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**Briefing by Deputy Director of the Foreign Ministry Information and Press
Department Ivan Nechayev, Moscow, August 11, 2022**

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Donbass and Ukraine update

The special military operation in Ukraine continues. Russia's, DPR's and LPR's allied forces are making steady progress in delivering on the operation's goals and objectives, which are aimed at defending civilians in Donbass, demilitarising and de-Nazifying Ukraine, as well as removing the security threats Russia is facing. Only military sites are targeted using high-precision weapons in order to avoid civilian casualties.

Peaceful life is resuming on liberated territories of the DPR, the LPR, Zaporozhye, Kharkov and Kherson regions. Over 50,000 explosive ordnances were detected and cleared on more than 400 hectares of land. Efforts to rebuild housing and essential social infrastructure have been gathering momentum, with over 200,000 square metres of destroyed buildings cleared. Russia is delivering humanitarian aid to people living there with over 56,000 tonnes supplied since March 2022. As of the end of July 2022, more than 300,000 retirees in DPR, LPR and Ukraine's liberated regions received social benefits.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian troops and neo-Nazi groups, including foreign mercenaries, continue using unacceptable combat methods by setting up firing positions in residential high-rises. They use remotely-delivered butterfly landmines against Donbass cities and villages, deploy artillery and multiple launch rocket systems near schools and hospitals, while setting up barracks and ammunition warehouses in school buildings and other civilian sites. They carry out strikes against critical energy infrastructure.

Over the past few days, the Ukrainian units shelled the territory of the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant several times, which constitutes an act of nuclear terrorism. These actions by the Kiev regime can lead to a disaster far worse than the one that took place at the Chernobyl station. In addition to the nearby regions in Ukraine, Russia, the DPR and the LPR, European countries can also suffer from exposure to radiation, putting millions of lives there at risk. Today, on August 11, 2022, the UN Security Council will hold a meeting on this matter, convened at Russia's initiative. We hope that the international community and the specialised international bodies will pay due attention to the disastrous situation we are currently witnessing. We stand for arranging a visit to the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant by an IAEA mission, which was unable to travel there in June after the Department of Safety and Security within the UN Secretariat obstructed the visit.

Against this backdrop, NATO countries are pursuing their own agenda in the post-Soviet space by continuing to prop up the Kiev regime and helping militarise it. On August 8, 2022, the United States announced yet another \$1 billion military aid package for Ukraine. This brought the overall amount spent by the US on military assistance to Ukraine to \$9.8 billion since the beginning of Joe Biden's presidency for a total of \$11.8 billion since 2014. All this policy does is prolong the hostilities, while doing nothing to bring about a settlement.

This unhinged effort to place more weapons at Kiev's disposal has led to a major upsurge in arms trafficking with the delivered weapons popping up on the black market, including on the dark net. According to the information we have, law enforcement agencies in EU countries have confiscated and returned to Ukraine hundreds of assault rifles and tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition, which were smuggled out of Ukraine. This is not just about small arms. For example, the dark net has Javelin anti-tank missiles on sale for \$30,000, while they cost six times more – \$178,000 – to make. There are also NLAW missiles for \$15,000, Switchblade 600 kamikaze drones are offered for \$7,000, as are small arms, grenades, and bulletproof vests with prices ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,500.

This is an alarming trend, which is increasingly becoming a matter of concern for the Western public. CBS, a US television network, has released a documentary on Western weapons flowing into Ukraine, exposing hard-hitting facts for the Ukrainian and Western establishment. It is not surprising that the film later disappeared from the internet, allegedly in order to be updated. However, its copies are still available for viewing.

The United States has gone beyond arms deliveries and has been sharing intelligence with Ukraine as part of its military assistance. According to the information we have, they use civilian and private satellites in addition to military ones, which de facto amounts to militarising outer space.

Russia continues working within the Joint Coordination Centre in Istanbul for facilitating grain exports from the Ukrainian ports. Since August 1, 2022, 12 ships carrying 375,000 tonnes of agricultural products have left these ports. We must emphasise that the Russian Defence Ministry kept the maritime humanitarian corridors open long before the grain export deal was reached. These corridors have now been extended to 307 nautical miles, and operate around the clock.

We have taken note of the situation with bulk carrier Razoni, which left Odessa on August 1, 2022, for Tripoli, Lebanon, with a shipment of grain. It turned out that it carried fodder corn instead of the wheat which the Lebanese needed. The buyer in Tripoli refused to take this corn, and the ship is now waiting for new buyers.

Unfortunately, not a single vessel carrying grain has so far reached the African and South Asian countries, where people are suffering from hunger. The ships are mostly heading to Western ports, carrying corn and sunflower oil, not wheat, which raises questions about the sincerity of what the West has been saying about the grain deal being instrumental for global food security.

The Australian National Review exposed another telling aspect. According to this media outlet, three major US transnational corporations – food and chemical giants Cargill, Dupont and Monsanto – own 17 million out of 64 million hectares of cropland in Ukraine. These are the companies growing wheat in Ukraine, and they are the ones selling it.

Let me remind you that the package of documents signed in Istanbul included agreements on grain exports from three Ukrainian ports which started a week and a half ago, as well as on selling Russian food products and fertiliser on the global market. So far, the latter provision has not been carried out. We hope that all the agreements included in this package will fully materialise and the Western countries create the necessary conditions for enabling Russian fertiliser and food to access the global market.

At the same time, all this proves yet again that the Western countries are using the ongoing crisis in Ukraine in their own interests. Despite all the support they are providing the Kiev regime and all the efforts to preserve a hotbed of instability in Eastern Europe, the special military operation will achieve all of its goals and objectives.

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Reports of volunteers from the DPRK to be dispatched to the Donbass republics to take part in hostilities

We have taken note of the rumours circulating online and picked up by certain representatives of the blogosphere and pseudo-experts about an offer allegedly received from the DPRK through diplomatic channels to send up to 100,000 volunteers to take part in the special operation in Donbass. In this connection, we would like to state that these reports are a fake from beginning to end: no such negotiations are underway and there are no plans to send North Korean volunteers to the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics.

We are convinced that the combat capabilities of the Russian armed forces and the people's militias of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics are sufficient to successfully achieve the goals of the special military operation.

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Developments in Moldova

We continue to closely monitor developments in the Republic of Moldova. It is a country that we have close ties with and where a large number of our compatriots live. The degradation of media freedom there is a cause for serious concern. The Moldovan authorities are putting pressure on independent and opposition media resources. The media space is being purged of opinions and assessments undesirable to the government.

There has been a ban on Russian news and socio-political television programmes in the country since March, introduced under the far-fetched pretext of “combating disinformation”. The authorities are closely monitoring the Russian-language channels broadcasting in Moldova and are imposing penalties on them with particular zeal. On August 5, the Broadcasting Council of Moldova once again fined four Russian-language TV stations: NTV Moldova, Exclusive TV, First in Moldova and Accent TV, for “deviations” from the established rules.

On August 1, the Moldovan Information and Security Service blocked access to the Russian website Free Press for allegedly “biased coverage” of the special military operation in Ukraine and the publication of “misleading information” that could harm the country's national security.

This prompts a question: To what extent does the information policy pursued by the official Chisinau correspond to its declared commitment to “democratic values”, including freedom of speech, media freedom and freedom of expression?

We also took note of the information circulated on August 8 by the press service of the Constitutional Court of Moldova regarding its application to the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. The Court requested an opinion on the legal ban on the St George's Ribbon, which entered into force in April. The decision is based on amendments to the Law on Combating Extremist Activity and the Code of Administrative Offences, which stipulates punishment for the use of attributes and symbols of so-called military aggression, including “coloured flags and ribbons, symbols, badges and other similar signs”, which included the St George's Ribbon. As we know, the ban was imposed specifically ahead of the Victory Day celebrations and provoked a strong negative reaction from a significant part of Moldovan society.

Unfortunately, under the current circumstances, we cannot expect that the Venice Commission, which has repeatedly displayed a biased and politicised approach, will examine the request of the Moldovan Constitutional Court in a responsible and impartial way.

We urge the Moldovan authorities to reconsider their policy of restricting fundamental rights and freedoms of their own citizens and to take necessary measures to ensure their full observance.

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Polish OSCE Chairmanship unable to organise work in its humanitarian dimension

The OSCE is the largest regional international organisation uniting 57 participating States of Europe, Asia and North America. Its mission is to develop common approaches to security, encompassing three dimensions: the military-political, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension. Each year, one of the OSCE participating States is elected to hold its Chairmanship. Its direct duty is to be an “honest broker,” to direct the activities of this international community strictly in accordance with its political commitments, and be guided by the interests of all its member countries.

In 2022, Poland took over and gave assurances that it would follow the principles of neutrality and objectivity, and pledged to act “in the spirit of cooperation and dialogue.” Poland made the commitment and broke it right away. This was especially evident in the human dimension of the OSCE, which, in fact, became a hostage to the unconstructive and politicised approach that Warsaw took in the context of the events in Ukraine.

We have not seen any cooperation or dialogue in this important area during the nearly eight months of 2022. The Polish Chairmanship, having submitted its proposals on human dimension meetings for consideration by the participating States at the end of January, almost immediately froze all mandatory consultations on this subject. This put all preparatory work for these meetings, as well as the process of agreeing on their funding, on an unprecedentedly long pause. That, when they had to act under severe time pressure. Even the previous Swedish Chairmanship seems much more professional by comparison, despite the multiple complaints about the quality of its work.

The repeated reminders of the need to resume consultations fell on deaf ears; all these calls only evoked vague excuses on the Polish side. Moreover, in cases where consultations did take place against all odds (I am referring to the three OSCE supplementary human dimension meetings), the participating States were simply informed about the plan as a done deal; it is clear that a normal discussion was impossible in those conditions by definition. In this regard, Russia officially boycotted them.

Moreover, the Russian side, together with its Belarusian allies, insisted that all the activities of the OSCE human dimension should be moved from the territory of Poland, and we intend to firmly adhere to this position. One of the reasons is Warsaw's failed policy in the OSCE proper. Secondly, the Polish authorities are unable – or unwilling – to provide real security guarantees to foreign diplomats and participants in international forums held on their territory. After all, the unsightly incidents involving the Russian Ambassador and the Consul General in Poland on May 9 have not been forgotten. On that day, with the complete inaction of the police, the Russian diplomats were attacked by aggressive Poles and Ukrainians, who were running rampant due to impunity. No proper apologies followed. Poland's voluntaristic decision to bar members of the Russian Civic Chamber from one of the above supplementary human dimension meetings in May was the last straw.

The absurd actions of the Polish Chairmanship – and the resulting deplorable state of affairs in the OSCE – climaxed in its recent arbitrary decision to hold (and, consequently, sponsor it financially) something called the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference. A clarification: this is an ersatz event that Poland is trying to use to cover up its failure in regard to the frozen consultations on the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – the most important two-week human dimension event of the year, which brings together about 1,500 government officials, civil society representatives and experts. Its dates, place and agenda are decided on by consensus of all 57 participating States.

It is clear that in the situation described above, Warsaw could not be chosen to host the meeting. What the Polish OSCE Chairmanship did actually amounted to forgery; it also casually accused Russia of blocking the meeting – just out of habit.

Naturally, Russia does not intend to officially participate in the aforementioned informal gathering, sponsored by the Polish government at that, whose coffers have grown thinner as they are due to Warsaw's short-sighted policy on the Ukrainian track.

We hope that common sense will prevail in other capitals as well.

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ICAO Fact-Finding Investigation Report on the “event involving a Ryanair flight” on May 23, 2021, in the Belarusian airspace

In July 2022, the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) reviewed the final report drawn up by the Fact-Finding Investigation Team (FFIT) on the diversion of a Ryanair flight to Minsk on May 23, 2021.

Allow me to remind you that on May 27, 2021, the ICAO Council decided to investigate the event and on January 31, 2022, the Council discussed the FFIT report which concluded that no escorting or interception of a Ryanair flight by a Belarusian Mikoyan MiG-29 jet had taken place and the decision to land the aircraft in Minsk had been made solely by the crew, with no fault attributed to Minsk. As expected, those findings could not satisfy the interested Western countries. After all, the plan was to use the report to justify unsubstantiated restrictions against the Belarusian aviation industry. Exploiting their majority in the ICAO Council, they forced the FFIT to continue the investigation. The ICAO specialists learned their lesson and finally produced a satisfactory result.

Upon reviewing the “updated” report, the ICAO Council issued a resolution condemning the Government of Belarus and claiming that Belarusian state officials had been involved in misleading the Ryanair flight about a bomb threat. Russia’s representative in the ICAO Council expressed disagreement with this clearly politicised ruling.

First of all, experts have serious grounds to question the objectivity of the report that now quotes an alleged air traffic control officer as an anonymous source and uses unverified audio recordings while disregarding the data provided by Belarusian officials.

Overall, the report and the Council’s ruling are clearly biased against Belarus. It appears that the sole goal of the report was not to establish facts (as it is stipulated by the group’s mandate) but to find ways to accuse Belarus. It is worth noting that the Council once again refused to consider a counter-issue raised by Minsk about the unlawful nature of the Western restrictions imposed on the Belarusian aviation industry. Discussion of this matter was once again postponed under a feigned pretext.

Regretfully, we have to state that no impartial and transparent inquiry, as requested by the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, took place. Obviously, a once reputable international organisation admitted its inability to stand up for its impartiality and sacrificed its reputation as an expert body in aviation to Western ambitions.

On our part, we believe that international civil aviation and the ICAO must not become tools of political pressure and counteraction against unwanted governments. Yet, we have less and less hope of being heard by the West.

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The situation in the Russian peacekeeping contingent's zone of responsibility and on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border

Before the briefing, we received a series of questions related to the situation in the Russian peacekeeping contingent's zone of responsibility and on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, as well as various aspects of Armenian-Azerbaijani normalisation. Specifically, the questions came from the Public Television of Armenia, Verelq News Agency, Vestnik Kavkaza, and NEWS.ru.

We have been focusing on the situation in the region. On August 4, 2022, the Foreign Ministry of Russia made a statement in connection with the escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, urging both sides to show restraint and observe the ceasefire. We reaffirm the need to settle all issues in keeping with the statements the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia made on November 9, 2020, January 11, 2021, and November 26, 2021.

This also concerns the situation in and around the Lachin Corridor, which should be settled based on Clause 6 of the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020, which says that "As agreed by the Parties, within the next three years, a plan will be outlined for the construction of a new route via the Lachin Corridor, to provide a connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and the Russian peacemaking forces shall be subsequently relocated to protect the route."

Russia maintains close contact with Armenia and Azerbaijan, both at the top level and through the Defence Ministry of Russia, the Foreign Ministry of Russia, and other Russian agencies. As you may know, President of Russia Vladimir Putin had telephone conversations with Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan on August 2 and 8 of this year. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu also had contacts with their Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts.

All the above mentioned issues, including the situation regarding the Lachin Corridor, are discussed at consultations aimed at reaching solutions that suit both Azerbaijan and Armenia. We will not divulge the details of the agreements under discussion, given the sensitivity of the problem.

In parallel with the intense political contacts, Russian peacekeepers continue their pro-active efforts to stabilise the situation on the ground. Both Baku and Yerevan repeatedly commended the important role played by the Russian peacekeeping contingent. We regard isolated criticisms against the peacekeepers as unjustified. For more details, we would advise you to contact the Defence Ministry of Russia.

As for applications from certain citizens of Armenia seeking the citizenship of Azerbaijan, we have no specific information in this regard. We would recommend that you ask Baku and Yerevan how they assess this matter.

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Prospects for talks on resuming the nuclear deal with Iran

Russia continues to play a most active role in the multilateral efforts to restore full implementation of the JCPOA. Our position in this respect is very consistent. The resetting of these highly important agreements is the only sensible and effective way forward. It will make it possible to restore balance and prevent escalating tensions around Iran's nuclear programme which would inevitably have negative consequences for the entire Middle East and its security.

Let's recall that the JCPOA was backed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that remains in force. Its legal commitments are immutable and any deviations or back-up plans that some people like to discuss are contrary to the Security Council's consensus decisions.

We note that all JCPOA participants, including the US, are motivated to complete as soon as possible the final drafting of a package of decisions by the Joint Commission, which are designed to return the JCPOA's implementation to the initially agreed-upon framework. Talks in the Vienna format have been held with this aim in view since April 2021. One of the main roles in them is allotted to US representatives. Our view that there is no reasonable alternative to the return of all involved parties, primarily the Americans, to their commitments was confirmed by the holding of another round of indirect talks between the US and Iranian delegations with the mediation of the European External Action Service (EEAS). This round took place in Vienna literally the other day. It brought about an updated version of the package of decisions by the Joint Commission, which was proactively produced by the EU's Coordinator. The package reflected progress in some areas that had proved elusive before. Now the relevant capitals are thoroughly analysing this document.

Many Western politicians started saying that it was time to complete the negotiating process and that everything worth discussing had already been set down in the text. On August 9, Peter Stano, EEAS Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, even tried to present this as a radical choice: adopt the Coordinator's draft or admit that the talks had failed.

Let's note that the JCPOA Joint Commission has not made any decisions in this regard, nor authorised the Coordinator or his representatives to pass verdicts. So, the EEAS was definitely too quick to render its conclusions. This has happened in the past as well.

Russia has said more than once that the language of ultimatums will not work on such a weighty, sensitive issue as the revival of the JCPOA. We heard from our European colleagues at the talks more than once that crude political pressure is a lawful method that they could use as regards Iran. This is not our way. It is important to remember that the JCPOA was the result of agreements based on a carefully calculated balance of interests. It is impossible to resolve such issues violently, by resorting to force. The work on the draft recovery package will be completed when the interests of all parties involved will be duly taken into account. We hope Washington, Brussels and other European capitals realise this.

We believe it is quite possible to achieve success at the talks. There are no insoluble differences between the key players. As demonstrated many times before, rapprochement depends entirely on the parties involved having sufficient political will. We hope the United States will finally stop obsessing over its own exceptionalism and obey the will of the UN Security Council by ensuring strict compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and creating the conditions for a reciprocal “unfreezing” by Iran of its voluntary commitments suspended in response to Washington’s crude violations.

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Anti-Russia statements by French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna on Russia's role and policy on the African continent

We read the interview with Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France Catherine Colonna, published by Liberation newspaper on August 4, 2022. It contains the standard mix of anti-Russia clichés the French media have been hammering over the past months. In this sense, it offers nothing new and would not have deserved our attention if not for one fact.

The French Minister took the liberty of making a series of scathing statements on Russia expanding its foothold of the African continent as “attempts to use the most atrocious methods for restoring its imperial might” and Moscow being “aggressive” in several African countries. As absurd as these statements may sound, especially considering the warm hospitality Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov received during his recent visit to four African nations, these words sounded hypocritical and provocative, coming from the top diplomat of France, a country whose policy towards its former African possessions is the essence of neo-colonialism.

It was Paris, not Moscow, who carried out multiple military operations in Africa as it pursued its corrupt interests. It was France who kept a network of military bases on the continent and has the most military personnel deployed there. Who forced many African countries to sign what de facto amounted to unequal defence and/or military-technical cooperation agreements? France did. To this day, these pacts offer a legal framework for France’s military presence on the continent and even interventions. Finally, the Fifth Republic, which pretends to care so much for the interests of Africans, still controls territories it inherited from its former colonial empire that belong to the African continent. Using various pretexts, Paris keeps the islands of Mayotte, Eparses and Europa, as well as Tromelin, under its rule. What about France’s arrogant refusal to recognise its responsibility for the multiple war crimes it committed during Algeria’s independence war and the consequences of the nuclear tests there? Or its attempts to evade responsibility for destroying Libyan statehood in 2011 which paved the way to many of the challenges the Sahara and Sahel region is facing today?

This list goes on and on, and there are many other striking examples of what Paris did in Africa. However, I believe this is enough. In fact, most Africans have long understood what “wonderful France” is after on their continent, and have drawn their conclusions. This is why we have been hearing recently the grumbling of senior French officials about the country’s slipping positions in African countries. They still view these states being part of their traditional sphere of interests, guided as they are by their colonial-era habits. The fact that in some cases those whom the Elysee Palace and the Quai d’Orsay have been treating as their client states are now opting to bolster ties with Russia is merely the result of the objective difference that exists in the principled approaches Moscow and Paris have taken in their relations with Africa. Whether the French like it or not, it is up to the Africans to decide.

As for Russia, we offer Africans equal and mutually respectful partnership without any political conditions or imposing our own vision of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. If Africans are becoming increasingly receptive to this policy, could it be that it is time that our geopolitical opponents, including France, ponder whether they are on “the right side of history”? Maybe they should rethink their own behaviour instead of spitting venom at Russia.

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Statement by South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation on US policy in Africa

We took note of the statement by South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Naledi Pandor in Pretoria last week during a national foreign policy address. Pandor characterised as unprecedented the US House of Representatives bill on “countering Russia’s malevolent actions in Africa”, which would impose punitive measures on countries unwilling to stand in solidarity with Washington over the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In South Africa’s view, such measures by the US government violate the sovereign rights of developing countries as UN member states.

We fully share the views expressed. The aforementioned bill is yet another vivid example of modern American “diplomacy”, which is based on coercion, blackmail and complete disregard for the partners’ interests. We view Naledi Pandor’s statement as confirmation of South Africa’s balanced and sober position on the key issues on the regional and international agenda.

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Launch of Iranian Earth’s remote sensing satellite

On August 9, Khayyam, a satellite for remote sensing of the Earth, made by Russian companies for Iran under previously concluded agreements, was launched from Baikonur Cosmodrome.

The satellite was put into its target orbit by a Russian Soyuz-2.1.b launch vehicle and a Fregat booster. The satellite is designed to monitor and image the Earth’s surface for civilian purposes.

A delegation headed by Iranian Minister of Information and Communications Technology Eisa Zarepour arrived at Baikonur to monitor the satellite launch. Director General of Roskosmos State Corporation Yury Borisov held talks with Mr Zarepour on August 9.

We believe that successfully launching and placing a satellite in orbit marks an important milestone in the development of bilateral space cooperation. This event is just one example of the multifaceted cooperation between Russia and Iran which is steadily gaining momentum in accordance with the guidelines set by the top political leadership of the two countries, including following talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi, which were held in Tehran on July 19.

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TASS office opening in Turkmenistan

TASS news agency opened a representative office in Turkmenistan on August 9 as part of the expansion of Russia's media presence in the CIS countries. A correspondent sent from Moscow began his work in Ashgabat.

It is gratifying that this event took place in the year of the 30th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan. Cooperation between Moscow and Ashgabat is based on the principles of strategic partnership, characterised by equality and mutual respect, and careful consideration of each other's interests.

We believe that the opening of the TASS representative office in Turkmenistan will contribute to raising awareness of Russian, Turkmen and foreign readers about political, economic, cultural, scientific and sporting life in this friendly country, as well as cooperation between our states in the international arena.

We are confident that greater media cooperation will serve to strengthen and expand the traditionally strong and multifaceted relations between our countries and peoples.

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75th anniversary of Pakistan's independence

On August 14, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan will celebrate its 75th Independence Day, a national holiday that marks the country becoming a sovereign state. The friendly Pakistani people achieved freedom in 1947 following a difficult struggle against British colonialism.

Pakistan has been playing an increasingly significant role in regional and international affairs in recent years. Pakistanis are rightly proud of their achievements in the field of socioeconomic development, ancient history and cultural heritage of their country.

Russian-Pakistani relations are developing rapidly. Amid the turbulent international situation, our countries continue to maintain a regular political dialogue and carry out constructive cooperation within international organisations, primarily the UN and SCO. Trade and economic cooperation has significant potential.

We congratulate our Pakistani friends on their national holiday and wish them peace and prosperity.

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75th anniversary of India's independence

On August 15, the Republic of India will mark the 75th anniversary of independence gained in 1947 following a long and hard struggle against the British colonisers.

Over the years of independent development, the Indian people have travelled an impressive path, created a democratic society, and achieved significant success in the socioeconomic, scientific and technical fields, while maintaining a vibrant identity based on centuries of history and rich cultural heritage. Currently, India is one of the leading states in the world, which enjoys well-earned respect in the international arena and has a serious impact on regional and global processes.

Our countries have been linked by decades of strong friendship. Today, Russian-Indian relations have the advanced status of a specially privileged strategic partnership. Moscow and New Delhi maintain an intensive political dialogue and strengthen interaction within multilateral formats such as the UN, SCO, BRICS and G20 in the interests of achieving a truly multipolar, just international order. Cooperation in defence and security, trade and economy, the peaceful atom and space exploration, education and culture is confidently reaching new heights.

Congratulations to our Indian friends on their national holiday. We wish you peace, prosperity and new achievements.

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15th anniversary of the SCO Treaty on Long-Term Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation

On August 16, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation will celebrate the 15th anniversary of signing the Treaty on Long-Term Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation. Together with the SCO Charter, which was adopted 20 years ago in June 2002, the treaty created the basis for the consistent development of the association on the principles of equality, mutual respect, openness and consideration of the interests of all member states. Its defining features are a vast creative potential, a focus on the positive promotion of multidisciplinary cooperation and not being directed against third countries and organisations.

Following the meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council to be held on September 15-16, 2022 in Samarkand, the member states will approve the next comprehensive action plan for 2023-2027. Russia, in line with the principal foreign policy determined by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, will continue to actively participate in joint efforts to strengthen the SCO and build up multifaceted and fruitful cooperation within the Organisation.

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Answers to media questions:

Question: President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky and Prime Minister of Estonia Kaja Kallas almost simultaneously demanded that Europe stop issuing visas to Russians for travel to Western countries. How does the Russian Foreign Ministry assess such calls? What could be Russia's response if Western countries do take such a step?

Ivan Nechayev: We have already commented on these provocative statements. We regard them as an open manifestation of chauvinism, a thoughtless desire to “cancel” everything Russian. It's impossible.

By the way, Latvia has recently stopped issuing almost all categories of visas to Russian citizens. These gestures of powerless malice, aimed at depriving Russians of the opportunity to visit the EU, show that the Ukrainian regime and the Russophobic camp in the EU that supports it are desperate to collectively punish all Russians simply for being citizens of a country that pursues an independent foreign policy and firmly defends its national interests. The initiators of such ideas seem unconcerned by the Schengen Visa Code, which includes no provision for introducing a total and indiscriminate ban on short-stay visas, something European Commission Spokesperson Anitta Hipper essentially confirmed during a briefing on August 9, 2022. Moreover, they seem equally unconcerned that any discrimination in issuing visas is a flagrant violation of the basic human rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 21 prohibits discrimination on national or other grounds).

It is also worth remembering that the OSCE participants, including all members of the European Union, voluntarily assumed obligations in the 20th century to ensure freedom of movement throughout the European continent. This obligation is also clearly spelled out in Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil Rights, which protects everyone's right to liberty of movement within a state, and freedom to leave any country and return to their own. Finally, legislative novelties of this kind run counter to EU representatives' own statements that any restrictions imposed against Russia are not directed against ordinary citizens.

We are confident that any attempts to fence Russia off with a new Iron Curtain for current political considerations, destroying the common European humanitarian space created over the recent history and hampering thousands of person-to-person ties, will not be supported by the population in the EU countries or Ukraine. They might find this a reason to consider whether they should continue to support politicians who make chauvinistic statements that are certain to have consequences. One will be held accountable for such words.

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Question: Last night, the Swiss Foreign Ministry reported that Bern and Kiev had completed negotiations on having Switzerland represent Ukraine's interests in Russia, and now they are waiting for Moscow's response. What does Russia think of this initiative? Has Switzerland made this proposal to Russia?

Ivan Nechayev: The Swiss were indeed interested in what we thought about the possibility of them representing Ukraine's interests in Russia and Russia in Ukraine, and that happened quite a long time ago.

We responded very clearly that Switzerland, unfortunately, had lost its neutral status and therefore could not act either as a mediator or as a representative of interests.

As you know, Bern has joined the illegal Western sanctions against Russia. Switzerland supports the anti-human Nazi regime in Kiev and participates in an aggressive Russophobic campaign launched by the West and Ukraine. How, with such behaviour, one can offer mediation, representation or other "good offices" is completely incomprehensible.

The fact that Bern, knowing our approach, continued negotiating with Kiev on the mutual representation issue confirms that Switzerland could not care less about Russia's interests. This, if anything, has strengthened our belief that there can be no question of any Swiss representation or mediation.

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Question: You said that Russia and India are strategic partners who have been given added incentive to develop their relations further. If we elaborate on this issue, it leads us to BRICS that is currently expanding its activity and has great potential. In your opinion, how should the accession procedure for new BRICS members go? As we know, Argentina and Iran have applied to join, and President of Türkiye Erdogan has spoken about it as well. What is your opinion on the matter? Should BRICS accept anybody or is it an exclusive principle?

Ivan Nechayev: The BRICS countries alone determine accession criteria for potential members. During the BRICS summit on June 23-24, 2022, BRICS leaders issued instructions to continue discussing guidelines, standards and procedures for expansion. Work is underway in this respect.

Admitting new members requires a delicate approach that takes into consideration the views of all the members of this association. We have no intention to turn the “five” into an elite club similar to the G7. BRICS is about transparency and inclusivity, willingness to fully respect the interests of all members of the international community and developing countries, in particular.

The BRICS Plus dialogue has been rather successful in this context. Specifically, the BRICS High-Level Dialogue on Global Development, held at the initiative of China during its chairmanship and attended by the leaders of 13 guest countries, confirmed the obvious: our association is seen as one of the pillars of a more just world order and a keeper of genuine multipolarity.

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Question: Last week, the City Court of Khimki issued a prison sentence to American basketball player Brittney Griner, who was found guilty of smuggling and possessing drugs. There is more and more talk these days about the need for the United States and Russia to negotiate a prisoner exchange. Sergey Lavrov said that Russia is ready to discuss an exchange but only through a “special channel” that presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden agreed upon during their last in-person meeting in Geneva. Is the Foreign Ministry or its staff involved in this negotiation channel and how in general could the Foreign Ministry be involved in these talks? Considering that the media has already mentioned specific names of both American and Russian candidates for a potential exchange. What are the prospects of such talks?

Ivan Nechayev: We have repeatedly commented on this topic. Indeed, on August 5, 2022, Sergey Lavrov confirmed that our country is ready “to discuss this matter but only through the channel that Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden agreed on.”

Allow me to remind you that authorised bodies were instructed to conduct the talks. They are being conducted by competent authorities. We assume that the interests of both parties must be considered in the course of the negotiations.

Official Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has also answered media questions concerning the possibility of an exchange of Russian and American citizens imprisoned in the two countries, noting that “real work is not accompanied by media hype, while what you are talking about is a classic information campaign. We regret that the United States has chosen this path instead of maintaining a confidential, professional dialogue. The American public, which takes such an interest in the fate of its fellow citizens, should realise this. The more people talk into a microphone in Washington to voice their opinion on the matter, the less they are involved in real effective work. If they had worked to help their citizens, they would not have had time to talk.

We are calling on the US authorities not to exploit this sensitive issue that affects the lives of real individuals. We recommend that they stop trying in vain to put pressure on us and urge them to concentrate on practical work via existing channels. There is no other way to achieve anything.”

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Question: Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said the other day that Russia remains in close dialogue with the United States on full-scale measures on the New START Treaty. What does the Foreign Ministry think about this dialogue at the current stage? What results can it produce and when?

Ivan Nechayev: I would like to note that inspection activities under this treaty have been suspended by mutual agreement since the start of 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. That said, indeed, as Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on August 9 of this year, “the parties conducted close professional dialogue via relevant channels on how they could return to full implementation of the treaty as regards verification and what organisational and technical problems ought to be resolved for this purpose. They settled some issues and made considerable progress on others. However, a number of substantial difficulties and differences still remained outstanding.”

I would like to recall that on August 8 of this year, the Russian Federation officially informed the United States via diplomatic channels that our country temporarily exempted its facilities from inspection activities that are required under the New START Treaty. This exemption also covers appropriate facilities at which demonstrations may be conducted under the treaty.

Sergey Ryabkov emphasised that against the backdrop of what is happening in our relations with Western countries now, there appeared additional obstacles to resuming inspection activities under the treaty. I am referring to the absence of normal air flights caused by the West, neglect of our requests to confirm the possibility of our aircraft with inspectors traveling through the air space of transit countries, visa problems during transit, and difficulties in paying for services during inspections, to name a few. All this is complicating, if not blocking, our ability to conduct unimpeded inspections on US territory, and creating unilateral advantages for the US. Needless to say, this is unacceptable.

The official statement published on August 8 of this year on the Foreign Ministry's website, stressed: "These and other issues known to the US, on which the parties exchange information via the appropriate channels, must be resolved. Without this, it would be premature to resume inspection activities under the Treaty, as the United States insists."

"Our goal is to bring an end to this unacceptable situation and ensure the functioning of all mechanisms in the Treaty in strict conformity with the principles of parity and equality of the parties, as was implied when it was agreed upon and entered into force.

"We hope to continue close cooperation with the American colleagues. We have always advocated and continue to advocate a discussion on the resumption of inspection activities under the Treaty from a position of practical reality and equality.

"We believe that under the circumstances, the parties need to abandon any deliberate, counterproductive attempts to artificially expedite the resumption of inspection activities under the Treaty and focus on the thorough analysis of the problems in this area. The successful resolution of these problems would make it possible to return to the full application of the verification mechanisms under the Treaty.

“We would like to emphasise that the measures we have adopted are temporary. <...> After the problems related to the resumption of inspections under the Treaty are resolved, we will immediately cancel these exemptions to the inspections, and we both will be able to conduct these activities in full again. We believe that this would meet the interests of both Moscow and Washington. We are ready to contribute to the achievement of this goal. We expect the US to adopt a similar approach.”

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Question: At the previous briefing, we asked a question about the US claims that they had killed the leader of the al-Qaeda group in Kabul. What is Moscow’s reaction to this information? Have there been any updates?

Ivan Nechayev: It is not up to us to confirm the reliability of the American statements that al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in a US drone strike on July 31 in Kabul. Washington has not offered any evidence to the public.

According to reports, the residential building in Kabul hit by the Americans belonged to the “Haqqani network.” We cannot draw conclusions until representatives of the current authorities in Afghanistan make official comments. So far, they say that they have no information about Ayman al-Zawahiri’s presence in the Afghan capital.

At the same time, such aggressive actions by the US air force, which invaded the sovereign territory of Afghanistan, raise a number of serious questions. For example, who provided the airspace for the airstrike on Kabul? Who will be responsible in case of collateral casualties among the civilian population from such actions?

We believe that fighting terrorism requires joint efforts and a system-wide approach, not attempts to use a real threat to cover up someone’s own geopolitical ambitions. Washington, judging by this incident, prefers to act as it pleases, solely pursuing its foreign policy interests, while disregarding international law or other states’ national sovereignty.

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Question: In its recent reports, the Donetsk People's Republic regularly informs that Ukraine shells civilian facilities in Donbass with Lepestok (Petal) anti-personnel mines. The use of this type of weapons against civilians violates humanitarian law. Will Moscow raise the use of this type of weapons in relevant international institutions and demand that Kiev be held to account? Was this issue brought up during contacts with the UN and what was the response?

Ivan Nechayev: True, the use of anti-personnel mines, including Lepestok antipersonnel high-explosive mines (also known as the Green Parrot or Butterfly mines), by Ukrainian troops in public spaces in Donbass with large gatherings of civilians is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, including the commitments under Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, also known as the Ottawa Treaty.

To permanently resolve the issue of the use of anti-personnel mines against civilians by the nationalist regime in Kiev, we have raised this issue at relevant international forums, including in the UN and as part of the efforts under the convention on inhumane weapons [the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons], as well as during meetings with the UN Secretary-General and the UN Secretariat members. In particular, on our initiative, this issue was considered at a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine held in New York on July 29, 2022, and at a meeting of experts from the member countries of Protocol Additional II to the convention on inhumane weapons held in Geneva on July 20 and 21, 2022.

We will continue to focus the international community's attention on the illegal and inhumane use by the Ukrainian armed forces of any anti-personnel mines. We will seek to bring the members of the Kiev regime who are behind these crimes against civilians to account.

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Question: No sooner had Nancy Pelosi concluded her visit to Chinese Taiwan than Lithuania sent there its deputy minister of communications. According to Laima Andrikiene, an official representing the Lithuanian Parliament Committee for Foreign Affairs, this visit by Lithuanian politicians to Taiwan seeks to promote cooperation in the financial sphere and trade between Lithuania and Taiwan. Would you please comment on this? How would you explain Lithuania's behaviour?

Ivan Nechayev: Vilnius has rushed again to be in the vanguard as it tries to please its overseas overlord, although Lithuanian businesses and ordinary people have already seriously suffered from the disruption of economic ties with China as a result of reckless actions by Lithuanian authorities.

We believe that a settlement of the situation in the Taiwan Strait is exclusively China's internal affair. Russia's principled position on the Taiwan issue remains invariable – there is only one China and the Chinese Government is the only legitimate government, which represents whole of China, which Taiwan is part of.

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Question: Last year, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia announced the formation of a “trilateral security partnership.” Under the pact, the US and the UK, which possess nuclear weapons, will help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines. Is such cooperation contrary to the goals and tasks of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)? How will it affect IAEA safeguards, regional security and stability?

Ivan Nechayev: In recent years, the United States and its Anglo-Saxon brethren have repeatedly announced high-profile, ambitious initiatives and projects that are becoming increasingly aggressive. Whatever they touch, shooting or explosions follow. It seems that the Americans wake up first thing in the morning and immediately start looking for enemies and deterrence targets. Obviously, these initiatives are rooted in phantom pains associated with being unable to dictate their orders to the international community in the current reality.

The AUKUS partnership is no exception. For the time being, the future military alliance exists more at the level of speculative idea, including the construction of nuclear-powered submarines for the Australian Navy. The authors and participants of this initiative do not seem to think of how the world, primarily the Asia-Pacific Region, will respond to it. We won't get into the reasons for such neglect of public opinion abroad. The main point is that the Americans, obsessed with a sense of their own exceptionalism, are still trying to impose their standards on the world, to tell other countries what to do and how. In other words, AUKUS is nothing but another US attempt to take charge of the Asia-Pacific Region by establishing sole control over sea lanes and trade routes, as well as economic, military, scientific-technical and other cooperation.

London serves the interests of the Americans in Europe, acting like a dog whom the owner sics on undesirable, unpleasant neighbours. The United States is likely to carve out a similar role for Canberra in the Asia-Pacific Region. While in Wellington, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said the US was going to bring New Zealand into AUKUS as well.

Obviously, this is creating new challenges and threats, provoking new risks and tensions in international security and stability and sowing the seeds of an arms race, and not only in Asia and the Pacific. The 2022 NPT Review Conference opened in New York on August 1. Its participants are discussing in detail all these issues. The Americans and their allies must justify themselves, although it seems that they do not even fully understand how far they have gone.

It is impossible to deny that assistance to Australia, a non-nuclear country under the NPT Treaty, in the buildup and large-scale re-equipment of its military-strategic capacities, including the construction of nuclear-powered submarines, allows it to reach an entirely new level. It would never achieve this single-handed. It is important for the international community to understand how these intentions align with Australia's commitments under Article 3 of the NPT and its comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA. The Agency does not have readymade models or agreed-upon approaches in this respect. The Americans, Britons and Australians state that they are willing to be transparent and discuss in detail all sensitive issues with the IAEA Secretariat. However, this will be the first discussion on this issue and it is unlikely to be easy. Nobody will believe the "good word" of the AUKUS participants because it has long been known that all of their good intentions are nothing but tricks to distract the international community from what is really going on. Therefore, tough, efficient control over the compliance of Australia, the US and the UK with their commitments under the NPT and their comprehensive safeguard agreements with the IAEA remains an imperative. No deviations are acceptable in this respect.

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Question: Kazakhstan's Minister of Science and Higher Education Sayasat Nurbek said a branch of another American university, Michigan State University, will open in Kazakhstan's capital next year. At the same time, there are plans to launch an educational programme providing for both Kazakhstani and US diplomas as part of such cooperation. How does Moscow see this kind of introduction and expansion of US influence in countries friendly to Russia, such as Kazakhstan?

Ivan Nechayev: We proceed from the fact that the Republic of Kazakhstan is our partner and a sovereign state, which certainly has the right to develop relations with all countries without exception.

The establishment of branches of universities in third countries in Central Asia does not cause any special emotions on our part. Competition in the field of education "tones up" the development of our multifaceted ties with Kazakhstan in this area.

At present, four branches of Russian academic institutions – Moscow Aviation Institute, St Petersburg Humanitarian University of Trade Unions, Chelyabinsk State University and Lomonosov Moscow State University – are operating in the neighbouring republic, training about 4,500 people.

Moreover, a legal framework has been created to further expand bilateral cooperation in this sphere. Thus, on February 24, 2022, the governments of the Russian Federation and of the Republic of Kazakhstan signed an agreement on the establishment and operation of university branches in both countries. We are working towards opening branches of two more Russian educational institutions as soon as possible: MEPhI in Almaty and Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas in Atyrau.

In general, the data shows that Russian education is in demand among Kazakhstani young people. According to statistics, in the 2021-2022 academic year more than 65,000 Kazakhstani citizens studied at our universities, about 30,000 of whom studied at the Russian state's expense.

As part of inter-university cooperation, 25 Russian higher education institutions are implementing 93 educational programmes with Kazakhstani partners, including in the form of double degrees and joint projects.

We appreciate the efforts of Kazakhstan's leadership to ensure the strong position of the Russian language in education. According to official data, as of June this year there were 1,160 schools in the country with instruction in Russian (16.6 percent); 2,047 schools with instruction in Kazakh and Russian (29.4 percent). The share of students studying in Russian in Kazakhstan is 30.9 percent. Furthermore, Russian as an academic subject is taught from grades 1 to 11 in all schools.

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Question: After the escalation of tensions in Karabakh, the Armenian side has had many questions about the activities of the Russian peacekeepers, who allegedly failed to take the necessary measures to protect them in the region. According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Yerevan said back in February 2021 that the peacekeepers needed to be more effective. There was also a recent rally in Yerevan asking for a multinational peacekeeping mission to be responsible for the security of the Lachin corridor. Some experts in Yerevan have also noted that relations between Yerevan and Moscow are quite strained at the moment. What are your comments on such accusations and demands coming from the Armenian side?

Ivan Nechayev: I commented on this issue in the first part of the briefing. There is nothing more to add.

Question: A meeting of the Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders was announced in Brussels. The exact dates of this summit have not yet been published but the leaders reported that their meeting was likely. Is a similar meeting planned in Russia against the backdrop of escalating tensions in the South Caucasus?

Ivan Nechayev: As you know, comments on any highest-level contacts with the participation of the President of Russia are the prerogative of the Presidential Executive Office. There are plans to organise high-level trilateral contacts on different tracks of Armenia-Azerbaijan normalisation efforts before the end of this August. We will notify you about this in more detail later.

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Question: Russia has invited IAEA experts to visit the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant to assess the effects of shelling. Some media outlets claim that the UN Secretariat is opposed to this visit. Russian officials maintain the UN Secretariat is acting in Kiev's interests. Is there an official position on this issue? |What are the reasons for delays?

Ivan Nechayev: We repeatedly commented in detail on this issue at different levels, including last week's briefing by the Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman. Literally the other day we published on our website the Foreign Ministry's statement on the preparations for an international IAEA mission to the Zaporozhye NPP. You are welcome to read it in detail.

If you still have questions, please follow the discussion at the UN Security Council meeting that will take place in the next few hours at Russia's initiative. We hope this event will make it possible to send a unified signal to Kiev on the need to stop, immediately and permanently, any shelling of the plant and abstain from preventing a visit of the IAEA international mission to it.

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Question: Rossotrudnichestvo has been without a website for a relatively long time. Why is that?

Ivan Nechayev: We would advise you to ask the agency directly about the functioning of its website.

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Question: In the past week, Russian peacekeepers prevented journalists of two Armenian media outlets to enter Artsakh to carry out their professional duties without proper explanation. What is the reason for restricting the movement of journalists via the Lachin corridor?

Ivan Nechayev: I have already answered this question during the first part of the briefing. We can comment on this in more detail upon receiving additional information.

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Question: On July 9 of this year, Azerbaijan and the European Union signed an agreement for increased gas supplies. Earlier, in February of this year, Azerbaijan and Russia signed the Declaration on Allied Cooperation, paragraph 17 of which reads: "The parties shall abstain from taking any actions against each other, including those exercised via third countries." The agreement with the EU is openly aimed at ousting Russia from the European gas market. Isn't this a violation of allied commitments by Baku?

Ivan Nechayev: As far as we understand, this is the Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy. Azerbaijan and the EU signed it on July 18 of this year. We don't think such a sectoral document runs counter to the Declaration on Strategic Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan of February 22 of this year.

Every state has the right to decide independently how to develop relations and with whom, including the oil-and-gas industry. In the past few years, Azerbaijan has made a big leap in its socioeconomic development. This is certainly increasing its appeal for international investors.

Moscow and Baku are relying on their long-standing experience of productive cooperation in the fuel-and-energy sector. Our agenda of trade and economic cooperation includes both the implementation of long-term contracts and the development of new investment projects.

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Question: You mentioned Clause 6 of the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020. Not so long ago, Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia Armen Grigoryan commented on the escalation and the fate of the corridor, mentioning the same Clause 6. He also noted that Azerbaijan's demand to surrender populated localities and change the route was unlawful under Clause 6, which says that a plan to this effect will be outlined within the next three years. Mr Grigoryan stated that Armenia has adopted or approved no such plan. This begs the following question: Are there any oral or written agreements, apart from the Trilateral Statement, which the public is unaware of? What are Baku's grounds for demanding that Armenia discontinue the traffic along the old route even before the expiry of the three-year term and start using the new road that is yet to be built?

Ivan Nechayev: Whatever we can say at this moment was said in the first part of this briefing.

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Question: Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and the Foreign Ministry of Armenia have expressed dissatisfaction with the Russian peacekeepers' performance. The Armenian Foreign Ministry declared that it had warned Russia of misgivings and concerns arising from their activities back in February 2021. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said recently that there had been no appeals from Armenia. I would like to have it clarified whether Armenia made any remonstrations in this regard or not?

Ivan Nechayev: Earlier, both Baku and Yerevan noted the important role played by the Russian peacekeeping contingent. We regard isolated criticisms levelled at the peacekeepers as unjustified. We would suggest that you contact the Defence Ministry of Russia for more details.

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Question: On August 9, Moscow University Rector Viktor Sadovnichy told a news conference at the Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency that in 2022, the university had enrolled many more foreign students from the UK, the Czech Republic, and other countries. Is there any data on the current rate of foreign students' enrolment at Russian universities? What we would like to know in particular is whether special quotas have been allocated for Russian compatriots living abroad and their children and what support the Russian Federation is rendering to them?

Ivan Nechayev: This academic year, to implement the Russian Government's resolution, a quota numbering 23,000 state-financed openings at Russian universities has been allocated for foreign citizens and stateless persons, including Russian compatriots living abroad. Of these, 20 percent are reserved for winners of academic competitions, with the usual selection procedure applied to the rest.

In the course of the selection campaign, applicants from 183 countries submitted over 82,000 requests via the Education in the Russian Federation for Foreigners state information system. By now, Rossotrudnichestvo and Russian missions abroad have selected 15,730 candidates; over 1,000 state-financed openings have been assigned to Russian compatriots.

It should be noted that foreigners display a growing interest in studying at Russian universities, with clinical medicine, economics and management, information technology, political science, and linguistics leading in popularity in the 2022/2023 academic year.

The majority of foreign students at Russian universities hail from the CIS member states, China, Syria, and Mongolia. A considerable number of applicants will come from Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Owing to a certain reduction in the student inflow from unfriendly countries, Russia has managed to meet the quota enlargement demands from the states with which it maintains close partner relations.

We are pleased that despite the collective West's campaign to cancel Russian culture and education, young people from Western countries are still planning to study in Russia. This year, according to preliminary estimates, these students will number about 1,300. Moreover, the number of young Austrians, Germans, Hungarians and Serbs aspiring to study in Russia has exceeded the figures we had last year.

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