



**Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, St Petersburg, June 15, 2022**

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### **International and inter-regional ties of St Petersburg and the Leningrad Region**

We traditionally start our on-site briefings with information on the trade and economic situation in the region where it is being held. I am sure our northern capital does not need any introduction. Nevertheless, I'd like to draw your attention to the fact that St Petersburg's foreign economic and humanitarian ties facilitate the development of inter-state cooperation in general and promote Russian interests in both the near abroad and in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Thus, Prime Minister of Belarus Roman Golovchenko and St Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov met at the opening of the Belarusian Food Forum. Looking for new areas of cooperation, St Petersburg's delegations, which included entrepreneurs, visited Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The Week of Vietnam and a familiarising visit by Latin American ambassadors to St Petersburg were a success. This work has not been interrupted and is continuing practically online.

We value the assistance of the city authorities in organising top-level international events (the annual meeting of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, the St Petersburg Cultural Forum, as well as humanitarian and sports events). I came here in advance to take part in the Likhachev Readings, held at the highest level. They were attended by guests from Russian and foreign cities.

St Petersburg is implementing an important international agenda by expanding Russia's humanitarian influence abroad, promoting the Russian language and culture, preserving the historical truth about the country's role in routing Nazism, educating foreign students and carrying out "people's diplomacy" programmes.

The first videoconference between St Petersburg and Belgrade medical institutions was held on May 18 of this year as part of efforts to develop bilateral cooperation with Serbia in healthcare. On June 8 of this year, a videoconference on the development of emergency medical care and an exchange of experience in preventing the coronavirus in Chinese and European healthcare took place with support from the St Petersburg Foreign Relations Committee and Russia's Consulate General in Guangzhou.

The Foreign Ministry is doing all it can to help the city promote international ties. We are supporting the northern capital's efforts to attract foreign investment and develop tourism. We instruct our foreign missions to promote the initiatives of St Petersburg's business circles and hold presentations on the city's economic and investment potential. St Petersburg's information and business centres abroad are also playing a big role in these efforts.

The Leningrad Region has firmly held its position among the regions with the most dynamic inter-regional ties. We note the region's intensive humanitarian contacts, especially its work with regions in foreign countries on environmental and social initiatives. It is among Russia's top ten regions in investment appeal, and its second largest transport and logistics hub, which accounts for over 20 percent of cargo turnover.

Today, the Leningrad Region has good prospects for developing cooperation with the CIS countries, with Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Thus, at the talks in Minsk on June 2 of this year, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and Leningrad Region Governor Alexander Drozdenko discussed issues of expanding cooperation in construction, housing and utilities, the agro-industrial sector, machine manufacturing and logistics. In 2021, trade between the Leningrad Region and the Republic of Belarus grew by almost 50 percent. We support the desire of the region's authorities to expand the geography of mutually beneficial cooperation and are doing all we can to promote ties with our partners from the BRICS countries – China, India and South Africa, as well as Serbia and Turkey.

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### **The 25th anniversary St Petersburg International Economic Forum**

The 25th anniversary St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) opened today, June 15, under the slogan “New Opportunities in a New World” and will remain open through June 18.

There will be panels on pressing issues in global politics and economy, including challenges and prospects for cooperation in the leading areas of industry. The programme is available on the forum's website. There will be a series of panels on advancing bilateral ties with Egypt, China and countries in Africa and Latin America, among others, as well as interaction within ASEAN, BRICS, the EAEU, and the SCO, to name a few.

As is customary, the forum brings together many foreign guests. Today, we are expecting representatives from 135 countries to attend (that figure can change).

As always, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will take part in forum events and hold bilateral talks with his foreign partners on the sidelines of the forum. Meetings with Deputy Prime Minister of Cuba Ricardo Cabrisas, Vice President of Venezuela Delcy Rodriguez, Prime Minister of the Central African Republic Felix Moloua and Nicaraguan Special Representative for Relations with Russia Laureano Ortega, as well as a number of other foreign guests, have been confirmed. As usual, we will keep you informed about the schedule.

In addition, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will speak at the Multi-Track Diplomacy panel at approximately 5 pm on June 16 on the subject of “The Role of Traditional and New Diplomatic Tools in Promoting Russia's National Interests.” The speech will be streamed live on the Foreign Ministry's website and social media accounts.

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## **Dictatorship of Neoliberalism with Russian Fellow Countrymen's Eyes Abroad panel discussion**

A panel discussion sponsored by the Foreign Ministry, with the participation of Rossiya Segodnya, on a hot-button topic The dictatorship of neoliberalism through the eyes of Russian compatriots abroad, will be held as part of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 16. Rossiya Segodnya's Director General Dmitry Kiselev who acted as co-organiser of the event and Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova will participate in it.

Special guests include Konstantin Yaroshenko. For many years, we have been talking about Konstantin Yaroshenko as a Russian pilot, but today I can say that he is a public figure, a person who has ideas to share. This will be his first public speech (yes, he has given interviews, but they were one-on-one with journalists) before a large audience with his own theme, not something that was made up or prepared in advance by someone, but something personal that is based on his life experience.

The special guests include Yelena Chernykh who founded the public organisation named "Together with Russia." She now works at Radio Sputnik and is known as chair of the Coordinating Council of Organisations of Russian Compatriots in the United States. The United States initiated a hunt for her. She is facing a long prison term (several decades) with unthinkable and phantasmagoric accusations being brought against her. I won't speak for her. Tomorrow, you will hear everything directly from her.

Timofey Sergeitsev (writer, columnist); Alexey Yesakov (human rights activist and coordinator of the Immortal Regiment interregional historical and patriotic social movement in Tallinn); Oleg Nikitin (former entrepreneur/businessman turned social activist and a prominent representative of the movement); Marat Kasem (editor-in-chief of Sputnik Lithuania) are on the special guest list as well. All of them have been through a lot. They know the history of current international relations and crises and not just from textbooks or materials that someone prepared for them. They will talk about what they have seen and experienced and what is etched in their memories for life.

A discussion will be moderated by journalist and publicist Mikhail Shakhnazarov. I won't tell you what this panel is about. Clearly, it focuses on an analysis of the devaluation of Western liberal democracy values using specific examples of gross violations of Russian citizens' rights (the big question is whether the West still considers the rights of Russian citizens as human rights or treats them separately), and pathways to overcoming challenges and difficulties of mind-boggling proportions that our compatriots face while enjoying the benefits of liberal democracies.

We encourage the journalists accredited to SPIEF 2022 to attend this discussion which will be interesting. You will have an opportunity to ask questions.

As always, the event will be streamed live on our website and our social media accounts.

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## **Arctic events at the 2022 St Petersburg International Economic Forum**

This year will be the first time that the St Petersburg International Economic Forum will feature a booth called The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue. The business programme offers over 15 events, including several events related to Russia's Arctic Council chairmanship in 2021-2023. They include:

- A conference on telecommunication development and digitalisation in the Arctic. Participants in the conference will discuss, among other things, the introduction of digital technology in the region and the use of telemedicine and driverless forms of transport.

- A seminar on shipbuilding and ship repair in the Arctic, which will focus on developing services to repair ships in the Arctic and building more high-ice-class vessels.

- A creative business forum to discuss the prospects for and the development potential of creative industries in the northern territories.

In addition, the Arctic booth will hold a session, The Northern Sea Route: An International Transport Corridor. Participants in the event are expected to discuss the impact this route might have on the economy of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and the opportunities the route offers for developing the regions they represent amid the sanctions pressure, as well as the prospects for strengthening partnership ties with friendly nations.

The Arctic's investment potential will be discussed separately, including during presentations for investors prepared by the heads of nine regions in Russia's Arctic zone.

The Arctic events also include sessions on the prospects for developing the tourist industry in the Arctic, as well as climate change trends, efforts to manage environmental risks in the region, and issues relating to integrated security and effective coordination in preventing emergency situations in the high latitudes.

Numerous Russian and international experts, as well as heads of Arctic regions and representatives of relevant ministries, businesses and indigenous peoples in the Arctic, are expected to attend.

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### **Sergey Lavrov's visit to Azerbaijan**

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will visit Azerbaijan on June 23-24 of this year. He plans to hold talks with Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and expects to meet with President Ilham Aliyev.

The plan provides for discussing the range of issues for the further development of bilateral relations under the provisions of the Declaration on Allied Cooperation signed by the presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan in Moscow on February 22 of this year. There are also plans to review and analyse a number of urgent regional and international issues. They will focus on the implementation of the top-level trilateral agreements of November 9, 2020, and January 11 and November 26, 2021. These agreements are to ensure normalisation of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia and help turn the South Caucasus into an area of peace, stability and prosperity.

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### **Update on Ukraine**

Every week brings further tragic evidence of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law committed by the neo-Nazi regime and foreign mercenaries that are fighting on its side.

They are resorting to the terrorist, extremist tactic of intimidating civilians and are using locals as human shields. Apparently, this is how NATO instructors trained the fighters of the so-called Armed Forces of Ukraine. Ukrainian military units shell peaceful residential districts in Donetsk every day. They know there are no military facilities or targets there but they shell them anyway. They have been doing this for years. Our so-called Western partners and, unfortunately, Western journalists have not wanted to see this for a long time, and now they continue to ignore it. Let us tell them about this.

Controlled by the Kiev regime (I don't know whether they control anything or not), the armed forces are using banned cluster ammunition and artillery weapons they have recently received from the United States, the United Kingdom, France and other countries in the collective West, which are calling themselves peacekeepers, supporters of pacifism. Investigators from the DPR have authentically established that NATO 155mm caliber ammunition was used for shelling the Voroshilovsky district of Donetsk on June 9 of this year.

On June 13 of this year, Ukrainian nationalists subjected Donetsk to the most barbaric shelling since 2015. They fired 620 units of different ammunition from tube, rocket and missile artillery, killing five people, including an 11-year-old boy. Thirty-nine civilians, including three children were injured. What about the Department of State? Is the US delegation walking in sacral circles around the UN Security Council hall of sessions? Where is the US Permanent Ambassador with angry speeches and yelling? Where are the US humanitarians? What's wrong with the NGOs and international associations? Why are they silent? They have been criminally silent for all these years and continue being criminally silent. We know this.

The Republican Centre for Maternity and Child Protection, a maternity home, was damaged by shelling. Expectant mothers, mothers with children and staff had to hide in basements. These weren't the basements where military hardware was installed to stage provocations and attract fire. These were real basements in this maternity home. These expectant mothers were also real, not instabloggers or photo models.

Other social facilities, such as the central clinical hospital, primary care centres, schools, gymnasiums and kindergartens, have come under attack as well. Five medical, eight education and two cultural buildings in all.



I remember Sergey Lavrov's news conference in Turkey quite well. It coincided in time with what was portrayed as the Russian armed forces shelling a Ukrainian maternity hospital. I remember how foreign journalists formed a dense circle around me before and during preparations for this news conference. You should have heard them yelling. It was no longer journalism, but propaganda at work. To all my attempts to provide materials or to offer comments, to take a question, or to just show the text of the refutation by the Russian side, I saw amazing things when the correspondents (I convey my apologies to the CNN correspondent in this audience, but I vividly remember his colleague) turned away from the screen of the phone that I held out to show information about this incident. They didn't want to see it. Meanwhile, they shouted and clamoured to prepare the ground for what happened next. These are facts, they cannot be ignored. My question is: where are they all now? Did any one of them surround Dmitry Kuleba or the Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany Andrey Melnyk (who posts on Twitter terrible insults addressed to everyone on a daily basis), or Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN Sergey Kislitsa? Maybe there are bloody demonstrations taking place outside Ukrainian foreign missions, or are these the wrong kind of children? Are these other boys and girls, other women in labour, other maternity hospitals? Are they second-rate people?

The latest tragedy in Donetsk has finally mobilised international agencies (not to mention the global media which, compared to how they cover this situation, completely ignore and hush up these crimes) and they have begun to show signs of responding. Spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric called the shelling of a maternity hospital in Donetsk a clear violation of international law. One might get the impression that the UN Secretariat began to respond only after the Russian Permanent Mission urged it to do so, highlighting the fact that the Western mainstream media intentionally hushes up this situation. It's a shame international officials do so only when it becomes impossible for them not to see the unfolding crime.

Kiev and its Western patrons are pursuing their disinformation campaign against our country. They make up and spread absolutely false information despite the fact that their previous fakes were quickly debunked and disavowed. In early April, they tried to accuse Russian military personnel of killing civilians in Bucha. The evidence clearly showed it was a staged performance carried out by Ukrainian and Western intelligence agencies. I have a question for everyone: what's up with Bucha? Where are the names and pictures of the people and their life stories? I would like to understand that. Or is it going to be like it was with the snipers during the Maidan protests in 2014 when the entire “civilised” international community represented by a small group of countries was yelling that it was the beginning of an active phase, which later turned into a coup d'état. They said that nothing would have happened had it not been for the snipers who were undoubtedly (as they claimed) led by the legitimately elected Kiev authorities. According to them, these snipers made talks with the legitimate authorities in Kiev in 2014 impossible, and that is why the opposition “must grab power,” because allegedly, on the orders of Viktor Yanukovich himself and every other member of the government, they were firing shots at civilians. How long did it take to conduct the investigation into who these snipers were, who gave them orders, and how it ended? It ended in nothing. A classic provocation. We are left with the fragments of a statement by an EU representative made in 2014 posted online that even they are aware that the snipers received orders not from the legitimate authorities in Kiev, but those who issued orders on the other side. Is it going to be the same with Bucha? It is already the same. Remember the House of Trade Unions in Odessa where people standing on the windowsills and asking for mercy were burned alive? The same “civilised” international community saw it, but no one was held accountable. The trail went cold. We see these terrible events repeat. They follow the same logic which underlies everything that is happening there. The Kiev regime is a tool. The collective West is unfortunately the mastermind.

A week after the incident in Bucha the Ukrainian Armed Forces hit the railway station in Kramatorsk with a Tochka U missile and again accused our country of the air strike. Even Western journalists, who started correcting their own mistakes and then stopped covering this topic altogether, said it was a lie. They verified the serial number of the missile and found that it belonged to Ukrainians. As if no crime had been committed. It turns out that crimes are qualified depending on the nationality of those who have or have not committed them. It doesn't work like that!

On June 13, 2022, Kiev again tried to accuse Russia of shelling the central part of Donetsk with NATO-made ammunition. This is beyond comprehension. Such cynicism can neither be understood nor qualified.

To a large extent, the blame for the ongoing tragedy in Donbass lies with Western countries, which are sending increasingly more weapons to Kiev. The United States has estimated that its supplies of weapons to Ukraine in the previous three and a half months alone included some 24,000 anti-missile systems, over 1,000 anti-tank systems, over 1,000 air defence complexes, about 1,500 missiles, 90 artillery systems, dozens of helicopters and about 8,000 pieces of small arms. These are people who support those with pacifist slogans. These are, allegedly, true heroes calling for peace, who at the same time are boosting their weapons supplies. They plan to supply long-range multiple rocket launchers. These are weapons that will definitely bring peace, no doubt about that.

Today, on June 15, members of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group led by US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin met for the third time in Brussels to discuss new shipments of weapons to Ukraine. As you understand, weapons shipments to Kiev tend to prolong the fighting, leading to new casualties among civilians and helping the black market of weapons develop and expand, so that weapons will increasingly circulate across Europe and in other regions of the world.

On June 9, 2022, the first sentences were given to foreign mercenaries. We have warned for a long time that this will happen. Now we see this in practice. British nationals Shaun Pinner and Aiden Aslin, and Moroccan national Saadun Brahim were sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the Donetsk People's Republic. We believe this severe sentence for crimes against civilians in Donbass will teach an unforgettable lesson to all other "soldiers of fortune" fighting on the side of Ukrainian Neo-Nazis or just only planning to join them. These are crimes against civilians in Donbass. Military crimes committed by Ukrainian national radicals and foreign mercenaries will not go unpunished. A lot was said about this and now words have been translated into action.

As the Russian leadership said, Russia will continue its special military operation to defend Donbass from the aggression of the Kiev regime, demilitarise and denazify Ukraine and head off the threats to Russia from Ukraine.

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## **Outcomes of the Summit of the Americas**

The 9th Summit of the Americas was held in Los Angeles on June 8-10.

The event was clearly “truncated.” Almost a third of the leaders of the 35 states of the Western Hemisphere didn’t attend the summit. For ideological reasons and abusing (let’s face it) their status, the organisers did not invite Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. To protest this decision, the heads of Mexico, Bolivia, Honduras and a number of Caribbean countries boycotted the event and lowered the level of delegations. Due to disagreements with the US administration, the presidents of El Salvador and Guatemala never came to Los Angeles.

The discussion showed that instead of a unifying agenda, the White House is trying to implicate Latin Americans in building a revamped order in the region according to Washington’s patterns. President Biden was pushing forward the theme of “regional exceptionalism.” Before that, only the United States was exceptional, but now they are letting those who received an invitation try on this status. I’m not sure who, but someone wrote this for the US president (for sure he is being helped). He said, “We are prime.” Being in St Petersburg, I can say that the theme of “prime” was perfectly covered by Sergey Shnurov in his song titled “The Exhibit.”

This concept will supposedly help turn the Western Hemisphere into an area of “flourishing liberal values.” No one is sure what these liberal values are that will allow the region to “shine” only now (before that, for some reason, from the point of view of Washington, it was not shining properly). Liberal democracy and liberal regimes have destroyed all genuine values like freedom of speech, democratic institutions of state power, and economic and trade freedom. There is nothing left of it, only the media manually controlled by big capital. Economic and trade freedom are nonexistent today given that stealing assets, blocking accounts, imposing unilateral sanctions, and banning (directly or indirectly) cooperation has become the new normal for the Western liberal thought. What kind of economic and trade freedom can we talk about today? This is important for potential investors who are exploring opportunities in different parts of the world. There is the WTO and its general rules. There is a lengthy procedure for approving new members, preparing a country's membership, compliance with vast numbers of requirements and unification of legislation and norms in order to be able to participate on an equal footing in the WTO. Everything is fine. It looks like everyone is included. China and Russia, everyone is in there. Why can't you act and trade normally? As soon as everyone began to use the capabilities offered by the WTO, arbitration within this organisation was blocked by the United States, that is, you can participate, but as soon as it comes to disputes that must be resolved through arbitration, this system is blocked by the US administration. What kind of participation is that if disputes that arise cannot be resolved? Go ahead and sing, but keep your mouth closed.

The US-centric agenda was built in a consumerist manner to suit the image of “US leadership.” The participants from the private sector, NGOs and the media were handpicked, the decisions on a narrowed-down set of topics that are beneficial to Washington were pushed through (many of them concerned democracy, elections, the media and the role of NGOs and bordered on interference in internal affairs), new coordinating regional formats were created with the involvement of the Organisation of American States which is discrediting itself.

The scenario whereby the United States is staking out its exclusive influence in that part of the world clearly shows one of its critically important goals which is to minimise cooperation between the region and Moscow and Beijing. Everything that is now included in the unifying agenda for Washington is based on the destruction of the existing and natural ties of various regions and associations with Russia and China.

We were part of the discussion as well. Latin Americans were intimidated by Moscow's role in destabilising the situation on the food and energy markets. This is despite the fact that for many years now we have been building energy partnerships and cooperation with all regions of the world on a mutually beneficial foundation and based on existing legal framework. Washington assumed manual control to force countries and companies abandon this cooperation under the threat of sanctions for the sole purpose of preventing anyone from replacing it as a supplier of energy resources. Discussing the food situation is an embarrassment. The crisis was brewing due to the pandemic and weather outbreaks, and after the sanctions were imposed that blocked payments... There are humanitarian supplies and supplies of free aid. One way or another, food is being bought and sold. If you block payments, this will trigger another round of the crisis. We were accused of this as well.

The smokescreen of prospects in some areas (healthcare, climate, energy transition, democracy, digitisation and migration) declared by the organisers did not include possible comprehensive solutions to the problems that are really worrying Latin Americans: foreign debt and the need to overcome poverty and unemployment, counter drug trafficking and reduce migration. While trying to offer a unifying agenda now, the United States itself used sanctions to block these states and keep them from interacting for many years. But now it needs the region again as a territory for developing resources, getting workers and generally creating a semblance of integration processes. The premise was that Washington was uniting so much rather than destroying everything. So, everyone was invited to attend. Who was invited? Those whose interstate ties were subjected to interference and destruction.

This is no surprise. Washington has long been shaping its policy toward its southern neighbours mostly through the prism of interparty divisions. This has become an internal political factor in the US, considering the numerous Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in that country. Election goals are being set and political strategists achieve them by mobilising diasporas, especially since the elections to Congress are not far off (November 2022). There is a busy domestic political agenda and it must be dealt with in a couple of months. This is an answer to the question of what it was.

Here is a typical example demonstrating US priorities (Latin American leaders openly spoke about this in Los Angeles). Against the backdrop of over 40 billion-dollar allocations for military aid to Ukraine, Washington has been unable to approve the spending of \$3-4 billion for assistance to these countries for migration. What has triggered this migration problem in the region? US efforts to destroy the domestic life and the economy of these countries and use their resources. This is the source of all other problems, including migration. To resolve the issue, it is necessary to allocate \$3-4 billion but why do this for the countries of your region when the far-away Kiev regime needs peace? No reason to stint \$40 billion for the war. Logical, isn't it?

Many Latin Americans criticised this approach in their speeches, for instance, the President of Argentina, who is the rotating chairperson of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Another critic was the President of Belize, who heads the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). They spoke against discrimination, the decision not to invite the leaders of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela to the forum. Washington obviously underestimated the powerful support that these countries enjoy in the region.

Despite the White House's aspirations, the shambles of the Los Angeles event reflected an important reality: the times of the Monroe Doctrine are long gone no matter how much somebody may want to restore them. Latin American and Caribbean countries are striving for equality. They do not want to be treated as subordinates. Adhering to different nuances in approaches and assessments of the current world situation and often faced with difficult problems, including those that require international cooperation and outside aid, they are still displaying significant foreign policy autonomy. They are willing to promote their interests themselves and want their voice, diverse but united, to be heard in the international arena.

As for our country, we are willing to develop cooperation with friendly countries of the region on a pragmatic, mutually respectful and mutually beneficial foundation. We have always proved this by deeds, being a reliable supplier, partner and friend.

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### **The 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Senegal**

On June 14, we marked the 60th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Senegal.

The two countries maintain friendly ties based on the principles of mutual trust and respect. A regular political dialogue is conducted, including at the top level. On June 3, 2022, President of Russia Vladimir Putin held wide-ranging talks with President of Senegal Macky Sall, who is also the incumbent Chairperson of the African Union, in Sochi. The two presidents discussed current issues related to the plan to further strengthen Russian-Senegalese relations, the key aspects of Russia's collaboration with the pan-African organisation under the current conditions, and the ways of overcoming obstacles to the delivery of food and other goods that the Africans regard as socially important for them, which the West has created under the pretext of the Ukrainian events. We intend to continue close and productive coordination with our Senegalese partners in the international arena.

Our common priority is to build up trade and economic cooperation. In 2021, bilateral trade increased by 150 percent to \$1.2 billion. Senegal has gained the lead in the volume of trade with Russia among the African countries located south of the Sahara. Vigorous additional steps are being taken to promote mutually beneficial business partnership projects in areas such as geological exploration, mineral production, fuel and energy, power generation, infrastructure and fishing. We are studying the possibility of establishing a bilateral intergovernmental commission on economic and scientific cooperation.

We are confident that by joint efforts we will be able to ensure further progressive development of the entire range of mutually beneficial ties between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Senegal for the benefit of the two nations and in the interests of peace, security and stability on the African continent as a whole.

We offer our greetings to the people of Senegal on the anniversary of the Russian-Senegalese diplomatic relations and wish them peace, prosperity and wellbeing.

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## **Presenting Hospitality Recipes**

I would like to draw your attention to a book released at the initiative and with the support of the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Corps Directorate jointly with the Gastronomic Map of Russia project.

On June 9, the Foreign Ministry's Reception House hosted the presentation of Hospitality Recipes, a book by Yekaterina Shapovalova for heads of diplomatic missions.



This bilingual (Russian and English) book presents Russia's gastronomic traditions, cuisines of the Russian Federation from the Arctic to the Russian Far East, and the most famous and creative Russian chefs, who have won recognition both in Russia and elsewhere.

The edition is unprecedented in that it presents the reminiscences of all the most outstanding Soviet and Russian chefs who were directly involved in historical events at the top level. It also includes anecdotes about Russian hospitality and rundowns on the cuisines of Russia's numerous ethnic groups. The book debunks the long-standing negative stereotypes and will possibly introduce new, positive stereotypes.

Here are some interesting names of dishes: buhuzes, pelyani, khinkal, bakhukh and metukh, kurut and chok-chok, stroganina, suguday, Bear's Paw, Ossetian pies, pancakes with reindeer moss, perepechi, kulebyakas, kalitki, and Sosva herring.

A deluxe edition, it is not on sale, but we will try to make it available online. I hope the authors will give us their permission.

It would have been impossible to take the exclusive photographs featured in the book without the support of the regional authorities, specifically St Petersburg's Committee for Tourism Development, which helped to organise a photo session in the Throne Room of the Catherine Palace and at the Faberge Museum.

The Gastronomic Map of Russia is not just an online project. It is a touring exhibition around the regions of this country, enabling foreigners to learn more about local cuisines.

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[Answers to media questions:](#)

**Question: When will Russia send its ambassadors to the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics? Have they been appointed? What can you say on this issue? What is the situation?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Yes, we have been receiving these questions since the recognition of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics. I can tell you that work on this matter is in progress.

Our current priority is to complete the liberation of the territories of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and to rebuild infrastructure, utilities, social and other facilities there. Russian regions have energetically joined in these efforts, together with Russian ministries, agencies, volunteers and regional authorities. The ambassadors of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, who have been officially accredited in Moscow, are contributing to these efforts. We will provide updates.

I would like to remind everyone that the appointment of ambassadors is the prerogative of the President of Russia.

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**Question: President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has proposed creating a mechanism for rebuilding Ukraine that would be similar to the Marshall Plan. She said the EU should become the main investor, while rebuilding the country would be in the hands of the Ukrainians themselves. What is the Foreign Ministry's view of this initiative? Could this be an attempt to establish Western economic diktat in Ukraine after gaining political control of the country?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We have heard many interesting and sometimes shocking statements by EU diplomats. Now they say that the war must go on to the end without examining what this really means, and then they start talking about peaceful reconstruction and "plans." It looks to me that they don't have a comprehensive concept, and that they are in a state of absolute uncertainty. There is only certainty regarding our country, which must be "contained," and their involvement in a hybrid war against us. What about everything else? What about a streamlined ideological and philosophical concept? We regard this as an absolute dichotomy.

As for the “Marshall Plan,” I don’t think that there is a logic behind these historical parallels. This is evidence that obsolete Cold War clichés and the logic of antagonistic relations with Russia are deeply embedded in the minds of the Western political class. A new Marshall Plan is an indicative feature of the period of confrontation between two systems. It’s no secret that the Americans conditioned the allocation of funds to beneficiary countries on a great deal of political and ideological provisions. They divided the world on the either/or principle: either you accept everything we say, become subordinate to us and follow our direct orders, or you don’t get the money. But the conditions were truly draconian. It is believed that this mechanism was extremely instrumental in the post-war reconstruction of Europe, although the European countries that were part of the “Eastern bloc” also reported major achievements in the sphere of industrial development. It is a fact that the United States used the Marshall Plan to keep Western Europe in its sphere of influence. They are now trying to do the same to Ukraine. Their initial plan was to destroy Ukraine, its statehood and civil society, and now we are witnessing its actual destruction.

It has become customary for the current EU politicians and officials (Ursula von der Leyen is not an exception but a striking example of this) to increasingly use the ideological clichés of the most fanatical anti-Russia propagandists of the 20th century. It’s no secret that their promises of selfless assistance to their minions are highly doubtful, if not a lie altogether.

The recent policy of the West towards Ukraine didn’t look like a Marshall Plan but was openly aimed at de-industrialising it and at turning it into a provider of resources. During the Soviet period, Ukraine became a highly industrialised republic with its own science, its own education system, industry and agriculture. We can see now what happened to it over 30 years of its independence, or more precisely, its dependence on Washington. We dutifully supplied resources to Ukraine, which largely accounted for its industrial development.

For many past decades, the EU and the United States have been implementing a geopolitical project in Ukraine aimed at “containing” Russia. This began long before 2014. Billions of dollars have been allocated for this project. As for how much of these funds reach Ukraine and how much return to the source, this remains an open question. It’s clear from the financial information sometimes reported in the media that Ukraine is being used to make a quick profit from these funds, which subsequently return to the provider, with only a few percent of the initial sum ending in Ukraine. It’s just a financial trick. Any other funds approved for Ukraine are not invested in its prosperity but are used to buy weapons.

The EU leadership, while hypocritically speaking about the need for the “reconstruction of Ukraine,” continues sending lethal weapons to it. This amounts to investing in prolonging the hostilities and further destruction of the country.

The underlying logic – raze to the ground first and build anew later – is preposterous for the 21st century. People in Ukraine don’t understand what the West will build in their country, but the West will only build what it itself needs, for example, enterprises that will turn out products for transnational companies, just as this has been done in the EU member states. Many EU countries have abandoned their traditional way of life and their systems of agriculture and industry, which are only staying afloat because of subsidies but are unable to develop normally.

I doubt that this logic meets the interests of Ukrainians and citizens of EU countries who will hardly agree to pay for Brussels’ militaristic plans amid the energy and food crisis provoked by the West.

The European and US political communities are discussing the expropriation of foreign assets belonging to Russian citizens and companies and the frozen funds of the Russian Central Bank for these purposes. I would like to remind everyone that Washington invested its own funds in the Marshall Plan. Will it do so now as well? This question is for them. We believe that it must answer this question, considering that ideology has changed in the West, which intends to use seized funds to implement its geopolitical projects.

It's not just that the West is taking its time to transfer “reconstruction” funds to the current Ukrainian authorities; it's very unlikely that they will entrust them with the funding at all. I'd like to remind you of a revealing fact: US President Joe Biden, back when he was Vice President, visited Kiev to “supervise” a strange hybrid event. It was not an ordinary meeting of the Ukrainian government attended by the Ukrainian President, but an event chaired by the US Vice President, who issued instructions to the Ukrainian cabinet. The situation will not change. Everything will go on as before.

If Western politicians and experts agree that it's impossible to effectively monitor how and where foreign weapons are being used in Ukraine, the fate of the billion-dollar financial support transfers is not in their hands at all.

It is also obvious that not a single dollar or euro of Western assistance will be invested in the development and reconstruction of the Donbass infrastructure, which Kiev has been destroying blow by blow since 2014.

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**Question: Why were the talks between Moscow and Kiev halted? What are Moscow's conditions for resuming the talks? Is there even a point in resuming them?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I want to remind you about the sequence of events. The talks were requested by Ukraine and Russia's leadership responded affirmatively. A negotiation team was formed. The talks began. Several rounds were held in person and online. We saw many objections: either the place was not right or the team composition was not right or the country should have been different. There were a lot of whims. One way or another, we managed to find opportunities to continue the talks. On one of such occasions, the materials prepared by the Russian side upon Ukraine's request were sent to the Kiev regime. And that was it. We never heard any signals from them. The talks were essentially (I don't know, ask them what the right word should be) frozen, stalled, suspended, interrupted or sabotaged. They should tell you what they did to the talks. We have the information indicating that the order came from their American curators. So, the questions are for them to answer.

I would like to note that Sergey Lavrov covered this matter extensively.

1. At a news conference during the New Horizons educational marathon on May 17, 2022: “When they suggested talks, which was soon after the special military operation began, President Putin instructed us to hold the talks. Moreover, we suspended the operation as a gesture of goodwill during the first round, but the Ukrainian side did not reciprocate, acting unscrupulously as usual. Therefore, our troops and the Donetsk and Lugansk militias did not stop the fighting during the subsequent rounds of talks.”

2. In the interview with RT Arabic on May 26, 2022: “After several rounds were held in Belarus and online, the idea of meeting in Istanbul was put forth, and the Ukrainian delegation brought, for the first time, written proposals signed by the head of the delegation to the meeting we held on March 29. <...> We used them to quickly draft an agreement that was based on the Ukrainian proposals and turned it over to the Ukrainian delegation. The following day a flagrant provocation was staged in Bucha.” After that, independently or following instructions from Washington, London or Brussels “the Ukrainians said that they had reviewed their position and would reformulate the principles underlying the agreement. Nevertheless, contacts between us continued.”

3. At a news conference on current international issues on June 6, 2022: “Ukraine is unwilling to hold negotiations. It has declined to do this. We have every reason to believe that in this way Kiev is following the wishes of the Anglo-Saxon leadership of the Western world. We were ready to work honestly based on our Ukrainian colleagues’ proposals. A draft agreement drawn up on the basis of those proposals has been shelved by the Ukrainian side until now.”

4. At a joint news conference following the talks with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on April 26, 2022: “Judging by all appearances, they are not particularly interested in talks. Those insisting that Russia should not be allowed to win, and, on the contrary, urging [Ukraine] to overpower Russia and destroy it have promised Kiev that they will continue this policy by rushing arms to Ukraine in huge amounts. Right now, the Ukrainian authorities are relying on this. If this continues, the talks are unlikely to have any outcome. But I repeat: we are committed to a negotiated solution and ceasefire. We pursue this daily by announcing humanitarian corridors.”

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**Question: Sergey Ryabkov has met with the US Ambassador several times in Moscow. These meetings were aimed at scaling down tensions between Moscow and Washington. What topics did they discuss?**

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**Maria Zakharova:** These were routine working contacts and they focused on technical issues of the national embassies' work in Moscow and Washington.

**Question:** During his visit to Finland, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that peace in Ukraine was possible, but the main issue is the price to be paid for it. He specified that what he meant by the price was territory, independence, sovereignty, freedom and democracy. According to him, the Alliance will continue to support the authorities in Kiev, but that it will do everything in its power to avoid an escalation with Russia. What do you think about this statement?

**Maria Zakharova:** This will not happen, this is not happening today, and this will not happen in the future. How can one work to escalate the situation, supply weapons and force others to supply weapons, impose sanctions and proclaim the main “goal” as “suffocating” Russia, and try to avoid an escalation at the same time? What is their concept of escalation? It's not even an attempt to sit on two chairs; it's a dichotomy.

It's hard to imagine peace in a country that receives tonnes of lethal weapons daily, primarily from NATO member states. I believe that it would be better to ask Mr Stoltenberg about the price that he is talking about. In any event, it is obvious that NATO and its Secretary-General care nothing about Ukraine and its citizens if they are talking about a certain “price.” It appears that they are using the destiny of Ukraine and its citizens as a legal tender.

Let's recall the gist of the problem: NATO perceives confrontation with Russia as an end in itself. NATO is not defending itself from any hypothetical threat. They declared this goal, and they veiled it in PR concepts. Later, all of them started saying openly that their main goal was confrontation with Russia and hostilities, and that the situation on the ground should be resolved by itself, etc. In this case, NATO sees Ukraine and Ukrainian citizens as expendable, as a tool and attendant costs. NATO sees them as convenient assets for achieving its goal. The longer they (I am talking about the armed forces of Ukraine here) conduct hostilities against the Russian armed forces, the better for the Alliance. This justifies NATO's existence today.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that this is not my concoction, but a statement by former US President George W. Bush that the mission of Ukraine is to kill as many Russians as possible. I am not saying that he is a very knowledgeable person (I don't want to discuss this topic right now), but, he is not only a representative of the US "deep state", he is part and parcel of this "deep state" and its political elite. Their clan governed the state for many years, Bush Sr and Bush Jr served as presidents for a long time. They had tremendous influence within the Republican Party, and they retain this influence today. They are closely linked with intelligence agencies and the defence industry. Naturally, they also control the energy sector. This a classic story. George W. Bush openly voiced an idea that many people still veil in elegant language. He made a straightforward statement that the mission of Ukraine was to kill as many Russians as possible. This is just about it. We need to talk about this. It appears that Mr Stoltenberg has elaborated on this idea, and he has said how much this will cost, and it had its own price. This price includes the lives of people whom the West had simply pitted against each other for many years. If you ask me about the situation around NATO (your question mentioned this aspect, one way or another), then, in my opinion, they should have thought about the consequences of providing political and material support to the actions of Ukrainian nationalists long ago. Alternatively, they could think about starting to look for ways to prevent an escalation that leads to a confrontation that nobody needs. They should think about these things. I don't want to advise them here but this is so obvious that I could not help but note this.

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**Question: The other day McDonald's re-opened for business under a new name in Russia. What are the prospects for this project? Will this model be used for other foreign-owned businesses?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Business model questions are best directed to the Ministry of Economic Development and, possibly, other agencies.

Our country and economy remain open to foreign investors. We are now in a beautiful showroom in St Petersburg filled with presentation booths about our economy's capabilities, which attract investors. We are open to foreign investors provided they comply with Russian legislation and corporate and social responsibility standards. This is the banal truth.

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**Question:** My question is about two maternity hospitals in Mariupol and Donetsk that you already mentioned today. The Western media reacted in a radically different manner to this. I remember Sergey Lavrov issuing a warning before the developments in Mariupol that the Ukrainian forces had taken the building. The Western media did not respond to that. You mentioned Kramatorsk and the “adjustments” that followed. Does this mean that there is hope for objective coverage of the situation in Ukraine? What is behind this difference of opinion when the “masks have been torn off,” or are they simply following orders?

**Maria Zakharova:** With regard to hopes for objectivity, this is a separate matter. Let's face it: objectivity is nonexistent when we talk about the Western media covering this conflict through its eyes, or via screens or newspapers. I read numerous reviews, digests, selected articles, etc. I see the African and Asian media outlets trying to maintain the balanced approach to coverage and to show different points of view with regard to this situation. They are sending their correspondents and asking questions, and doing their best to cover the situation. However, they realise that this is a complicated situation that is not unique in the world. The world has lived through many challenging situations. No doubt, peace and bringing an end to the conflict are everyone's priority. But it's not easy to do. Furthermore, a certain portion of the global political establishment is prepared, as they say, to “go all the way” in implementing their “morbid” ambitions, not being directly involved in this situation, but controlling the Kiev regime behind its back. I see this balance and objectivity in the media that I mentioned. Speaking of the situation in the countries to the west of our country, it is nothing short of a freak show, including Canada, the United States and the EU countries, but not all of them. Many of them are part of the Western information and political mainstream. Do you understand what this is all about? You can argue as much as you like and cite examples, but there is one colourful argument: journalists or publications that interview or publish Russia's point of view are being blackballed. That is, they are being subjected, at least such attempts are being made, to cancel culture in order to erase and annihilate them. This is what matters. This is an absolutely straightforward position to keep the Russian point of view from reaching the Western mainstream media. So, there can be no talk about objectivity when it comes to the Western media.

This may hold the answer to the question you asked about hope. This should not be our hope. This question is for them to answer. Do they need it or not? They are liberals. Their system is based on democracy as the core value and the freedom of speech that underlies democracy and primacy of liberalism. In fact, though, this is no longer about primacy, but dictate (this matter will be reviewed at our panel tomorrow). This is an existential issue for the West, even if it doesn't even try to ensure balance and objectivity. What we are witnessing are concrete efforts to remove every bit of dissent from the media space. What are we talking about? The question is best directed to them.

Indeed, it's amazing. As a reminder, the Western media first showed up in southeastern Ukraine, Donbass and at the line of contact in early 2022. What about before then? The major media corporations from the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France and Spain had no staff correspondents there for eight years. I'm well aware of the fact that nothing was reported. As a rule, staff reporters were sent there via Russia, or those who were stationed in Russia were delegated there. Almost all correspondents left Moscow for Ukraine to cover the events in early 2022. Why was nobody sent there for eight years, while 13,000 people were being killed? Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov used multiple opportunities to publicly encourage the correspondents go there. There was one story on the BBC, and then one in the US media. There were no broadcasts from there and no correspondents. They can tell me they weren't allowed there, but those who wanted went there to work, like the Italian journalists. This is telling. Unfortunately, I have to say for the third time that there has been no objective coverage in the Western media for a long time now.

Was the coverage of Syria, any other conflict or the sanctions objective? Never. However, if there are good faith reporters, working in that country, they must cite direct quotes from the US leaders. Although, for example, when President Trump spoke, they didn't quote him, or would use a direct quotation and then say that he was talking nonsense that didn't deserve to be listened to. Now, though, the US media need to listen to what the President of the United States has to say. In all seriousness, they are citing direct quotes to the effect that the rise in petrol and gas prices is a "Putin price hike," "Putin prices" and "Putin taxes." Not a single observer or correspondent is even trying to think about what they are blabbering about. You see, this is the question. We see this all the time. Probably, the situation concerning Ukraine has become the most odious in terms of coverage.

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**Question:** I have a question about the visits by Japanese people to the southern Kuril Islands. Japanese officials claim that their citizens have stopped visiting the region to honour their relatives' graves, but according to your Foreign Ministry, this practice continues. Can you explain, please?

**Maria Zakharova:** We have already given a detailed comment. I would like to add that these statements by Japanese officials is nothing other than the continued domestic political games of Fumio Kishida's administration. Apparently, they are trying to explain what is going on to their domestic audience. They cannot explain their anti-Russia sentiments, call things by their proper names and admit that it was Washington's orders. But it seems that it is about time.

We are surprised that Japanese officials are literally forcing this ban on visiting the graves on the islands. When this issue was discussed, it was they who said that it was necessary to provide Japanese citizens with the opportunity to visit the graves. I do not want to seem impolite or disrespect people's feelings, but they used the interests of their people to push through their approaches at some point. Today, on the contrary, they say that people who have relatives buried there should not visit them. Teams and politicians change but people who have relatives buried there are the same. It has come down to developing alternative solutions. For instance, burial rituals at sea were proposed and it was claimed that everyone was okay with them. So the question is why did they insist on visiting the graves? There is no logic in it. Russia's decision – driven by strictly humanitarian concerns – to preserve the practice of visiting graves after the epidemiological restrictions were lifted, based on an agreement of July 2, 1986, is being hushed up. Japanese people can visit the islands. This issue is politicised. All of this contradicts the national interests of Japan and their citizens, and is in fact a policy dictated by Washington.

If Japanese nationals want to commemorate their ancestors and visit the graves that are located on our country's territory, they can always do that. If someone prevents them from doing so, they need to understand that it is because of the Japanese officials' policy. Why are they doing this? In order to keep the issue of the islands afloat and implement the ideology inspired by the Americans. We will keep in mind the current actions of the Japanese authorities in our future contacts with them.

These days, I often quote this phrase: “Nothing on Earth passes without a trace.”

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**Question: The ECHR ruled that the Russian law On Foreign Agents violated human rights and awarded compensation of 10,000 euros to 73 Russian NGOs. Russia refused to comply with this requirement. But the lawsuits were filed with the ECHR long before March 15, when the country withdrew from the Council of Europe (in fact, some as far back as 2013). Does this mean the law has retroactive effect for Russia?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Do you not see what is going on in the world? Do you understand that nothing is left of the law, of international law? And this is partly due to the efforts of certain representatives of the ECHR. Many of their rulings did not just run counter to, but were downright antagonistic to any legal logic. This made Russia withdraw from the Council of Europe. Read the statements we have made on this score. It is entirely politicised. The law serves to fulfil political orders.

I understand that certain people have certain requirements and a different view on this foreign agency situation. We discussed this a year ago, at this same forum. I was the first to say that the foreign agency concept should have become a thing of the past, but we were forced to respond to the West reinstating it. This foreign agency thing is a US invention from the 1930s. They revived it at the beginning of the 21st century, primarily in relation to our country.

And now you're asking me what we think about this law having retroactive application? You have to be realistic and see what is happening in the world. Things approved by consensus, for example, by the WTO, get cancelled all at once. What kind of law are we talking about when the most active participants violate the WTO rules to ensure themselves advantages they cannot achieve due to free competition?

What else? Who ever heard of media outlets blocked solely on the basis of nationality? This is how policies of genocide originate – with entire information, cultural, humanitarian chunks being simply erased from the landscape of other countries. What kind of law are you talking about? What is it you're talking about? Show me where it's written. I can respond by showing you that this is impossible. America has amendments to the Constitution that guarantee freedom of speech. So what? They have been trampled on when Russian journalists, television channels designated as foreign agents have had their bank accounts blocked and their visas denied. Let's talk about the law, shall we? Have you forgotten about it?

We pulled out from the Council of Europe on March 15, 2022, made an official statement. As for the case you are referring to, among other things, the ECHR decision was fully predictable because it was politicised. This destroys the law in principle. It was in line with extremely liberal and neoliberal approaches to regulating civil society, and that was one of the reasons why Russia decided to withdraw from this organisation.

Liberal approaches have nothing to do with freedoms. This is a liberal dictatorship. As the court was reviewing that case, the Russian Federation pointed out how other countries were using the foreign agent term in their laws. They imposed very strict requirements on persons subject to regulation. Do you know what the ECHR said? The court completely ignored these arguments, bypassed our reasoning and indirectly agreed with the claimants and others, participating as a third party, that the US Foreign Agents Registration Act was totally different.

“This is different” seems to be a valid argument when they clamp down on all Russian media, conventional or social media, etc. They say, you aren’t journalists. So much for your laws. You are violating your own rules of regulation. They were told they weren’t journalists. Why is that? We are correspondents, we have been working for 25 years writing reviews, reporting from hot spots, members of the Union of Journalists of Russia or Moscow, or another region. We have international awards, we were nominated in your own countries for international awards in the field of information and journalism. You awarded us. But we aren’t journalists now? No, you aren’t. No longer journalists. What do you think of this?

Therefore, concerning this crisis in the legal sphere, these questions shouldn’t be addressed to me or to us, but to those who destroyed this international law and their own laws.

Remember the concept the West proclaimed five years ago? The rules-based international order. Here lies the answer to what is happening with the law. They are trying to completely destroy it, reduce it to a nice tradition and replace it with rules. These rules today, different ones tomorrow. Therefore, the double standards manifested in the practice of the ECHR fully confirmed that Russia made the correct decision on March 15, 2022 when it withdrew from the Council of Europe. Among other things, I would like to underscore that the President of Russia has signed a law making ECHR decisions non-enforceable. An official report has been released the other day. Changes have been made to the Code of Criminal Procedure and certain federal laws. The State Duma approved the new legislation on June 7, 2022, and the Federation Council, the next day. Russian courts will not have to comply with the ECHR rulings passed after March 15, when Russia decided to withdraw from the Council of Europe.

Everyone dreamed of living according to international law, according to the norms of international organisations, according to officially documented regulations. What has been left of it, with the “new” vision of the international order proclaimed by the “collective West”?

We are witnessing amazing things that are happening with national laws, bilateral agreements, and international legal norms. Will the world return to normal? I have no answer. We would like to have a common legal framework that would help avoid conflicts, suggest ways out of difficult situations, and, in one way or another, glorify equality and justice. What we see now is a reverse process.

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**Question: Yury Dud, Alexey Pivovarov, Alexey Venediktov and rapper Morgenstern... Personally, do you consider them agents of foreign states? Venediktov appeared to be recognised as a foreign agent because he received a salary from the radio station Ekho Moskvyy. Do you personally find these arguments persuasive?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I know many of the people you mentioned only casually, but I worked with some, gave interviews, etc. I believe some of the material published by those people whom I know, and which were written by themselves or by their employees, the teams they led, clearly indicate that they pursued a political line that was formed abroad, was prompted by certain services or countries. Every time I read those materials, I had a lot of questions. And I did put these questions to people I was in touch with, people I worked with in the information field, and so on. But I had more and more questions. It was absolutely obvious to me.

Would you like me to give you a specific example? Alexey Venediktov wrote something that surprised me and continues to surprise me (I have already spoken about this publicly). He holds absolutely pacifist views – he is for peace, against weapons, against violence. And I remember how, three or four years ago, Venediktov published photographs of young Israeli women with weapons in their hands on his social media pages every week, praising the youth and beauty of those defending their homeland. Those people, those young women wearing military uniforms and holding machine guns in their hands, were defending their Motherland – Israel – and that was beautiful, remarkable, a feat, heroism, and self-sacrifice. There were some emotional captions, too. And then something happened in his own country. Young men – probably, women, too – are involved in the special military operation. Tell me, are they not worthy of similar praise? Just as people? Don't they deserve it? Why should there be a change of attitude? If a person stands for peace, for pacifism, this person's position remains stable and does not change depending on the situation. The most important thing is that they're Russians, citizens of our country, people who are doing their duty. They deserve a similar kind of support too. But for some reason it's not there. And I wonder why people defending Israel delight the editor-in-chief of a Russian media outlet, as do politicians and leaders of other states, but everything connected with our country causes unfair criticism (this actually happened, and we answered it).

Many things reported by that radio station made me do some fact checking or thinking and give a refutation or, on the contrary, find confirmation. But for the most part, it was an endless “stream of consciousness” (you know who I'm quoting here). This term, stream of consciousness, taken from Western literature, has been often directed at us with a negative connotation. I asked myself these questions all the time.

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**Question (retranslated): You mentioned international law. We are now at an international forum that is based on rules for the entire world. Clearly, international cooperation is based on respect for sovereignty. President Putin compared the special military operation to what Peter the Great did during the Great Northern War, meaning that this territory is being returned to Russia by right. Don't you think this constitutes a violation of international law?**

**Maria Zakharova:** An excellent specimen of propaganda work. Have you ever tried to use this high-flown language to ask the US Secretary of State or the US President a question about recognising Kosovo's alleged sovereignty? You could also use this kind of beautiful and pontifical language at a briefing at the State Department or the White House to say that if we, the United States, are holding forums based on international law and norms that imply respect for the existing borders of sovereign states, then how come we, the United States, have been covering heinous crimes in Kosovo, including organ trafficking, and eventually “rewarded” (if I may put it that way) the thugs who ruled the roost there with the title of a sovereign state contrary to the UN Security Council resolution and the will of Belgrade and the people of Serbia, without even asking anyone for their opinion.

When will you start talking like that with your leaders and officials? Are you directing these questions only at us? Everything is fine with international law in our country. We have always upheld it. We are doing our best to put it into practice contrary to what the United States may have planned. I can answer your question. Let's go back to 2014. A referendum was held in Crimea amid an anti-constitutional coup. Lawfully elected President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, who, regardless of what you may think of him, was recognised by the Western community and was its best friend until late 2013, when he suddenly came up with a question about what he should do with the two CIS integration associations in which his country participates and the ones in the EU that he was invited to join. He wanted a pause of up to six months to harmonise these processes. The next day he woke up as an objectionable “criminal.” The EU stopped talking to him despite the fact that a week before that he was a guest of honour at an EU forum. He was toppled in the most horrifying and bloody manner, with fatalities on the Maidan, with the use of gunmen and the American money and the political support of the EU. Your government has done all of that by precision management. A high-ranking representative of the US State Department personally participated in these events, not just meddling in Ukraine’s internal affairs, but leading the political processes that were brewing there with the support of gunmen. Viktor Yanukovich was removed from office.



The regions that you care so much about, the Ukrainian territories with remaining legally and democratically elected power of the people chose not to swear allegiance to the “government” that came to power as a result of this coup. These people decided to keep this legitimate power that was recognised by international law and not to obey the rabid impostors. They began to defend the people's power with the support of the people. Crimea held a referendum. What an endeavour that was! There have always been efforts to block referendums. They held a referendum and Russia was supportive of this decision. Donetsk and Lugansk have also held a referendum. Let's call a spade a spade. They gave the Western community an opportunity to prove themselves on the negotiating track in order to preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity and the Ukrainian state itself. They came up with the first Minsk Package of Measures and took the declaration of will expressed at that referendum under advisement. They teamed up with the Western community represented by Berlin and Paris in order to work together on the negotiating track. They've been putting up with this mayhem for eight years. For eight years, people have been killed there. For eight years we've been witnessing and most recently put on record a buildup of the armed forces of all stripes. They were killing civilians and volunteers, the people who were part of the resistance (you called them separatists) and who signed the Minsk Agreements that stated that the DPR and LPR were part of Ukraine. You still called them separatists. Why? They just wanted and tried to live within Ukraine. But you insisted that they were separatists, even after more than 13,000 people died. This is not just hostilities. This is about mass graves and killing children. What about the skyrocketing number of NATO exercises in the Black Sea? In 2021 alone, there were seven of them, and nine more were planned to be held next year. The number of NATO combat units (weapons, instructors and military personnel) increased by an order of magnitude. It was clear which way it was going. After that, we recognised the obvious – the declared independence of the DPR and LPR in order to stop the loss of lives and guarantee them their safety at their own request. What are you talking about? Point me to where this international law was not respected? The references to the UN Charter that we made were exactly the same as NATO and the EU were making when they carried out their operations. Show me where this logic is failing.

Arms, including Soviet ones, are being supplied to Ukraine, which completely violates every obligation ever assumed by the Western countries that are encouraging these supplies. I posted a material to that effect on Telegram. Read it. But you have no interest in that. So, save this language for US politicians and government officials and put these questions to future US presidential candidates and nominees to Congress. Hold them answerable in the same manner.

**Question: That doesn't really answer the question. I would like to remind you that the war in Iraq and Afghanistan was widely covered by the US media. My question is whether taking back and strengthening other countries' territories constitutes a violation of international law?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I understand that the “#thisisdifferent” topic will start again now. What was the legal basis for invading Iraq? I didn't say anything about Iraq, you mentioned it. Was there any legal basis for invading Iraq? Tell me.

**Question: We are not talking about Iraq. What is the difference now? You are invading a sovereign country.**

**Maria Zakharova:** Do you understand what a referendum is? The referendum was held in Donetsk and Lugansk. You just forgot about it.

**Question: It has not been recognised.**

**Maria Zakharova:** So, what matters is not the will of the people, but who recognised it or didn't recognise it? Do I follow your logic?

**Question: That's why the United Nations was founded to recognise or not recognise certain referendums.**

**Maria Zakharova:** What territories are you talking about that we seized and annexed?

**Question (retranslated): The entire region of the Azov Sea, Kiev, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson region and other regions. Many...**

**Maria Zakharova:** The territories of Donetsk and Lugansk?

**Question: Not only them, as you are well aware, but also Kiev and Odessa.**

**Maria Zakharova:** The territories that you mentioned are they part of Donetsk and Lugansk?

**Question: The Donetsk and Lugansk regions, yes.**

**Maria Zakharova:** We have recognised the territories of Donetsk and Lugansk as sovereign states. They held referendums which, as I said, reflected the will of the people. We took note of this and started a negotiation process on reintegrating these regions with the “Ukrainian statehood” and have been doing this for eight years now. The eight years of talks were not easy. They started out with Ukraine’s unfavourable living conditions. Because of the anti-constitutional coup, Ukraine began to disintegrate. One part held a referendum, which we recognised and we reunited with this territory. I mean Crimea. Other parts – Donetsk and Lugansk – held referendums, and the people had their say, but we gave an opportunity for the Western countries to start the negotiation process in order to have these regions reintegrate with the rest of Ukraine. Aren’t you aware of that? You aren’t aware of what the talks were all about during the eight years? Are you new to this topic? The talks were about giving a new start to life in Ukraine with account taken of the interests and rights of the DPR and the LPR (Donbass. Unfortunately, eight years later the talks came to a dead end not even because of Kiev’s position, but because of the position of Washington, which stood behind the Kiev regime. All this ended with the fact that over the past 18 months the Ukrainian president and officials from the Ukrainian ministries and other agencies have been saying that the Minsk Agreements are no longer valid and are inconsistent with the situation on the ground and they will no longer feel obligated, especially as it was not they themselves who signed them. They say they were signed in circumstances that no longer exist. Kiev has put a stop to the negotiating process. You must make an effort and make sense of the facts. What were the talks about? It's complicated. I understand. When you are not using clichés, but base your reasoning on the facts, it may be a fairly challenging process. But it is there. The negotiating process was about reintegrating the DPR and LPR on certain terms, with which Kiev and Donetsk and Lugansk agreed. The Normandy format members were instrumental in facilitating this process. The talks were not about improving economic life in Donetsk or Lugansk, and not about the humanitarian component of Donbass. They were about ways to reintegrate these territories with Ukraine. It was up to the participants whether this would work or not. It didn't work out because of the Kiev regime, backed by Washington. There’s no need to pretend that this never happened and it all began only in 2022. It’s a long story based on its own logic.

You just mentioned the UN which was created on certain principles. Which country of the collective West, in its policy, has ever shown respect for the fundamental principles of the UN? You say you don't need anyone to tell you about Iraq. Why shouldn't we tell you about Iraq? We should. These were the coalition members. France and Germany were a rare exception, but these were mostly NATO members and there were others. There was Ukraine, too. Few people remember that now, but Ukraine was also part of the invasion and destruction of a sovereign state. Perhaps, this is the right place to look for the source of disrespect for the UN and its Charter and the fundamental principles. That's why you don't like it when people talk about Iraq. But it started with you. Shall we talk about Libya maybe?

**Question (retranslated from English): We can talk about Libya and Afghanistan, but Ukraine is being invaded now, so I propose that we talk about it. You are representing the Russian Foreign Ministry. Let's talk about Ukraine. Your government said it wanted the Minsk agreements to be relaunched and complied with. When you talk about Donetsk and Lugansk, I'm not sure that their liberation can justify the attacks on Kharkov. Is this the new mantra: the occupation of the territories that were initially Russian? What does it mean? Where will it stop? Isn't this a violation of international law established after WWII?**

**Maria Zakharova:** You say that I am not answering your question. You don't like how I am answering, but I am answering. My answer may not be what you want to hear, but it doesn't mean that I am not answering your question. We can talk again about the fundamental principles. International law is not a smorgasbord from which you choose what you wish and like. International law stipulates rights and duties for all. One of the world's largest countries has announced that it considers itself to be exceptional and will not comply with international law. Why do you demand that all other countries accept this situation? The United States declared American exceptionalism. We said that it is a faulty concept, and that no country has a right to exclude itself from international law. We also pointed out that the United States and a group of NATO countries are trying to destroy international law, on paper and in practice. We provided many examples of this, and we warned that international law could cease to exist under this system. It is being attacked, and the practical examples of these attacks are the bombing of Belgrade, the occupation of Iraq and the destruction of Libya. You don't want to talk about this, but I would like to remind you that US forces are currently deployed in Syria. I suggest that you attend to what US troops are doing in Syria. Nobody has invited them there: neither individual regions of that country, nor the government in Damascus or civil society. But the American troops are there. Now, ask yourself if you are complying with international law. If you do, you have a right to demand an answer from other countries as well. Or do you regard international law as an instrument of your policy and think that you have a right to provide moral assessments of all others? There is only one answer to the question about what US troops are doing in Syria: they are trying to seize the resources which belong to the Syrian people and which the United States needs.

You have asked me about the developments in Donetsk, Lugansk and Ukraine. I have told you that over the past eight years the talks failed to produce any concrete political solution to the conflict, which started after the 2014 coup, because of the stand taken by the Kiev regime. Regrettably, an obvious crisis at the talks forced Donetsk and Lugansk to declare their independence. The Russian Federation took into account the slaughter that went on there for eight years, when civilians were killed and a whole generation of children grew up in basements. You can't understand this. Russia made a decision to recognise these sovereign territories, accepted their ambassadors and provided the assistance they asked for. The West started to pour fuel on the flames by sending more and more weapons and egging the Kiev regime on to wage this proxy war against Russia. I don't know what else to say to make you understand. If anything is unclear to you, please say what it is exactly that you don't understand.

**Question: I am the editor-in-chief of the Society and Environment newspaper that has been published for 23 years and I am also Chairman of the Union of Donbass People of St Petersburg and the Leningrad Region. I want to thank Sergey Lavrov for his clear civic position. I also would like to recommend that my colleague from CNN travel to Lugansk and Donetsk and talk to ordinary people there.**

**Maria Zakharova:** CNN can't afford it. CNN's editorial board is in the United States. They will never be sent there because if they were, they would have to tell the truth.

You have my permission to interview a representative of Donbass, who is in this building and who is a journalist, your colleague. Start with him, talk to him. You will never be allowed to air this story. You know this better than I do. You know this. These stories will never appear on CNN, because otherwise paid protesters will start encircling the CNN headquarters. And they will cancel you the way they cancel all those who reveal the truth. What permission do you need to interview a man who has come from Donbass? No need for any permission! I have allowed you [to do that]. He is willing as well. Talk to him. He will tell you the truth. After all, you are so fond of showing footage with ordinary people from this or that region. You are so fond of showing the everyday life of an ordinary Ukrainian. Here is an ordinary resident of Donbass for you. He is a colleague of yours. Talk to him.

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**Question:** Are there prospects for the DPR and the LPR joining Russia? The St Petersburg International Economic Forum is 25 years old today. Can you compare it with the Davos Economic Forum, which is 51 years old? Isn't the Davos forum past it, incapable of anything, while our St Petersburg forum is a "pinnacle of philosophical thought" going from strength to strength? It is quite important for us to know your point of view, as a diplomat, on these two economic forums, Western and Russian.

**Maria Zakharova:** Let me start with the second question. I do not think it necessary to compare St Petersburg and Davos forums. The local agenda is absolutely clear and transparent. There are regions with potential, there are companies, and there is room for direct additional contacts on various matters. The SPIEF lacks the backstage intrigue; the speakers are open-minded, the conversations do not "charge" you with political speculations but are on the contrary about the primacy of cooperation and they provide opportunities to make deals, find partners, etc. I'd rather not characterise the other forums.

We are open to everything. As a country holding a huge number of forums in both its west and east, Russia has never indulged in selectivity or denied anyone an opportunity to attend a forum. Even during these days, when there are attempts to "cancel" us, we are open, including to guests and participants from these "concrete" countries. I know that in the case of these Western regimes, all of this is temporary, superficial and connected with pressure from Washington. This is not part of their values or cultural code. People must not suffer, businesses should continue operating despite Washington's hard work and all-out attempts to break all these economic chains and cross out all agreements signed by private companies and government agencies.

Now back to the first question. Thank you for trusting us. I think you remember everything Russian leaders said while answering questions of this kind. They spoke about sovereign countries and peoples, which independently decide their future. Let us proceed from our position of principle.

I think all of us will have an opportunity to listen to both the President of Russia and the Russian Foreign Minister on the sidelines of this forum. They are certain to speak at length on this topic.

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**Question: Some of Yury Dud's works have been declared extremist by Belarus. We think this is absolutely justified. Is Russia planning to learn from the experience of Belarus in its information policy, in its efforts to ensure information security, given that the selfsame Yury Dud' distorted the facts connected with the Beslan tragedy in his film?**

**Maria Zakharova:** There are relevant agreements between Russian and Belarusian media outlets. Consultations are also held at the Foreign Ministry and within the framework of the Union State. Dmitry Mezentsev is focusing on this sphere. We exchange best practices and help each other in some respects. This is a live and regular dialogue.

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**Question: You said earlier that “nothing on Earth passes without a trace.” The Belarusian Prosecutor-General's Office has opened a criminal case into the genocide of the Russian nation during the Great Patriotic War. Will Russia open any similar cases in the context of the staged massacre in Bucha and other similar provocations? Is Russia planning to file lawsuits and complaints in order to attract attention?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I would rather not answer this question. This is within the remit of other Russian agencies, civil society and political parties.

I would like to say that I bow low before the employees of museums in St Petersburg and the Leningrad Region. I attended the Likhachev Readings in St Petersburg, and I visited Peterhof, Tsarskoye Selo, Oranienbaum, Pavlovsk and other places in my spare time. We were told about Russian history during the reign of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. In fact, those outstanding people built this city. I bow low before the staff of museums in the city and its environs for devoting separate guided tours to the plight of these areas during the Great Patriotic War. They tell visitors how selfless people preserved landmarks and monuments, prepared them for evacuation, and how they sacrificed everything, including their lives, in order to preserve all this heritage.



What is genocide? We usually perceive it as physical destruction alone, and this is the way it has always been presented. However, it is actually the destruction of a community of people for cultural, religious, national, ethnic and other reasons. It means the destruction of our cultural code. On the other hand, our nation was multi-ethnic. Everyone suffered, including Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Jews, Tatars and all other ethnicities. Nearly all guides talked about the siege of Leningrad. They discussed this subject at the end of guided tours and told visitors arriving from various Russian cities and regions what the siege of Leningrad was all about. All pets and other animals perished in the city, and people had to boil leather belts and bags in order to survive. This sounds familiar to every resident of St Petersburg, Leningrad and the Leningrad Region. I didn't know that, when artillery shells hit the food warehouses (where sugar was stored), people carried away lumps of sugar-soaked earth, and that they boiled those lumps to get at least something nutritious. While discussing lofty subjects, our guides also talked about the ordeals of this city's residents. What was that if not genocide? I don't know what legal or legislative framework those events fit. This question should be put before specialists, representatives of relevant departments. I don't know how else to call it. It was the destruction of people along ethnic, national, regional, territorial and other lines, as well as the destruction of their culture.

Some photos show that during the first post-war years we had to rebuild the utterly devastated country from the ashes and ruins and to redress the damage caused by the German and other Axis forces. Their primary objective was to plunder and to take away as much as possible. They wanted to raze everything to the ground, so that all that would remain was scorched and barren earth. This wasn't an ordinary war. Today, they have invented a seemingly nice-sounding formula for themselves: cancelling Russian culture and cancelling Russia. We have experienced this many times in our history, we have repeatedly defended our country, and we will do it this time once again.

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**Question: We know that the United States and its Western partners are sending modern weapons to Ukraine and that foreign instructors are working there. Do you think this proxy war in Ukraine could develop into a direct conflict between Russia and the United States?**

**Maria Zakharova:** It is the worst possible apocalyptic scenario for the international community. I abhor the very idea of this. We never wanted a confrontation with NATO. We regarded this military bloc as a fact of life, tried to develop relations with it and interaction on issues of mutual interest. We had the Russia-NATO Founding Act and a permanent mission to NATO. Our diplomats were aware of the bloc's Cold War mentality but tried to shift our relations to a new level through cooperation, to show the priority significance and mutual benefits of addressing the existing issues together rather than creating problems where none existed before. We did look for forms of cooperation to strengthen stability and security on the European continent. We tried doing all of that. We put forth and implemented many initiatives.

Based on this approach, in late 2021 Russia asked for security guarantees from Washington and its allies. We knew that our friendly approach was disregarded and that the processes underway within the NATO framework were headed in the opposite direction. NATO member states refused to hold a frank discussion on this issue. Instead, they egged Kiev on to use military force to settle the problem of Donbass, which could have led to genocide, including of a large group of Russian citizens who lived in that region. You are right in that we see the current developments in Ukraine as a proxy war. Its target is Russia. Sergey Lavrov spoke about this in detail. Incidentally, the White House has openly described Russia's special military operation as an existential challenge. The United States and other NATO countries are sending unprecedented funds and large arms supplies to Kiev as part of their policy of an active containment of Russia. There is also tinkering with funds when the money provided for a specific purpose is misused. The Biden administration allocated \$13.6 billion to Ukraine this spring alone, and it has recently decided to give it another \$40 billion.

Officials in Brussels and NATO member states have stated on numerous occasions that they don't want a direct confrontation with Russia. But these words come into conflict with their actions. Time will show if they comply with the declared approach. So far, their actions are evidence of opposite intentions.

One more thing: Russia and the United States as nuclear powers bear special responsibility to the world and so must find the best possible forms of peaceful coexistence in the interests of humankind. Keeping the world from a nuclear disaster is the responsibility of nuclear states. It is our position of principle. The question is how soon Washington accepts the new geopolitical reality and abandons its claims to hegemony.

It is a difficult and largely painful process for the United States, but it is the only option.

Our mention of the nuclear issues invariably provokes hysterics and distortion of facts, including in US television networks, newspapers and other resources. They claim that Russia's position is threatening nuclear stability and security, even though everyone, from the president, ministers, the military to civil society representatives, say that our position has not changed a bit. We stick to our previous approaches in this respect. And then a member of the European Parliament, not an ordinary MEP but former Foreign Minister of Poland Radoslaw Sikorski, openly called for providing Ukraine with nuclear weapons to help defend itself against Russia or use them in any other way. The international community turned a deaf ear to the proposed violation of the non-proliferation regime, which could lead to nuclear proliferation, considering lax control over anything in Ukraine during the past decades. And Kiev is not the only one with this deficiency.

The Czech Republic, a NATO member state, didn't know what weapons were stored in its warehouses and what went on there. When the blasts burned the warehouses down, it took the country years to investigate the case. Unable to pinpoint the culprits, Prague placed the blame on Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov. It needed to write off the losses, including financial ones. This is how well NATO countries control their weapons.

And it is amid this chaos raging in the NATO countries that somebody proposed giving nuclear weapons to Ukraine. Can you imagine what this would lead to? Every single industry and sector in Ukraine has been thoroughly corrupted over the past decade. And they want to give it nuclear weapons. The idea has been voiced by a Pole who – a rabbit out of the hat – is married to Anne Applebaum, a US-born Anglo-Saxon propagandist. She is not an outright Russophobe who hates everything Russian, but she has published “historical surveys” that are full of horrible lies. Her husband, a citizen of the country that borders Ukraine, has proposed sending nuclear weapons to Kiev. He should be concerned about his country and people. Or does he think that he and his wife will be able to hide from Armageddon somewhere far away from Poland? He used to be foreign minister and so should be aware of the potential consequences of such ideas. No one will be safe. Remember Fukushima? Even the Japanese with their smart technologies weren’t able to do anything: water and everything else around the nuclear power station are still polluted. Chernobyl had been their number one concern for years, and then all of a sudden such an initiative. Notably, any mention of peaceful uses of nuclear energy and supplies of nuclear technology in accordance with existing standards and rules provokes protest rallies under the banner of American “NGOs.” Contracts are wrecked under the pretext of danger. Yet now they have proposed providing nuclear weapons to Ukraine. That’s all we need for a total apocalypse.

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**Question: Soon the 14th BRICS Summit will be held under China’s chairmanship. Today, the world is undergoing big changes and geopolitical tensions. The aftermath of the pandemic is affecting the full resumption of the global economy. In this context, what role do you think the BRICS member countries should play and what do you expect from the upcoming summit? What do you think the advantages of BRICS are in comparison with other international associations?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Regarding the upcoming BRICS events, I will speak in general, because it is the President’s Executive Office that gives comments on summits. In fact, we expect a constructive exchange of views on current issues on the world agenda from cooperation in this association in all its formats.

We see prospects for building up the BRICS strategic partnership in three main areas: politics and security, the economy and finance, and cultural and humanitarian ties. As the current BRICS chair, China has focused on strengthening multilateralism, cooperation in the fight against COVID-19, accelerated recovery of the global economy, and the implementation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda. We presume and are convinced that all these topics will be discussed in detail and will be reflected in the final declaration of the leaders. We believe this upcoming high-level event will help to sum up the preliminary results of China's chairmanship this year. Among its achievements is the launch of the BRICS centre for online research and development of vaccines, the beginning of the practical implementation of the cooperation agreement on the space-based remote sensing of the Earth, and completion of the work on the agreement on cooperation and mutual administrative assistance in BRICS customs issues; as well as the approval of the initiative to eliminate "safe havens" for corrupt officials and criminal assets.

We believe a separate session in the BRICS+ format featuring the leaders of several partner countries to be especially important. Our association has traditionally defended the interests of developing countries and stood for increasing their role in the global decision-making process regarding key international issues.

Today BRICS is one of the modern dynamic international platforms. This is a clear and successful example of true multilateralism and effective cooperation where the countries' combined efforts are dictated by their common interests. In cases where their approaches do not coincide, creative work is being done to harmonise them. Amid escalating tensions on the global stage, the five countries are serving as the keepers of true multilateralism based on an equal and mutually respectful dialogue, as well as a common approach to addressing current global challenges and a sensible balance of interests.

The role of BRICS in international affairs is constantly growing, which is quite natural considering its growth dynamics and potential. This includes a broad resource base, including labour, human resources, and everything related to resources, as well as a key place in global transport, logistics, and production chains. At the end of 2021, the nominal GDP of the association was about a quarter of the global total. And in terms of purchasing-power parity, BRICS outperformed the G7 in total numbers, according to the IMF's 2021 estimations: \$45.5 trillion against \$44 trillion. All this gives the five countries an opportunity to participate in shaping the global agenda and to be at the leading edge of efforts to ensure sustainable global development.

The democratic nature of this format and the lack of focus on subversive approaches or building friendships “against someone” is a BRICS advantage. We have our own interests, and we are eager to cooperate with each other. There is no goal to use our joint resources and opportunities against anyone. The fact that these five states have grown from different civilisations is very important. The main thing is to find a common language. Though we have different religious and historically different cultures, we are all authentic, and this makes the association attractive to other countries. This makes it possible for BRICS to find a worthy place in the international system of coordinates and become an important integral element of global management, the embodiment of the growing consolidation of positions, so-called new development centres.

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**Question: During his visit to Yerevan, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed hope that the Commission on the Delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Border would review and resolve the situation around the village of Parukh, where the Azerbaijani troops moved in March of this year in violation of the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020.**

**At the same time, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan said on June 14 in an interview with Al Jazeera that the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh is not related to the delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.**

**How will the situation around Parukh be resolved, and is there a connection between security and borders in Nagorno-Karabakh and the delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border?**

**Maria Zakharova:** The activity of the Commission on the Delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Border is not related to the situation around the village in the Askeran District of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is in the area of responsibility of the Russian peacekeeping contingent. We hope that the launch of the commission and its uninterrupted work will facilitate trust between Baku and Yerevan, and prevent incidents both on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and in the area of responsibility of the Russian peacekeeping forces.

**Question: When will Moscow host talks of the Commission on the Delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Border? We hear that they will be held soon, but the date constantly gets postponed.**

**Maria Zakharova:** We praised the holding of the first meeting of the bilateral Commission on the Delimitation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Border on May 24, 2022. It was agreed that the second meeting would take place in Moscow. We are ready to organise it at the earliest opportunity. We are waiting for our Armenian and Azerbaijani partners to suggest a date.

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**Question: Regarding the fishing agreement that gives Japan the right to fish near the South Kuril Islands. You said that at the moment, a decision was made to suspend the agreement until the Japanese party pays off a financial debt. But there are concerns about the agreement itself being “unilateral and unequal.” Also, Deputy Prime Minister Yury Trutnev said that Russian fishermen will use these waters. How will this story continue? Will there be talks with Japan?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We gave a detailed comment on the situation on June 7, 2022, which is posted on the Foreign Ministry website. Following the consultations on the 1998 agreement that took place last year, the sides agreed on fishing for the upcoming season (2022). Fishing began in January. However, the Japanese party used various pretexts to drag out the signing of an executive agreement on providing free technical assistance to the Sakhalin Region, and thus failed to fulfil its obligations. You know well the results of such irresponsible behaviour. It would be logical to ask the Japanese Foreign Ministry for the information on specific financial figures. Tokyo knows perfectly well what it is about.

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**Question: The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, declared that the EU should do everything in its power to maintain dialogue with Moscow. Speaking in an interview with a French weekly, he said that the EU would have to coexist with Russia after the hostilities in Ukraine are over and that it will not be easy. What sentiments are there inside your agency in connection with these pronouncements?**

**Maria Zakharova:** They are amazing people. I know how hard it is for them. Every day (I have this impression), they take a new lease of life, given their directly opposing statements. Now Mr Borrell says: “War, war, and again war,” now he declares that it is necessary to “coexist with Russia,” although prior to that he insisted that Russia “must be defeated.” I want to set their minds at rest. They should at last make the final choice. After all, they believe they have “cancelled” us. If so, who will they “coexist” with? In their paradigm, we no longer exist, if I understand their “cancel culture” correctly. So, whom are they going to coexist or restore something with? They are well aware how consolidated the Russian people are with regard to this issue. Based on various information sources and drawing their own conclusions, people have come together in rejecting the West’s destructive logic with regard to our people, state, and nation.

Performed by the Western diplomats and representatives of US administrations, these somersaults are the consequence of their realisation that things are not going according to plan. Of course, they want to “cancel” and “defeat” us. At the same time, they want to dominate us, but just in case they also want to coexist with us. They have got into a mess and become entangled in lies. To my mind, they need somehow to adjust their values and “basic principles” and develop a logical and unified policy. But they are mistaken if they think that this policy should be about “cancelling” Russia or “containing” Russia in its development. They will end up alone, if they persist with these approaches. More than that, the world at large is watching the current developments: Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of the planet are drawing their own conclusions about the West’s reliability as a partner who aspires to some leadership functions.

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**Question: What do you think about current relations between Russia and China? What is being done to promote relations between both countries?**



**Maria Zakharova:** The all-round development of strategic partnership with China is a priority of the Russian Federation's foreign policy. President Vladimir Putin has described relations between Moscow and Beijing as a model of efficiency, responsibility and aspiration for the future. He has also highlighted their unprecedented level (this is already a set phrase) and age-old traditions of friendship. Bilateral cooperation is based on profound mutual trust and is not subject to time-serving external changes. However, we see the insistent attempts by others to drive a wedge between us. At the same time, the approaches I mentioned continue to prevail. Experience of the past few years has repeatedly shown this.

The world is now going through drastic geopolitical transformations, and relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation with China are passing the endurance test with flying colours and are intensifying in line with the rapidly changing situation.

Our dialogue is based on strategic directives that have been approved by the leaders of both countries. On February 4, 2022, the leaders of both states held their first offline talks in more than two years, and they reaffirmed their assessment of bilateral relations and similar approaches to global developments. The President of Russia visited Beijing and attended the opening ceremony of the 2022 Olympic Winter Games. We are steadily implementing various decisions elaborated during the summit and aiming to strengthen cooperation.

We are purposefully implementing all approved interaction programmes and ambitious trade and economic, science and technological, industrial, transportation, agricultural and other projects. We are steadily expanding fuel and energy deliveries. China knows exactly what it wants and does not shoot itself in the foot, while the West is apparently shooting itself in the head. Both nations are strengthening their mutual friendship, and this friendship is forming a solid foundation of public support for Russian-Chinese partnership.

Moscow and Beijing play an important, stabilising role in today's international affairs, which are experiencing profound changes. They facilitate the democratisation of the system of interstate relations in an effort to make it more equitable and truly inclusive. They intend to continue intensively coordinating their steps on the international scene. This will make it possible to strengthen both countries' global positions still further and to attain results that we would be unable to achieve separately. This is clear, as the world is inter-dependent.

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**Question: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said [as part of the Yevgeny Primakov Gymnasium's "100 questions for a leader" project] that Russia should stop its dependence on all Western supplies. Does this mean that Russia is turning away from the West for good and will develop an alliance (rather than a partnership) with China?**

**Maia Zakharova:** I have just given a detailed answer to the question on the development of our relations with China. We were developing our bilateral ties regardless of what happened in other regions of the world or what the dynamics were there. We have always noted that our Foreign Policy Concept and other doctrinal documents reflected the multi-vector character of our policy. This is not an artificial goal but a natural course of developments in our country, considering our geography, history and geopolitics. The events of the past few months (and years) have emphasised the topicality of our multi-vector policy and have demonstrated the West's attitude towards us. We had a stable attitude towards our Western partners. We understood that they acted out of time-serving considerations. This doesn't mean that we accepted their actions. We always suggested having normal, stable and mutually beneficial relations. We believed that competition was a normal and natural part of relations and the international agenda. We also thought that competition in the world market should be ruled by the same market mechanisms on which their liberal systems insisted. But everything proved to be somewhat different. The West itself renounced this mutually beneficial partnership and cooperation by persistently destroying the entire fabric of our economic, financial and energy ties. It is not even worth talking about security issues because all the documents on which strategic stability and security relied have been thrown out (this is concerning international law). The West has unilaterally torn everything down.

As for Sergey Lavrov's citation, I'd quote it in full. This is what Foreign Minister Lavrov said: "We must stop being in any way dependent on Western supplies of whatever it may be to ensure the development of critically important industries for the security, the economy and the social sphere of our Motherland." I don't know what else I should explain here. The industries critical for our security must not depend on Western supplies. Why? Because when hard times arrive and we don't find points of contact or enter a direct competition, and it develops into a fight without rules, these supplies are instantly discontinued. Not by us but by the Western community. Are we the only country the West treats like this? Of course, not. Look at what was done with the countries that protested illegal, disrespectful or destructive Western actions. They were instantly blocked along the perimeter. It is impossible to do this with regard to our country. The West can block itself and this is exactly what it did. If they isolated anyone, they isolated themselves from us. This is the truth. They succeeded in isolating themselves. It is impossible to isolate us. Maybe they can even cancel the world, but nobody can isolate our country from anything.

Everything is clear here. How will this be done? This is a question for our relevant departments. Obviously, we are “regrouping” forces even in our foreign policy. Diplomats, other employees and experts in charge of promoting Russian foreign policy and implementing it in the West, have been expelled on a mass scale. They were banned from entering EU countries, the United States and Canada. They will be reappointed to CIS, Asian and African countries where we have normal, stable prospects for mutually advantageous cooperation, where it is interesting for us to work, where people look forward to our arrival and are willing to develop ties with us if the West doesn’t want, need or like them. But this is not the case – it wants, needs and likes them but the problem is that one state has decided to reign supreme in all areas and order other countries what to do. It is impossible to try to prove to our EU partners that their policy is suicidal. It is impossible to renounce the energy resources or diversification of their supplies, the obvious, geographically natural cooperation with one sixth of the Earth’s area on which they border, and mutual security guarantees since we live on the same continent. This is impossible. We are not their nanny, after all. They must learn to hold their head up themselves. But this is not happening. Why? The answer is obvious. Because they lost their independence and sovereignty. Apparently, trying to delegate their powers to Brussels, they inadvertently sent the control panel to Washington. In other words, at first, they integrated the economy and finances and delegated all their power to Brussels. Later, political considerations gradually prevailed over financial and economic collaborations in this union, and eventually NATO trampled this part down. That’s all. They wanted to integrate to minimise the damage and economic and financial losses, avoid double taxation, create a common territory for travel and ease an enormous amount of bureaucratic rules. All this was going fine until a “substitution error” took place in their administrative offices. And that was all it was. This was confirmed by Brexit in 2021. It was presented as a “domestic” mistake made by the British political establishment at some point. Meanwhile, this was not a mistake but a deliberate policy aimed at leaving the EU, that was tied up and had delegated its national sovereignty to a single decision-making centre where administrative settings had undergone a change. NATO replaced the EU and turned it into its own economic department. It might be possible to nurture illusions if this were not clear. But if we understand this, how can we build relations based on trust? We can’t. The lack of trust was obvious for a long time. We suggested many alternatives to move forward together until the very last minute, but we were denied this opportunity.

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**Question:** The expulsions of Russian diplomats from unfriendly states have created personnel problems and seriously complicated the work of Russian consular departments. Online appointments for submitting applications and documents aren't available for months, but expiration dates for documents have not been extended, and this leads to a whole range of questions and problems. People's passports expire. Because many Russian citizens reside in unfriendly states, this problem affects many people and entire families. Is it possible to resolve the problem with foreign-travel passports for compatriots? Does the Foreign Ministry plan to start hiring, at least for technical positions, Russian citizens who permanently reside in those countries or to outsource some of this work to organisations of compatriots? This could relieve the tension and seriously improve the quality of consular services on the ground.

**Maria Zakharova:** We have seen some progress in this area recently. But let's begin with the series of expulsions. That was definitely the result of advanced planning by Western countries trying to disrupt the work of our foreign missions towards upholding the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens permanently or temporarily residing and working on the territory of the respective foreign states.

Poland is one of the most revealing examples. A large number of refugees, displaced persons arriving from Ukraine use Poland as a transit harbour before they can reach Russia via various routes, and then either return to Donetsk or Lugansk, or stay in the Russian Federation. I have a feeling that the Polish authorities have deliberately done everything they could to expel all of our diplomats so that they could not help those people. I have seen many stories where not only Russian citizens, but also citizens of Ukraine, who ended up there, called our consulates, the Foreign Ministry, the Information Department directly asking for help, because they found themselves in difficult life circumstances and wanted to go to Russia. Even taking calls requires employees. In the first weeks, Russian consulates provided broad assistance. But the Polish authorities quickly expelled our diplomats. After this, how can they say that they care about the people, or make the humanitarian aspects a priority?

One of the possible solutions to make consular services more accessible for Russian citizens abroad would be to take some additional measures to help applicants properly file and fill out the documents they will then submit to the consular office requesting a particular service. This would significantly increase the throughput capacity of each consular office with the same number of employees by reducing the time needed to serve each applicant as well as waiting times.

On June 9, the Government submitted a draft federal law to the State Duma, which we believe should develop the regulatory framework, which would facilitate the creation of a consular version of integrated government service centres at Russian foreign missions. You probably know what an integrated service centre is. Moscow has made a breakthrough victory over bureaucracy. It would be great to extend and replicate this practice.

Such special consular service centres would provide qualified consultancy and assistance to citizens in the preparation of documents and preliminary verification. They can even accept documents when they are ready in cases that do not require an applicant's personal visit. They will operate under the local legal framework, which means that their operation, including hiring locals, will not require approval from the host country's authorities like consular offices and diplomats do.

In fact, similar private centres are already operating in many countries with large Russian communities. Their ads are all over the internet, but the quality of their services and their legitimacy are questionable.

As for the integrated service centres mentioned in the new legislation, they will enjoy the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The consulate will train their employees, and the Foreign Ministry will de facto guarantee the quality of the services provided. They will include professional translators, as well as lawyers who can help with the drafting of texts of notarial documents, etc., and, if necessary, they can represent a client's interests on the territory of the Russian Federation to resolve certain issues.

We believe this should provide a more balanced distribution of the workload among consular officers, free up part of the staff to do other kinds of consular work, and in the future, there is a possibility to expand the range of services the consulates provide to help boost the legal protection of Russian citizens abroad.

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**Question:** Just an hour ago, it was reported that President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China and President of Russia Vladimir Putin had a friendly telephone conversation. The two leaders once again emphasised the crucial role of our two countries in the international arena. Since we represent the business sphere specifically, what are your wishes for our Chinese enterprises that have been working on friendly terms with Russian enterprises for many years?

**Maria Zakharova (speaking Chinese):** I am extremely satisfied with the dynamic development of bilateral relations between our countries, and I wish our countries joy and that all our wishes come true.

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**Question:** The Russian rouble is rising appreciably. How does the Russian Federation plan to further promote its currency in financial markets?

**Maria Zakharova:** This is not really a question for me. We have relevant financial institutions. I can say that the strong rouble is viewed positively on the markets. The rouble is becoming a reliable currency, as opposed to the volatile dollar and euro. This is the competence of other agencies. Let me speak at least in political terms.

We keep forgetting about the currency's backing. After all, this is the most important thing. Given that we do not use gold, silver, or gold and silver coins, it is, after all, paper that has to be backed by something. It is not clear to me what backs US currency. I only know about the US national debt. But it turns out that the currency is really backed by the huge national debt, that is its value. It is possible to keep it afloat by means of force, by imposing and dictating one's will to less powerful countries. We know of examples of the US financial system collapse, which resulted in enormous costs. I heard so much from the CNN correspondent today: "Where is this international law?", "What are you doing there?". I have one question: 2008, the collapse of the US real estate system, which led to enormous upheavals of a global nature. Why? Because speculation has been and is at the heart of the American economic system, and indeed the currency. The US real estate market is a bubble. It is a scary story. Who more or less understands what the American real estate market is – it's a utopia. No other country has such a market. One needs to be an expert to understand how much a flat or a house is worth, and what it is secured with, and what the mortgage is. It's a dramatic story of swindling on a global scale. The natural collapse of this system in 2008 (because it was impossible to pull out and support this totally empty "game") led to the collapse and impoverishment of many people around the world. What was the response of the international community? Let me remind you that the response was the creation of the G20. The G20 was created and formed to try to stabilise the world economy. And who caused this collapse? The United States and that very liberal system. What did they pay to the world, to each individual country, to each family that was down and out? Nothing. Just like they never pay anyone anything. They only loot and take everything away. This is a fact, not my emotions. My words are based on real figures and data. When they once again start telling us something or demanding accountability from us, I will answer: first give an account of your own looting, violence, interventions, occupation, economic and financial fraud that went on for decades.

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