Department's annual Human Rights Report is its usual peremptory self and includes groundless accusations against countries which the United States has put on its virtual list of adversaries.

A considerable portion of it – 93 pages – is devoted to Russia. It is a tall order to read this voluminous document. But experts have managed it after all. The US assessments are predictable.

The principle by which countries are divided into “good” and “bad” is perfectly simple and is used by the US in many spheres: the goodies follow in the wake of Washington, and the baddies pursue an independent foreign policy. They have no use for any other principle. You can guess in advance who is on the penalty bench as well as the range of stereotyped grievances against them. And the report confirms this. These exercises in propaganda are meant to find a plausible human rights pretext for interference in internal affairs of sovereign states by the collective West, and the tools it uses like NATO and the EU, or individual countries posing as human rights policemen. But they give absolutely no thought to the state of affairs in this area at home.

The report has reserved no room for a description of the dismal human rights situation in the United States itself. These reports have different goals, although, by formal criteria, it is Washington that deserves to be among the prime violators, given the huge number of grave problems eroding the American society. A case in point is the continuing growth of racism in almost every area of America's public life. Linked to these negative phenomena are the massive movement for the rights of African Americans and a wave of aggression against Asian Americans, rising against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, Russophobia has become eminently conspicuous. Encouraged from above, this old "trend" has been upgraded in terms of ingenuity of its presentation, scale, and ugliness of forms.

We can add an intensifying proliferation of extremist ideas as well as a chronic migration crisis and the resultant discrimination against migrants. At the risk to their lives, thousands of illegal migrants are literally storming the US border with Mexico. Once there, the "lucky" ones have to live under inhuman conditions in deportation centres. There are regularly recorded cases of mistreatment of prison inmates, abuse of power by law enforcers, and cruel treatment of potential offenders. US human rights activists say they would be flattered if their appraisals of the state of US society were included in the report as an addendum. But they were not given this honour.

Capital punishment is used on a large scale, often as a result of a miscarriage of justice. The victims are mostly African Americans who make up the majority of the US prison population. The powers of the US secret services are almost unlimited as they wage a massive campaign of shadowing US citizens and media representatives. Despite earlier assurances, the Guantanamo prison, notorious for its cruel torture of prisoners, is still functioning illegally. These are all US realities. It is not interesting to record and report them to the world public or specialised international institutions. It is more interesting to conceal these things and bury them deep, while focusing on other countries' problems.

We urge Washington to concentrate on its own human rights failures. Please stop forcing questionable standards on the rest of the world and delivering lectures to which the United States has no moral right.

For a more detailed analysis of the human rights situation in the United States, US officials and all persons concerned could visit the Russian Foreign Ministry website, where they will find the Ministry's annual reports on the state of affairs in the human rights area in individual countries and on manifestations of Nazism and the glorification of neo-Nazism.

We have not started compiling these reports in response to the call of the heart. They represent reactions to the behaviour of countries that believe they are untouchable and immune to prosecution on account of their “exceptionality.” We are exposing their problems in response to their arrogance and conceit. To accommodate our US colleagues, we have translated these documents into English.

[back to top](#)

Launch of For Compatriots’ Rights international humanitarian project

I want to draw your attention to the project For Compatriots’ Rights by the Association of Lawyers of Russia nationwide public organisation and the Synergy corporation. Its launch was announced recently, on April 18, 2022, during a news conference by the association’s president, Sergey Stepashin.

The project aims to provide prompt legal and psychological support to Russian compatriots abroad who are facing various forms of discrimination related to their citizenship, ethnic origin or language. In particular, one can leave a message on the project website or call the free hotline. Experts from the association will provide free legal consultations and legal information on the most pressing issues that the Russian diasporas can be interested in. Lawyers will also help to write statements, complaints, court applications and other documents.

We believe that this project has special importance. Amid the unprecedented Russophobia in many countries, it can become a powerful additional tool for the legal protection of Russian compatriots abroad. It is also important that this initiative was proposed by the Russian civil society, which confirms Russia’s inextricable connection to its diasporas.

Yesterday there was a meeting with volunteers who work in Russian regions adjacent to the Ukrainian border. They help refugees, people who are trying to survive. We see that these people experience powerful positive emotions when they come to understand the complexity of the situation and do all they can to help refugees and temporary displaced persons. We not only read about it, but also work with volunteer movements and provide support on a regular basis. Special thanks go to the office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, which is in constant contact with the Ministry and embassies. We feel this inextricable connection.

The Foreign Ministry supports the For Compatriot's Rights project. We will work together with the Association of Lawyers of Russia on its implementation.

[back to top](#)

The anniversary of ending the Red Army's East Prussian strategic offensive operation

The East Prussian strategic offensive operation that ended on April 25, 1945 aimed to defeat a powerful Nazi army group in East Prussia and northern Poland. The General Headquarters of the Soviet Armed Forces ordered the 3rd Byelorussian Front, commanded by Army General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, to advance in the Königsberg sector. In turn, the 2nd Byelorussian Front, commanded by Marshal of the Soviet Union Konstantin Rokossovsky, was to advance in the Marienburg sector. Both fronts were to exploit their initial successes, cut off the East Prussian formation from the main German regions, and to split up and defeat its elements stage by stage.

Apart from the 3rd and 2nd Byelorussian fronts, the operation involved the 43rd Army of the 1st Baltic Front, commanded by Army General Ivan Bagramyan, and units of the Baltic Fleet, commanded by Admiral Vladimir Tributs. In all, the Soviet high command deployed about 1,670,000 officers and soldiers, over 25,000 artillery systems and mortars, 3,859 tanks and self-propelled guns and 3,097 aircraft.

In these sectors, the enemy established multi-echelon defensive fortifications with a depth of 150 to 200 kilometres. In all, 780,000 officers and soldiers wielding 8,000 artillery systems and mortars, 700 tanks and 775 aircraft defended these positions. Three fortified areas shielding approaches to Königsberg contained up to 12 firing positions per kilometre. The city itself had two lines of forts for defending the outside perimeter and its inner districts.

On January 13, 1945, the Red Army launched an all-out offensive in East Prussia and northern Poland. On January 18, they breached enemy defences north of Gumbinnen, now Gusev in the Kaliningrad Region. On January 29, Soviet forces reached the Baltic coast and bypassed Königsberg from the north, the northwest and the southwest.

In early April 1945, the Red Army managed to seize Königsberg and to kill about 42,000 Nazi officers and soldiers. By mid-April, Soviet forces established control over most of Sambia Peninsula. On April 25, they seized Pillau, a local fortress and seaport.

Red Army soldiers inflicted substantial casualties on the enemy during the East Prussian strategic offensive operation and captured over 220,000 officers and men. The loss of significant forces and resources, as well as an important region with a huge military-economic potential, hastened the complete defeat of Germany.

Victory came at a high cost, over 126,000 Soviet officers and soldiers were either killed or listed missing in action, and more than 450,000 were wounded. Army General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, a Two-Time Hero of the Soviet Union, was mortally wounded on the outskirts of Mehlsack, Germany, now Pieniezno in Poland.

The Soviet government bestowed orders and medals, including the Medal For the Capture of Konigsberg, on over 1,000 Red Army units, to mark the courage, heroism and high professionalism of their service personnel. In all, 217 units received honorary titles.

[back to top](#)

The Berlin strategic offensive operation

The Red Army's 23-day Berlin strategic offensive operation lasting from April 16 until May 2, 1945 effectively ended the Great Patriotic War and hastened the end of World War II. The aim of the operation was the final defeat of the main elements of the Nazi forces' Vistula and Centre army groups, seizing Berlin and linking up with the Allied forces.

The Berlin operation involved units of the 1st and 2nd Byelorussian fronts, the 1st Ukrainian Front, part of the Baltic Fleet, the 18th Air Army, three corps of the Air Defence Force and the Dnieper Naval Flotilla.

The operation's final stage commenced on April 26, 1945, and aimed to defeat encircled enemy forces and to seize the German capital. The enemy offered tough resistance and committed the last surviving Wehrmacht units and the hastily assembled Volkssturm battalions. In some cases, the Nazis machine gunned Volkssturm members for abandoning their positions in the face of approaching Soviet tanks. Indoctrinated with Josef Goebbels' propaganda, surviving units of the Berlin garrison tried desperately to counterattack. Soviet soldiers had to storm virtually every street and building.

In the early hours of May 1, ground scouts, sergeant Mikhail Yegorov and junior sergeant Meliton Kantaria, hoisted the Victory Banner over the Reichstag, on the sculpture of an equestrian knight - Kaiser Wilhelm. Following the capture of Berlin, all surviving Wehrmacht and SS units surrendered en masse on most fronts.

On May 9, at 00.43 am Moscow Time, the instrument of Germany's unconditional surrender was signed in Karlshorst. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Colonel General Hans-Jurgen Stumpf and Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg signed the document on behalf of Germany. Germany's unconditional surrender was accepted by Marshal Georgy Zhukov (on behalf of the Soviet Union) and Marshal Arthur W. Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (Great Britain). US General Carl A. Spaatz and French General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny signed the document as witnesses.

In all, 187 Red Army units received the honorary title Berlin for the courage, heroism and impressive professionalism of their service personnel during the operation. More than 600 Soviet officers and soldiers became Heroes of the Soviet Union. Among them was Marshal Georgy Zhukov who received his third Gold Star.

On June 9, 1945, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR instituted the Medal For the Capture of Berlin, and over one million Soviet soldiers received this decoration.

[back to top](#)

Answers to media questions:

Question: Russia has blacklisted key members of the British government and several politicians as a response to London's sanctions. What other countries may be affected by such measures?

Maria Zakharova: Representatives of the British government under Russia's response measures cannot aspire to be exceptional because some more high-ranking officials from other unfriendly countries are already on our blacklist, which is open for new candidates who perform anti-Russia actions.

The Russian Federation has never been an initiator of unilateral restrictive measures and has always spoken out against these mechanisms in the countries and associations' foreign policy toolkits, and called for abiding by collectively developed international norms. Our actions related to the sanctions have always been reciprocal. But this response is always founded, measured, timely and inevitable.

As for the anti-Russia restrictions developed with an obsessive passion by the collective West, their immediate authors are already feeling their consequences. In fact, they have become hostages to their own concept of a "rule-based world order" and unhealthy claims to monopoly in global politics and trade.

I think that it is time for the collective West to learn that it is not their competence to decide whether a sovereign state has the right to define and protect its legitimate national interests.

Over the centuries-long history of its existence, our country has repeatedly proven the inefficiency and futility of such policy.

[back to top](#)

Question: Can you comment on Russia's exclusion from the Bologna Process?

Maria Zakharova: In September 2003, Russia signed the Bologna Accord joining the Bologna Process that was to ensure the comparability of education standards and quality of qualifications in the participating countries and eventually form a single higher education area in Europe. That was the declared premise. The initiators envisaged that the system would improve the mobility of students and graduates in different countries. However, the goal was not fully achieved, partly due to Western politicians seeking to draw new dividing lines.

Moreover, many countries found adaptation to the new system challenging as flaws in the system became apparent (and there were quite a few). Just like some European countries, Russia had to break down the structure of its five-year higher education that had existed for decades, in favour of four-year bachelor programmes and two-year master programmes. The transfer of the entire higher education system to a new track (in view of our participation in the Bologna Process) faced a range of objective issues – specifically, ensuring the quality of bachelor programmes for technical specialists and medical professions.

Mutual recognition of higher education certificates in the participating countries has always been considered an apparent advantage of the Bologna Process. Mutual recognition is the main problem. Almost 20 years after Russia's inclusion in the Bologna Process, diplomas of many Russian higher education institutions are still not recognised abroad. And that is despite the fact that humanitarian links were completely depoliticised. At the same time, just like before, there is the possibility of signing respective agreements with foreign countries on a bilateral basis. I should note that this opportunity remains open and we continue to work consistently with interested partners.

It should be taken into account that there is still demand for the previous education system in Russian society, confirmed not only by multiple public opinion polls but also by the fact that, when Russia was a member of the Bologna Process, there was still demand for five-year study programmes for technical specialists and healthcare professionals.

It appears that at the current stage, the outcome of our participation in the Bologna Process will be subject to serious revision, with extensive involvement in the discussion of competent authorities, primarily the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the academic community.

This development is an excellent example meaning that, before joining any processes proposed by the West, we should evaluate our own practices and defend our own advantages confidently. This is true about many processes that we have been pushed into over the past few years and continue to be pushed into based on the argument that we should join the “civilised world.” We forget that we are civilised enough and represent a country with a long history, and advanced fundamental science, education, culture and arts.

Perhaps we should not be forced to adopt certain innovative forms that are in fact less innovative but only transforming sectors that already function well. In addition to that, they are even harmful, considering that our practices in certain fields have proven successful. Russian specialists trained in the old system were highly sought after around the world before and after the end of the Cold War. They were headhunted and even kidnapped (yes, that happened). Also, specialists trained in the Soviet Union or based on the Soviet educational system, as well as those who studied at Russian universities – either way, based on our country’s fundamental academic practices – were excellent specialists who had employers lined up to recruit them. This is a good reason to consider, not only in the future but even now, which of the imposed processes we truly need and which we do not. Otherwise later, it will turn out that one of our systems goes through yet another transformation but the benefits will be reaped by those who initially proposed this transformation. We will not get any benefits but will get another round of bureaucratic formalities that we do not need because they only complicate things without giving our country any competitive advantages. This is a good example to show that many of the things we were promised were never supposed to be granted in full. The goal was not to open more opportunities for us but to open them for the collective West by using our resources.

[back to top](#)

Question: According to the UN, Ukraine has accepted the idea of creating a trilateral contact group with Russia to deal with humanitarian issues in Ukraine. Is Russia ready to do this? What will the format of this group be? Will it include defence ministry representatives of Russia and Ukraine? When might the first such meeting be held, where and at which level?

Maria Zakharova: The provision of humanitarian aid to civilians in Ukraine and the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics is a subject of active discussions with our international partners, namely the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Martin Griffiths, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, visited Moscow on April 4, 2022. Telephone conversations are held regularly with the heads of specialised agencies. Direct interaction is maintained between the Moscow-based personnel of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and representatives of the Russian Defence Ministry as well as experts of the Foreign Ministry of Russia. These multilevel contacts allow us to discuss solutions to humanitarian issues substantively and effectively, including the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid, the safe evacuation of civilians, the deconflicting of civilian facilities and mine-clearing.

In this context, I would like to mention Russia's relevant activities: about 13,500 tonnes of humanitarian cargo, namely food and basic essentials, have been delivered to 259 population centres in the Lugansk and Donetsk people's republics and to seven regions of Ukraine, 865 humanitarian interventions took place. Humanitarian corridors are opened daily for the safe transit of civilians in the eastern and western directions, and about 900,000 refugees have arrived in Russia. It is notable that humanitarian aid is only delivered to the eastern regions of Ukraine, Donetsk and Lugansk from Russia and is actually the only source of support to people there. In addition, the Russian military have helped send five UN interagency convoys to Kharkov, Severodonetsk, Kramatorsk and Sumy (two convoys). Regrettably, these efforts are being hindered by the destructive actions of the Ukrainian authorities: the delivery of aid across the frontline is impossible due to safety risks, such as the chaotic mining of roads by the Ukrainian forces and attacks by Kiev-controlled raiding groups. In addition, Kiev does not allow the delivery of cross-border convoys from Russia and blocks the operation of humanitarian corridors.

In our opinion, the main task now is to deliver aid to those who need it, with due regard to the situation on the ground, rather than look for new formats, which is often aimed at scoring political points. We highly value our cooperation with the UN and the ICRC, and we are resolved to maintain and strengthen it.

[back to top](#)

Question: What is your opinion of the implementation of the Belgrade-Pristina agreement on the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo? Is the EU mediation in this process effective?

Maria Zakharova: Nine years ago, on April 19, 2013, representatives of Belgrade and Pristina signed, with the EU's mediation, the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations (the Brussels Agreement). Its main clause stipulates the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo, a group of 10 municipalities with a Serb majority population. The parties coordinated the structure of government and functions of the Community, which covered local security, economic development, education, healthcare and territorial planning.

Pristina has been using far-fetched pretexts every year to sabotage its commitment to establish the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo and has been trying to convince the international community of the uselessness and danger of that initiative. So far, the implementation of that document has not moved an inch. The EU's mediation under UN General Assembly Resolution 64/298, which was adopted on September 9, 2010, has discredited itself completely. The failure of Brussels, which is unable and unwilling to influence the Kosovo authorities, is proof that the EU does not want the situation to be settled.

For our part, we will continue to monitor the issue and the attempts to disavow the 2013 Brussels Agreement, and we will continue to demand that the EU fulfil its mediation functions in strict compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 as the international legal basis for a settlement in Kosovo. We view Pristina's use of every tool in the box to hinder the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo as direct proof that the "Kosovo state" does not honour its commitments and is a failed state and the main source of instability in the Balkans. In fact, it is the main task set to it by external forces or more precisely, the collective West.

back to top

Question: The Associated Press has recently published an article accusing Russian diplomats of promoting disinformation and propaganda on social networks. Should we prepare for the accounts of the Foreign Ministry, embassies and other agencies to be deleted from Twitter and Facebook? What, in your opinion, is behind this pressure on everyone who promotes Russia's point of view?

Maria Zakharova: I saw this article. It said they exposed the activity of Russian diplomats who allegedly have to do the "dirty work" amid repressions against the Russian media, and use social networks to "undermine the international coalition supporting Ukraine".

I think this article is a wonderful example of mixing truth, half-truth and lies, and it is difficult to draw a line and say what is reliable, factual information and what is a fabrication. Let us see.

“As governments and social media companies have moved to suppress Russia’s state media.” Thank you, Associated Press. I do believe that the situation with Russian media in the Western countries can be called repression. RT television channel, Sputnik agency and some other Russian and Russian-language media affiliated with Russian sources have experienced this firsthand. This I can agree with.

Are Russian diplomats doing “the dirty work” of using social networks to “undermine the international coalition supporting Ukraine?” I do not know. If we take it as an idiomatic saying, I would say hardly. If we speak about the environment in which our diplomats have to work in the media space of the Western states, there is nothing clean about that. There is dirt all the way. And they have to work in such conditions. This “dirt” is the result of the dishonesty of the Western media community and media mainstream.

Do Russian diplomats use social networks? They use the opportunities that are provided to all social network users on an equal basis. No more, no less.

Do Russian diplomats undermine the trust in the international coalition supporting Ukraine? I believe the coalition does this job well without the help of Russian diplomats. It undermines itself by publishing fake news, making inadequate statements, delivering weapons while saying that it calls for peace. Taking it one sentence at a time, I have tried to look into one of the main topics of this article.

It is true, we are working on all digital platforms (Weibo in China, Odnoklassniki and Vkontakte in Russia and on the American social networks). They are going to block us. For instance, we were banned from doing streams on YouTube. Then the State Duma’s channel was also banned for unknown reasons. If they go further it will simply indicate yet again that censorship is blooming in the West. They will confirm it once again, which they have done many times over.

As for information work, it is one of diplomats' tasks to provide information about their country's position. All the more so when the country is involved in events that are life-changing for the entire planet. How else should the diplomats spread the information? Our diplomats do not do what the British embassy does (I spoke about it today) or the Ukrainian embassy (recruiting soldiers). Our diplomats publish comments, give interviews, publish articles and do it without violating the community rules, including on the social networks. We also give references to historical materials. It is hard to argue about that. The Euro-Atlantic propagandists that accuse Russian diplomats of disinformation refer in the very same article to Russia's "deadly air strike on a children's hospital in Mariupol." And they say this after the disclosure of what really happened there. One can believe this fact or not, but it would be right to provide an alternative point of view. The same goes for the events in Bucha. There is only one mainstream version in the Western community. They immediately stopped speaking about Kramatorsk after it became obvious that it was a Ukrainian missile. So who is giving disinformation and spreading hoaxes?

It is a pity that there has been no reassessment of the destructive activity of these resources and the structures they are fostered by. It is time to understand that they are part of the policy of the collective West to create a deadly chaos that has long ceased to be manageable. The Western media are responsible for their destructive policy.

[back to top](#)

Question: In an interview with VGTRK today, you said that you had lost trust in the Ukrainian negotiators. What did you mean by that?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to remind you that it was the official Kiev, the Kiev regime and the people who call themselves leaders of Ukraine who expressed willingness to engage in talks. Russia accepted that intention and appointed negotiators. Russia never professed refusal to negotiate, especially when there is a request for talks. This is our long-term position based on the understanding of how complicated conflicts should be resolved. Russia agreed to the request for talks from the Kiev regime and got down to constructive work.

As we can see, the Kiev regime and its negotiators are trying to impede this process in every possible way by using their favourite tactic of deliberately dragging their feet, backtracking on earlier preliminary agreements and publicly disavowing what was agreed upon during the talks. Therefore, nobody is going to take these representatives of the Kiev regime at their word. We are only seeking agreements existing on paper. This is our understanding of the situation and who we are dealing with, drawing on our experience of previous communication with them. We are being pushed to do that. We are not trusting words. Many of the things declared at the negotiation table and even publicly have been retracted by the Kiev regime immediately, within an hour and sometimes within 15 minutes, thus shutting the door on any progress achieved. So, only in writing and on paper from now on.

Russia's representatives confirmed today that more proposals had been passed to the Ukrainian "negotiators." I would like to reveal the date when those proposals were handed over. It was last Friday. Today is Wednesday. No response has been received. This is to show you how the Kiev regime's negotiating team is conducting itself and what it is making of the negotiation process. We do not know if they can be trusted when they express willingness to proceed with the talks.

Let me remind you that it was their initiative. The Russian proposals have been stuck with them since Friday.

If they want to hold talks, they are welcome to proceed, but in writing rather than verbally or at microphones. We have stated this approach repeatedly. Nothing new has been said today.

[back to top](#)

Question: Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin compared the region and the world to a chessboard, and each individual country to a chess player. He said that each country should make its own moves on the chessboard and determine its own future. Other countries should not interfere with their actions or manipulate them. What do you think about this position in the context of the G20 summit and US pressure on Indonesia in an effort to ban Russia's participation in it?

Maria Zakharova: I do not agree with your interpretation of what my Chinese colleague had to say. He put it slightly differently when responding to a Bloomberg question about ASEAN member countries. When he mentioned chess, he meant that the ASEAN countries are chess players, not chess pieces. This is important. You framed it a little differently.

I fully agree with the point the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson made regarding the importance of ensuring genuine sovereignty and independence of states in international affairs. We believe that fair globalisation, which meets the interests of all countries and peoples without exception, mandates a truly multipolar world and inclusive institutions of collective governance. Democratising the joint decision-making system in the socioeconomic sphere is particularly important. It is likewise important to diversify supply chains, to settle transactions in national currencies (which we are talking about a lot now), and to strengthen the potential of the emerging economies.

We are witnessing the United States and its reckless allies' irresponsible and dangerous attempts to bully Russia (and other countries as well) in international organisations as our country is going through this particular phase. The obsession with this idea pushes the West over and beyond the dangerous brink of hypertrophied confrontation. We are witnessing a demonstration of the model of a "rules-based order" as seen by Washington and Brussels which the West is trying to push through. As we now know, it is about maintaining a dialogue with other participants from a position of force, pressure and coercion and the extraterritorial nature of illegitimate bans imposed by the West, as well as blackmail and direct external interference. The "collective West" has been using this for many years now, which has led to the results that we all can see.

Instead of international relations being "reset," they were "overloaded" (which is what the famous button that Hillary Clinton presented to Sergey Lavrov said, and this is exactly what happened next).

These unilateral restrictive measures erode food security, reduce trade flows, and cause inflation spikes. We have repeatedly warned about the harmful nature of these policies for everyone, including for the initiators of such approaches.

With regard to the G20, Russia considers this platform as a leading economic forum which boasts significant achievements, such as overcoming the financial crisis in the United States in 2008. The group was formed as an answer to the global crisis, which resulted from the crisis in the United States, which, in turn, was caused by the crisis of the US economic system and numerous fraudulent schemes that underpinned entire sectors of their economy. They are now trying to accuse us of causing almost planetary famine, undermining food security and disrupting supply chains and all of that despite the fact that the sanctions were imposed by the West and led to a collapse of all existing interaction mechanisms, including in the global economy. In 2008, though, no one in Washington said the guilt was theirs or even tried to offer excuses. What an interesting picture we get:

2008: The United States caused the global crisis. The whole world rallied to find a solution to this situation and formed the G20.

2022: The United States forced the EU countries to impose sanctions, destructive, primarily for their own economies, on our country which led to a collapse of the existing world order in the economy and economic relations. The United States is not laying the blame for this with itself or the failure of its own policies, but is instead trying to shift it onto our country and the countries that did not support these sanctions. It is contemplating Russia's exclusion from international institutions, including the G20. This is not even the rabbit hole, but some kind of an inconceivably perverted logic.

The G20 played a big role in finding a way out of the financial crisis and then out of the acute phase of the 2020-2021 pandemic.

We highly value the work of the current Indonesian Presidency, the depoliticised nature of Jakarta's efforts and its focus on achieving concrete results. We concur with the importance of the three proposed discussion topics, namely, healthcare, energy and digitalisation. We intend to make a significant contribution to building up progress in all these areas before the Bali summit, to be held on November 15-16, 2022.

We are convinced that the G20 must continue to operate on the terms of consensus and equality of its members. We are happy to know that our point of view is widely supported by our partners pursuing an independent foreign policy.

To paraphrase our Chinese colleagues, we see the G20 dialogue as an intellectual process rather than a Cold War-like confrontation. We value mutual solidarity and close coordination with Beijing in the G20 in the interests of finding balanced agreements.

Speaking of chess, after all, comparing the world to a chessboard comes from the West. What is chess? Chess is about two players, maybe even two teams, who move pieces as they see fit in order to achieve victory for themselves. Perhaps, we should play some other game to achieve common victory, rather than individual success?

[back to top](#)

Question: The West is stepping up its military assistance to Ukraine, including heavy offensive weapons. Several Western media outlets said that Russia could use nuclear and biological weapons. Against this backdrop, is there any possibility of progress in negotiations or a truce?

Maria Zakharova: I have already answered this question. This situation confirms our assessment that in Ukraine Russia is fighting not only the neo-Nazis, but also the countries of the collective West who are standing behind their backs. For many years, they have been shaping Ukraine as an ‘anti-Russia,’ a springboard for their aggression against our country in several sectors, including the economy, energy, finance, and many other spheres. It is through Ukraine that Russian gas transits on its way to the EU countries. The US controlled the top levels of the Ukrainian state apparatus, which constantly created problems with Russia’s gas supplies to its EU partners by demanding preferences and subjecting them to other issues, by acting capriciously, using blackmail, and behaving in a disgraceful and hideous manner. This is just one of the examples of the confrontation that has been brewing in many sectors and spheres. The collective West, primarily the United States, used it on Ukrainian territory against our country.

Information about the biological weapons programme carried out by the Pentagon in Ukraine raised special concerns. Let me remind you that there were about 30 laboratories created across the former USSR around Russia’s and China’s perimeters. There were 15 of them in Ukraine, and 30 in total. Media reports surfaced lately alleging that the Americans intend to transfer their Ukrainian biological laboratories to Mongolia – just think about this! What does this mean? This means that if these plans do materialise, they will be on a territory between Russia and China. This anti-Russia and anti-China focus drives the collective West and the United States in everything they do.

The West remained silent for eight straight years when the Kiev regime killed civilians in the country's east, destroyed civilian infrastructure, blocked the region, carried out strikes against schools, hospitals, and enacted ever-tighter norms to discriminate against people and other spheres of life. Everyone kept silent, collectively. Similarly, they fail to notice the fact that Ukraine's Tochka-U missiles were used to shell the Donetsk city centre and the train station in Kramatorsk. Moreover, they falsify this data and pretend Russia perpetrated these crimes. They fail to notice the explosion of ammonia reservoirs at the Sumykhimprom plant, or of a nitric acid tank in Rubezhnoye (LPR). They fail to see the clouds of smoke, which could have caused severe chemical burns. They persists in ignoring this. At the same time, NATO countries continue pumping weapons into Ukraine, as we have already mentioned today, and sending mercenaries and military instructors there. They are doing everything to make the military phase of this operation last as long as possible.

The special operation carries on despite all this pressure, as the country's leadership has been saying. This is what Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said yesterday in his interview with India Today channel. The Russia-Ukraine talks on the settlement in Ukraine were expected to help end the operation, among other things, but the Kiev negotiators are dragging them out, which is not a coincidence. On the contrary, they are doing this deliberately. This is the approach they have chosen in all consciousness. Standing behind Kiev's back, the West prevents Kiev from reaching peace agreements and encourages the Ukrainian regime to continue their aggression in the east of the country. We hope that Kiev will soon realise the need to adopt a more constructive position and act in the interests of the people of Ukraine without looking back at its Western instructors who have demonstrated their worth in many parts of the world over the years. As I have already mentioned today, they invariably betrayed those whom they had tamed.

[back to top](#)

Question: Could you describe relations between Russia and Kazakhstan under the sanctions? According to Mikhail Yevdokimov, Director of the First CIS Department of the Foreign Ministry, the sanctions have impacted the Eurasian Economic Union. In what areas can these sanctions hurt Russia?

Maria Zakharova: First of all, I would like to note that Russia and Kazakhstan are linked by mutual bilateral and multilateral obligations, including those within the framework of the EAEU. Neither party has renounced its obligations. At the same time, everyone knows that the West is exerting tremendous pressure on our EAEU partners, as well as our other partners. They are exerting this pressure at various levels. Sometimes the wording of their statements, demands and blackmail resembles open aggression. These dubious but already customary methods of the Western bloc's work only serve to convince us that we have chosen the right path based on Russian economic development with reliance on our allies and partners, who are ready for mutually beneficial and honest cooperation on a parity basis in the interests of our countries' peoples.

The association's member states are working actively to boost the resilience of their economies, including efforts to ensure macroeconomic stability. We will continue to prioritise the import substitution policy. The Government of Russia has repeatedly issued statements and offered explanations to this effect. We are almost 100 percent self-sufficient in terms of staple foods, including grain, sugar, meat, vegetables, etc. It is impossible to say this about Western countries with well-developed liberal economies. I am not sure whether the liberal economy now fully reflects its original concept. Today, they exist due to an imperialist approach and aggressive behaviour on the international scene, rather than due to free competition, the labour market, creative initiative and talents. They now exist under the same mottos as 100 years ago, namely, seizing resources and aggressively developing markets. Resources mean the most diverse resources, and not just natural resources (labour, financial, etc.).

The foreign trade sector is set to enter new markets. We should realise that EAEU countries export critical products, including energy resources, minerals and agricultural produce. Neither the United States nor the European Union can replace them.

Consequently, this concerns prices, not just import substitution.

Question: President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev recently appealed to President of Russia Vladimir Putin in the face of a terrorist threat against his country and himself. Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation provided the relevant assistance. Is it possible to say that the position of Kazakhstani authorities differs from what Moscow would expect from them amid the current pressure on Russia? Can they pay lip service, to say the least?

Maria Zakharova: Russia and Kazakhstan have been strategic partners and allies, and they retain this status. I repeat: the West is exerting unprecedented and absolutely illegal sanctions pressure on various countries. Interaction between countries does not cease even in these conditions. All specialised ministries and agencies maintain intensive contacts.

The heads of state and government hold regular telephone conversations. On March 1-2, 2022, the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation held its 23rd meeting and approved comprehensive decisions facilitating the sustainable development of our ties.

On April 21-22, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tleuberdi will pay a working visit to the Russian Federation to discuss the main issues of the bilateral and international agendas with Sergey Lavrov.

Russia and Kazakhstan address all matters, including problem issues, in a trust-based manner; we discuss them and find mutually acceptable solutions.

back to top

Question: Russia has announced that there are US biological laboratories in the South Caucasus, including in Azerbaijan. The same issue was brought up at the UN Security Council meeting on April 6. What information indicates that Azerbaijan is among countries hosting US-controlled biological laboratories? After all, earlier Azerbaijan refuted this report. Don't you think that comments of this sort can damage bilateral relations?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to correct what you have just said. On April 6, the UN Security Council had an informal Arria-formula meeting. Your interpretation of the New York discussions is incorrect.

The existence of national biological laboratories is not something reprehensible. All countries have such facilities. You give a blood sample and check to see if you are in good health. All of this is done by these laboratories. Rather, the question is who conducts this research, and how, for what purpose, and based on what laws this is done. When we raised the issue of biological laboratories, specifically in Ukraine, we said for years that they were controlled by another state having no common border with Ukraine. This is of critical importance for biological security matters. They conduct military research using a network of seemingly civil biological laboratories in the interests of another state and with US Department of Defence money. In itself, this sounds monstrous. One can only imagine what was going on there, given that they were accountable to no one except the United States. Even the citizens of Ukraine were without rights for years in the sense that no one reported to them. Former acting Healthcare Minister of Ukraine Ulyana Suprun was a US national. They did not report on the activities even to the international community.

Therefore, given the allied nature of relations between Russia and Azerbaijan and the historically existing common biological security space, we take seriously all signals on this score coming from Azerbaijan. We are ready to consider them as part of the partner dialogue we have with Baku.

In any event, your question hints at a comparison with Ukraine. How can you compare these things, considering that the leaders of Azerbaijan and its nationally oriented political forces prioritise their country and its interests? As for Ukraine, it was turned into NATO's backyard, where people with US, Lithuanian, Georgian, etc., passports were appointed government ministers. They had no intention of living in Ukraine, but they approved fundamentally important decisions. One can only guess what kind of decisions these were, given that whatever they were doing in Ukraine was concealed under the veil of secrecy.

We have been monitoring this issue, because it concerns regions contiguous with Russia. Since all these things are closely interlinked, we are promoting contacts with post-Soviet countries.

[back to top](#)

Question: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has appointed Ambassador at Large Igor Khovayev his special representative for normalising relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. What measures are being planned to normalise relations between Baku and Yerevan in connection with his appointment? Is Mr Khovayev planning a visit to Azerbaijan and Armenia?

Maria Zakharova: Igor Khovayev's priority is to help our partners in Azerbaijan and Armenia to draw up a peace agreement. He has swung into action, holding useful consultations in Yerevan. His visit to Baku has been coordinated and will take place soon. We will announce the dates and share the information.

The dialogue is based on Azerbaijan's Basic Principles for the Establishment of Interstate Relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia and Yerevan's constructive response to these proposals. Russia's mediation is based on the indispensable experience gained while the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia worked on their statements of November 9, 2020, January 11, 2021, and November 26, 2021, statements that made it possible to stop the bloodshed in the region and opened real prospects for solving the complex humanitarian problems involved in restoring transport communications and delimiting the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.

[back to top](#)

Question: Are there any operational communication channels between Moscow and Washington at present?

Maria Zakharova: We have the Russian Embassy in Washington. Its operational format is a far cry from the classical forms of international diplomatic relations, but it is the United States, not Russia, that wants it this way.

Yes, the work has been reduced to a minimum, but the embassies are functioning, the ambassadors are present and working actively in various areas. We are doing whatever we can, proceeding from the circumstances the United States has created to complicate our diplomatic missions' operations.

But our diplomatic mission is at work. The US Embassy is also present in Moscow.

[back to top](#)

Question: What is Moscow's vision of the world order after the end of the current acute phase?

Maria Zakharova: Understandably, each aggravation is followed by a settlement. I will not give assessments, but this is the history of mankind. One wants to minimise acute stages and make the world stable. What will the world be like after this crisis that has indeed affected all spheres of life? I think outstanding academics, futurologists, foreign-policy experts, political writers, journalists, diplomats and others can devote their writings to this theme. Official estimates may vary. One would like the world order to be based on international law and tend towards justice.

back to top

Question: What are the conditions, as you see it, under which Russia's diplomatic relations with Washington could return more or less to normal?

Maria Zakharova: A simple question merits a brief answer. The main condition is that the United States stop its destructive policy in Russian-American relations.

back to top

Question: The sanctions imposed on Russia are designed to isolate it from the global economy. But US Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently said that they could "go away" in the event of an "irreversible" withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. Do you think this is possible?

Maria Zakharova: We know how the United States lifts sanctions: by adopting new sanctions. There is not a single example of US sanctions against Russia being lifted without the simultaneous adoption of other restrictions. Take the Jackson-Vanik Amendment adopted over restricted Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. It remained effective until the first decade of the 21st century, when many of those who had emigrated from the Soviet Union returned to Russia. But the Jackson-Vanik Amendment remained effective, nevertheless. That anachronism in our bilateral relations was only removed after many months of negotiations. But it was replaced almost immediately with the Magnitsky Act and everything it entailed. This situation is best described by the phrase "the holy place is never empty." Only, I wouldn't call sanctions a holy place.

We don't see that the United States really wants to revise its stand on this issue now. Let's be realistic. The Americans never lift sanctions. They replace old sanctions with new sanctions or add more sanctions to the existing package.

We regard this approach as illegal and destructive, and we are never the first to use this method. But we do respond to it by taking appropriate measures.

back to top

Question: Our allies and sympathetic foreigners continue to send reports on their support for Russia. They wrote that they are eager to come to Moscow and take part in the Immortal Regiment civil event but cannot make it this time.

In the past few years, our foreign offices gave out St George's ribbons to anyone who wanted them and this brought passionate support on behalf of our compatriots, as well as the children and grandchildren of foreign anti-Nazi veterans. Will it be possible to get these ribbons at your offices this year?

Maria Zakharova: You are absolutely right that for millions of people in Russia and beyond, the St George ribbon is a sign of memory, a link between generations and a symbol of victory. It has nothing to do with propaganda or a hyped up story. It is historical memory. It is the colour of the awards that were conferred on the heroes of our country for decades and even centuries.

I would like to recall that the St George ribbon event was launched in 2005. The main idea was to preserve historical memory and glorify heroes. We have no doubt that those who received awards with this ribbon are true heroes. In 2006, the event took place on a national and international scale. It was joined by countries in the CIS, Europe and Asia.

The St George ribbon event is an opportunity to express respect for war veterans, revere the memory of the dead and give tribute to the feat of the Soviet people in the struggle against the Nazi German invaders.

We note with regret that the St George Ribbon has become an instrument in the efforts to set a new trend towards rewriting history.

In many countries, people are rejecting it, trying to delete the glorious pages of Soviet achievement from our common past. Yielding to Russophobic attitudes that reach absurd proportions, they are cancelling themselves. But they cannot cancel us. They can only cancel themselves. They are glorifying Nazi criminals, defacing monuments and doing all they can for Nazi ideology to grow and flourish in their societies.

I will mention a number of states that “distinguished themselves” in this respect. The Lithuanian Parliament recently adopted amendments banning the public use of the St George ribbon because for them it is a symbol of a “totalitarian or authoritarian regime.” They threw out fundamental science as well. They don’t have it now, but when they were part of the Soviet Union, they had it. Apparently, fundamental science is also a symbol of a totalitarian or authoritarian regime. I am tempted to ask Lithuanian MPs about the annual celebrations for SS legionnaires. What do they symbolise? Lithuanian MPs pay so much attention to them. They protect and maintain them, afraid to breathe in their presence. Are they a symbol of national pride? Say that clearly then. Then maybe we will understand what their supporters among Lithuania’s MPs are proud of.

The Estonian police banned public meetings with St. George ribbons from April 26 to May 10 with a view to “avoiding provocations” on May 9. Latvia banned the May 9 holiday celebrations, turning the glorious day of Victory over Nazism into mournful ceremonies. Everyone finds an excuse. The situation is absurd because Latvia is a member of the EU where May 8 is a holiday. So, is May 9 a day of mourning in this case? Maybe there were different Nazi or fascist troops and a different fascism or Nazism? Not at all. These were the same troops against which we fought and the liberators are the same. But why do they celebrate this holiday in the EU on May 8 and go into mourning on the next day? This is illogical. It is beyond common sense. The UN Generally Assembly declared May 8 and May 9 World War II Commemoration Days. The United Nations (UN) has a two-day global observance that occurs on May 8 and 9 each year. It is known as the “Time of Remembrance and Reconciliation for Those Who Lost Their Lives during the Second World War.” Everyone finds an excuse. Let’s leave this on their conscience if they still have one.

Yesterday, Moldova joined these ranks. This is what President Maia Sandu will always be remembered for. She signed a law banning the use of the St George ribbon in the Republic of Moldova as an attribute and symbol of “military aggression.” I understand that Moldova is subjected to pressure like everyone else. However, there are things that should not be betrayed. This is betrayal, pure and simple.

We expressed our assessment of principle as regards this legislative initiative and a number of other unfriendly steps by Moldova last Friday after the Moldovan Parliament endorsed them. Of course, such decisions evoke deep concern, putting it mildly (to use a diplomatic expression). They prompt indignation and hardly support the statements by Moldovan leaders of their commitment to the neutral status of the republic as interpreted by international law, the observance of the rights and interests of all its residents and pragmatic, mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia.

We were bound to notice the address Ms Sandu gave during yesterday's promulgation of this act. She said "such symbols should be thrown into the dustbin of history, next to other barbarous symbols of death and destruction." Who allowed her to say such things about "the dustbin of history"? I assure you that those who dare say this about a symbol for which people gave up their lives to let others live, will go to the dustbin of history themselves, next to other barbarous symbols. This is unacceptable and insults the memory of heroes. These people defended their own and foreign countries from fascism and Nazism. This was fixed in the decisions of the Nuremberg Trials. It is not up to individual or "collective" politicians in modern countries to cross out their achievements and the decisions of the Nuremberg Trials. They do not have the right to do this.

There are different symbols. I would like to remind Ms Sandu that the St George ribbon is a symbol of combat glory, courage and victory that is common for all Soviet peoples who fought a just war of liberation against Nazism. For many years, many countries, including Moldova, held events in memory of the Soviet warriors who fought in this war. Participants in these events proudly put on St George ribbons. This symbol helps consolidate the unity of those who cherished the feats of their fathers and grandfathers.

We have no doubt that history will dot all the "i's" and cross all the "t's." Such symbols as the St George ribbon exist outside the world of those who are ready to sell their mother for nothing, not to mention their country and its people.

Despite the bans, the St George ribbon continues to be a unifying symbol for nations, such as Moldovans, Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians, to name a few. It is cherished in the same way as the Soviet flag that we won the Great Patriotic War with and that the residents of Ukraine's liberated regions are now welcoming Russian soldiers with.

Once again, we urge Chisinau to give up its confrontational rhetoric that hurts Russian-Moldovan cooperation, or else we will respond. The response will be painful. This is not our choice and we do not support such rhetoric, but we cannot leave the recent statements from Chisinau unanswered.

Your question is yet further evidence of the fact that the St George ribbon event is in demand not only in Russia but also among millions of our compatriots living abroad.

Today, there are certain logistics obstacles to sending these ribbons to our offices abroad due to the Western sanctions, but we are working on this. I can assure you that we are doing our best, although, as you know, due to sanctions flights to Europe are not easy, to put it mildly.

I would like to respond to all official bans by saying that memory cannot be prohibited. A ban on memory leads to disastrous consequences. As for politicians like Maia Sandu, I would advise them to read (I hope she read it but just in case) Chinghiz Aitmatov's novel "The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years." Mankurt is the name of the main character.

back to top



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