



**Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow,
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Sergey Lavrov's upcoming participation in a Valdai Club event

On October 24, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will meet with the participants in the 19th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, A Post-Hegemonic World: Justice and Security for Everyone.

The Foreign Minister will present the latest assessment of the major trends in global developments and answer questions from the participants, which will include Russian and foreign experts in foreign policy and international relations.

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Sergey Lavrov's participation in the 24th World Russian People's Council

On October 25, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will give a welcome address to the plenary session of the 24th World Russian People's Council, Orthodox Christianity and the World in the 21st Century, which will take place in the Church Council Hall of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

Participants plan to discuss topical issues of modern times, specifically, the global mission of the Orthodox Christian Church, how the Church meets current challenges and the place of the Church and the Orthodox Christian faith in modern society.

As per tradition, the event will be attended by statespersons and public figures, scholars, diplomats, representatives of local Orthodox Christian churches and the clergy.

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World Thematic Conference "Economic Cooperation: Compatriots and Russian Regions. Responding to Modern Challenges"

The World Thematic Conference, Economic Cooperation: Compatriots and Russian Regions. Responding to Modern Challenges, will be held in Moscow on November 1-2 under the umbrella of the Government Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad.

The forum will be attended by members of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots, business compatriots, prominent members of the Russian diaspora (150 delegates from 84 countries), representatives of legislative and executive authorities of the Russian Federation and Russian regions, as well as members of Russian expert and business circles.

There will be two plenary meetings, panel discussions titled The Russian World and Modern Challenges; and Russian Regions and Compatriots: Promoting Trade and Economic Cooperation, four themed sections: Tourism: Trends and Opportunities in Modern Conditions; IT and Small Business: New Goals and Horizons; Young Compatriots as Drivers of Economic Development at the Time of Change; and The Right to Defence: Business in Russia and Abroad.

The Moscow Government is helping organise the forum. The leading Russian and regional media and the media of our compatriots living abroad will provide media coverage.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov plans to attend the forum.

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The Ukrainian crisis

NATO countries seem to be in a competition with each other, flooding Ukraine with weapons and ammunition, providing intelligence data, training its military personnel and helping it plan military operations, thereby moving ever closer to the dangerous line beyond which lies direct confrontation with Russia. According to an update published by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy last week, the combined Western assistance to Ukraine has reached \$42.3 billion, out of which the United States, which is Kiev's main sponsor, accounts for more than a half (\$28.3 billion) and does not plan to stop. On October 14, it announced the allocation of a new \$725 million tranche to Ukraine.

This logically brings us to the decisions adopted in the Baltic countries to declare Russia a sponsor of terrorism. This is not true, or rather, the address is wrong. All the papers to this effect, which have been signed, adopted and made public in the Baltic countries, should be addressed to themselves. These countries and regimes, which have engaged in extremist terrorist activities, killed civilians, destroyed infrastructure and intimidated people for years over refusal to accept their nationalist slogans, are now allocating huge funds and sending weapons to the Kiev regime and are therefore the donors, sponsors and supporters of its extremist terrorist activities. As the saying goes, a guilty conscience gives itself away. That is why NATO countries are trying to shift the blame on whoever possible to throw off suspicion. You are not just accomplices of the Kiev regime's crimes, but those who you condemn in your declarations and statements; you are the sponsors of Kiev's terrorist activities conducted with the direct involvement of NATO and its individual members led by the United States.

The Europeans are trying to keep up with their big brothers, the Americans. EU countries and pan-European institutions have already shelled out \$8.6 billion, and on October 17, their foreign ministers signed off on a military assistance mission to train over 15,000 Ukrainian command personnel at various levels in two years. The mission will be deployed in a month. The EU approved an additional 107 million euros for this venture. This step, along with supplying the Kiev regime with lethal weapons, qualitatively increases the European Union's involvement, making it a party to the conflict.

The so-called Ukraine Defence Contact Group decided, at its sixth Ramstein format meeting in Brussels on October 12, to supply Kiev with modern air defence systems. In addition to them, according to statements by the US military, almost 1,500 Stinger portable anti-aircraft missile systems will be delivered to Ukraine. In total, since the beginning of the special military operation, NATO countries have delivered at least 300 tanks, 130 infantry fighting vehicles, 400 armoured personnel carriers, 450 other kinds of armoured vehicles, 700 artillery systems, including multiple rocket launchers and mortars, 5,000 portable anti-aircraft and 80,000 anti-tank missile systems and grenade launchers, 160,000 small arms, 800,000 artillery shells and 90 million rounds of ammunition.

After that, the regimes in the EU countries asked their citizens to spend less time in the shower and find ways to keep warm because they can no longer provide them with warmth and comfort. We know where the money is going. Now the people in those EU countries know this too.

It can be said with certainty that a large part of these weapons have already ended up or will soon end up on the black market, as monthly arms smuggling exceeds \$1 billion. NATO military goods dispatched to the Kiev regime end up in the hands of terrorists, extremist and criminal groups in the Middle East, Central Africa and Southeast Asia. We have been pointing this out from the start. As always, we weren't believed; they said we were exaggerating and that was not a problem. But it was a problem. Now the international community has to deal with this. Major political and public figures, journalists and the general public are well aware of this. Independent experts and specialised agencies, including Interpol and Europol, have long expressed concerns about the illegal flow of weapons from Ukraine, including to European countries.

Think of the massive protests in the EU countries as the people are being pushed out of their comfort zone; combine that with the growing circulation of illegal and smuggled weapons on the black market; add to that the uncontrollable flood of migrants reaching the EU in recent years. The authorities have not even been able to calculate their number, let alone control their behaviour. All these factors add up to a bleak picture on the European continent. Who will deal with these problems in the EU countries? The people who are the face of Brussels' policies appear on screen every day. Not only do they not inspire confidence, their analytical skills and even their mental health are cause for concern. And everyone keeps going with eyes wide shut, exacerbating the security risks to their own citizens.

In Ukraine, the situation continues to deteriorate with massive human rights violations, rampant discrimination and persecution for political views, ethnic background, language and religion. We keep hearing that all this is a response to Moscow's actions. There is more to it than that. As we have been saying all along, this is a contagion devoid of logic or common sense. It has spread at all levels of government within the Kiev regime and has long taken root within it to become much more than just Russophobia.

You may know that Mukachevo city authorities in the Trans-Carpathian Region decided on October 13, 2022, to dismantle Turul, a Hungarian memorial. This is not a Soviet-era monument and there is nothing about it to give the Kiev regime anti-Soviet heartburn. This has nothing to do with de-communisation either. Let me remind you that a US businessman of Hungarian descent financed this monument, erected in 2008. It portrays an eagle as a mythological and heraldic symbol. According to the Hungarian national legend, it guided the nomadic Hungarian tribes to the territory of today's Hungary. No big deal, it would seem. And what did the Kiev regime nationalists place on the pedestal instead of the eagle? They placed a Ukrainian trident there. This is how their barbaric logic works.

They keep demonstrating their disdain for the interests of all ethnic minorities, even if Russians hardly qualify as a minority in Ukraine. This flies in the face of common sense, considering both the population numbers and the shared past. Still, the same applies to other ethnic groups. They reject even the theoretical possibility of any ethnic minority existing on Ukrainian territory with a mentality, history, or philosophy that diverges from that of the Kiev regime. That same trident must rule all. It must dominate everything by destroying and replacing, instead of bringing people together. This time, a Hungarian monument suffered. Once again, this is a telling and symbolic example. We are living in a new era – Western countries, and Western money. The Ukrainian authorities gave the green light. This was their sovereign and independent decision. Did something go wrong? Indeed. This is how it will always be. Everything that this nationalist, neo-Nazi Kiev regime does not approve, will be demolished and replaced with a trident. This is how Kiev has always demonstrated and will continue demonstrating its disdain towards any minorities. They have no interest in them. They are avenging future decisions which do not comply 100 percent with what the highest ranks of the Kiev regime believe.

You may also know that there was yet another exchange of detainees under the “110 for 110” formula on October 17, 2022. Among those who returned to Russia were 72 civilian sailors kept as hostages by the Kiev regime since the beginning of the special military operation. Kept in inhuman conditions, they could not leave their ships at the shipyards, most of them docked in Izmail, Odessa Region. Russia has been persistently seeking to liberate them and has referred this issue to the UN and the ICRC. We engaged in endless talks with representatives of the international community on this matter. Unfortunately, one of the sailors did not make it. Once again, these were civilians forcibly detained by the Kiev regime.

The outcome of a NATO Council defence ministers meeting on October 12-13

On October 12-13, Brussels hosted a North Atlantic Council meeting at the level of defence ministers which came as another confirmation of the NATO allies' unrelenting push to stoke confrontation in Europe.

It was decided to continue to provide military assistance to the Kiev regime. At a Ramstein-format meeting held on the sidelines of the event, the participants discussed plans to get the Ukrainian armed formations ready for the winter campaign and to boost the Kiev regime's missile and air defence capacity. Brussels is set on continuing to flood Ukraine with weapons and to gear up for a long war, which will inevitably lead to more casualties, but the collective West does not really care, since this is one of their goals. Washington and Brussels continue to hide behind a hypocritical front alleging they are not a party to the conflict. I made the numbers known today. They speak for themselves. The collective West's actual actions suggest otherwise.

By emptying ammo dumps in NATO member countries in order to support the Kiev regime, they are ensuring more orders primarily for US defence companies so they will be producing at full capacity. As the saying goes, one man's woes of war are another man's riches. We know who benefits the most from what is happening. This is the intransigent wing of the US domestic political establishment, which has for many years now been fomenting the situation in Ukraine not in the interest of the American people or the American state, but in the interests of individual companies and corporations.

The participating defence ministers also agreed to continue to build up NATO muscles on the eastern flank, made known their resolve to double their presence in the Baltic Sea and the North Sea to protect (which sounds particularly cynical) critical infrastructure following the attacks on Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2.

It's amazing, just six months ago President Biden and the US State Department representatives said the United States would benefit if this infrastructure was destroyed and Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 never existed. Now, on the heels of the act of sabotage that caused an explosion on these pipelines, they gather together and say that they will "protect" the gas pipeline. Hold on and make up your minds already. I believe, any truth, even that which is not accepted by the international community, is better than this endless prevarication. You yourself (NATO members) said that you would end the existence of Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 at any cost. President Biden said that in February. This was said on camera by official State Department spokespersons. Who are you going to protect Nord Stream from now? The United States? Then, this is how it should be articulated: during the meeting of NATO defence ministers in Brussels, a decision was made to protect Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 from Washington. One word is missing. Go ahead and put it in there.

Steadfast Noon, NATO's nuclear deterrence exercises which began on October 17, make the situation even tenser. The title is amazing, though. Importantly, most of the participating countries have a non-nuclear status. In violation of the fundamental principles of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United States has long been working to make these non-nuclear countries familiar with how to use nuclear weapons. Alleging that the issue is about long-planned and regular exercises, the Alliance leaders are trying to accuse Moscow of "irresponsible nuclear rhetoric." A likely story. These manoeuvres will not make the situation in Europe more stable, that's for sure.

With that, bold statements about the allegedly defensive nature of the Alliance turned out to be empty words again. De-escalation and strengthening the security system in Europe are still not a NATO priority.

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Report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine

On October 18, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine published its first report. It was established in accordance with the anti-Russia UN Human Rights Council resolution adopted in March of this year. I will remind you that we do not recognise the activities of this entity.

I will not reproduce everything that is mentioned in this opus. These “documents” eliminate the essence of UN institutions, including the Human Rights Council. It is impossible to be concerned over the rights of one specific person or a group of persons without understanding what is really happening and how many people have been suffering due to the West’s very active attempts to stoke conflict in Ukraine over many years. Now the West is becoming a direct accomplice in the criminal activities of the Kiev regime.

We did not have any illusions as regards the goals and tasks of the commission since it was established. It is yet another propaganda institution in the hands of the collective West. It was obvious that this structure was set up as one more instrument for exerting pressure on Russia, spreading false information, discrediting the Russian Armed Forces, as well as whitewashing and endlessly praising the Kiev regime. This is why we immediately decided not to engage with it at all.

The content and tone of the report merely confirmed our initial assessments that this mechanism is politicised and lacks independence. There is no doubt that the report was dictated by Western curators. The experts involved didn’t even try to make it seem unbiased and balanced. In a futile attempt to look objective, the authors of the report mention in passing that they “documented two cases in which Ukrainian armed forces shot, wounded, and tortured captured Russian armed forces soldiers, which are war crimes.” So “in some cases” there were two violations but everything else is “fine” because they were committed by the US-backed Kiev regime. It has already received over \$40 billion and a huge amount of US weapons, including those that the West has banned itself and criticises those who use them. This doesn’t look good. But otherwise the Kiev regime is dealing with people okay. No problems at all. There are videos showing how they shoot POWs and torture civilians. So what? This is a “young” democracy after all. It has not yet reached the same level of cynicism as the “old” one. Given this logic, it’s possible to forgive some things.

These “documents” testify to the criminal activities of the collective West and its violations of all conceivable standards and the very ideal of democracy that does not end at national borders. This democratic principle should cover international relations as well. But in defiance of this principle, they have enslaved many international agencies and organisations for their own purposes. They are far from noble. They are interested only in capitalising their own resources, opportunities and everything else they can use to gain a profit and keep growing it without any limits whatsoever.

We are well aware of the worth of the “evidence” and “testimonies” fabricated with tried-and-tested political and media tactics developed by the West.

The main supplier of information for such compositions has completely discredited itself. This is the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) that was established in 2014 under bilateral agreements between Kiev and the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Is it worth noting that many of its employees are Ukrainian citizens hired on the spot? Their political views and preferences are common knowledge. They provide this “breaking news.” They reduced a UN special reporter to a laughing stock for announcing that some stimulants were used in the Russian Armed Forces. This piece of news spread all over the world. Many people have written off these UN institutions, understanding what the collective West is doing to them, how it is distorting them, duping and framing them. They have become a rostrum for those who are seeking any opportunity to spread disinformation.

On the one hand, the collective West is doing all it can to demonstrate its resolve to counter fake news and disinformation and to verify all facts and data. On the other hand, it is using interstate institutions and international organisations to spread disinformation for its own purposes, in situations where professional expertise must be of primary importance.

It is revealing that the commission ignores the crimes committed by Ukrainian armed formations and nationalist battalions against the civilians of Donbass, and the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions, including daily massive shelling of residential areas and civilian facilities by multiple rocket launchers, heavy artillery, cluster munitions and the notorious Lepestok (Petal) anti-personnel mines. This is not interesting, and the commission fails to see any confirmation of this although the Russian Ambassador to the UN (the Human Rights Council is a member of the big UN family) demonstrated parts of these anti-personnel mines in the UN Headquarters. Apparently, commission members didn't have the time to rewind the tape and see it again and look at the photos. The commission didn't comment, either, on the use of civilians as a “living shield,” deliberate deployment of heavy artillery and fire positions at civilian sites and other mass violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Every day, the terrorist actions by the Kiev regime injure, mutilate and kill civilians, including women and children. But the commission takes no interest in the lives and rights of these people.

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US tour of Azov battalion fighters

American diplomats used to drag Pussy Riot around the world and the UN like pet monkeys, inventing and sponsoring their concerts and “punk prayer ceremonies”. I thought it was impossible to sink any lower, but we were wrong in our hopes for reason and a sense of proportionality in US diplomats.

Michael McFaul has made his mark. He is out of office now, but on the foreign policy front, still in the picture for the Democrats. He, like his liberal-democratic colleague, former US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power, who brought Pussy Riot to the UN headquarters, went even further and did everything he could to organise the visit of militants of the pro-Nazi Ukrainian Azov battalion to the US. Is this normal? A man who is in one way or another associated with diplomacy, now engaged in consultancy and teaching, is behind Azov’s trip to the US.

What is surprising in this story is not even that murderers and rapists from the death squad, who profess Russophobia and anti-Semitism and whom just three years ago US congressmen urged to recognise as a terrorist organisation, are received as guests of honour at the State Department, the Pentagon and Congress, as well as at Stanford University, where McFaul teaches. That’s not what’s surprising. We have seen that before. What is shocking is that this scum was openly praised for the sole reason that they are killing Russians. There is no other reason. In the eyes of the American elite, this is absolution for any crime and justification for unlimited arms deliveries to the Kiev regime. We have already seen all this in 1990s, when such “fighters for democracy and independence” of the North Caucasus, who were actually terrorists and extremists, fanatics, murderers and fiends, were welcomed in London and Washington as dearest guests. They were given the best platforms, money and political support; they were portrayed as heroes, not even shy about revealing their involvement in and organisation of terrorist acts. At that time, the Americans (Anglo-Saxon political strategists, politicians and statesmen) called all this a fight for democracy, the democratic process, defending liberal values. Let me remind you: Beslan, Dubrovka, Volgodonsk, Guryanova Street, a terrorist attack on the street in Moscow. They welcomed and praised those who committed all this, just like now they welcome and praise the Azov battalion and Vladimir Zelensky, and tell US citizens about their heroic deeds, thus justifying the fabulous sums billed to them. And through them they kill us, our citizens.

There is a limit to everything. We knew who Michael McFaul was as soon as he arrived here, not because of any prejudice towards him, but because of the way he behaved right away. Although he is no longer formally involved in diplomacy, he does not cease to be a human being. Or is he done with that too?

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Portugal's decision to give Ukraine six KA-32A11BC Russian firefighting helicopters

It should be noted that Lisbon's actions will violate the obligation, agreed to upon purchase, not to transfer helicopters to anyone without the consent of Russia, which applies indefinitely. Russia did not give its consent to such a transfer. Moreover, Lisbon is not transferring Russian helicopters to Ukraine in order to fight fires.

We call on our colleagues to come to their senses and avoid steps that would completely discredit Portugal as a negotiating partner and erase our history of mutually beneficial and previously mutually respectful cooperation.

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Update on Ukrainian human rights activist Yelena Berezhnaya

On October 17, 2022, Ukrainian human rights activist Yelena Berezhnaya celebrated her birthday. She is known for her activities not only in Russia but the world over. Yelena Berezhnaya has defended the rights of Russians and Russian-speaking people in Ukraine. She has not celebrated her birthday at home with her family but, to all appearances, behind bars. Has anyone from the UN Human Rights Council, Commission of Inquiry mentioned this in a report or raised an issue, or written a letter, or spoken publicly, or organised a meeting in support of this woman? What about Stanford University and Michael McFaul? Did they hold a conference to support her? Or is it again a case of a wrong person, wrong generation, wrong exterior, nationality, age or gender?

As many of you might remember, last March Yelena Berezhnaya was detained in Kiev and taken to an unknown location. Following that the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying there was cause for serious concern about her life and wellbeing. So far, no information about the fate of this human rights activist has been provided. There is every reason to believe that she might be still held by the Ukrainian Security Service in prison.

To refresh your memories, in 2014 Yelena Berezhnaya protested against the Kiev regime's repressive policies and the persecution of the priests and parishioners of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and was actively working against the glorification of Nazi accomplices and neo-Nazism.

I realise that she is not Nadezhda Savchenko. She has no one to defend her among the liberal-minded public, who, when preaching liberal values of freedom, clearly segregate people into "their own" and "others", into those who deserve having all this, that is, first-class people, and those whom they even do not want to hear about. They do not treat them as people who are entitled to anything in this life.

We have repeatedly called on international human rights bodies, including at the UN and the OSCE, to provide an appropriate assessment of the detention of Yelena Berezhnaya and to secure her release from prison. So far, there has been no response from these institutions, which, normally, are so concerned about human rights activists and human rights. What about the OSCE and its Polish Presidency? Don't they want to ask [Ukrainians] for information? Or are they not interested because she was not defending Poles, or the Catholic Church, or Polish priests? Have you no shame?

Segregation in the 21st century will be more terrifying than anything that Western civilisation put to test in the 20th century and earlier as well. We have pulled through those historical periods and drawn conclusions. The terrible thing is not only to commit an indecent or sinful or illegal act but, after having expressed regret, to fail to truly repent and continue doing the same. This is a terrible thing, which must not be forgiven.

In this connection, we plan again to officially approach the UN and the OSCE, in particular, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk, UN Assistant Secretary-General Ilze Brands Kehris and Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Matteo Mecacci, to inquire about Yelena Berezhnaya and not only her. But Yelena Berezhnaya is a symbol of what is happening there. She is a person behind whom stand the fates of the tens of thousands of people whom she defended. Now her life epitomises their fate.

We continue to insist that she be released immediately and without condition and that information is provided about the whereabouts of a great number of public figures who are being illegally detained by the Kiev regime.

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Official statements on food security made during celebrations in observance of the World Food Day

A ceremony dedicated to World Food Day and the 77th anniversary of the Organisation was held at the headquarters of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome on October 14.

We support FAO's decision to use Leave No One Behind as a motto for this year's event. We share many assessments regarding the challenging situation with ensuring global food security. Like most speakers, we are concerned about hunger spreading around the world. According to the UN, more than 800 million people (that's almost 1 billion out of 7 billion people living on Earth) are still affected by hunger which, it would seem, should have long become a thing of the past.

We stand behind the statements made by FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu and WFP Executive Director David Beasley regarding the importance of confronting the looming global food crisis, breaking the vicious cycle of hunger and acting immediately as a team to prevent the situation from getting out of hand. Pope Francis sent a strong humanitarian message to the participants of the event by saying that behind the numbers and endless statistics about hunger are, in fact, tragedies of real people.

We participate in the multilateral specific activities held by the UN agencies in Rome and New York. Unfortunately, a number of Western countries never stop trying to politicise the efforts to develop common approaches to returning international food markets to normalcy. The 50th session of the Committee on World Food Security (Rome, October 10-14) which, in fact, ended with nothing was no exception. With the collective West's compulsion to once again accuse Russia of creating a global food crisis, agreeing upon a document focused on specific international actions was impossible.

Notably, as a major agricultural powerhouse, our country makes a significant contribution to ensuring global food security. We are well aware of the importance of Russian food exports for the socioeconomic development of many countries in need. Our fertilisers are no less important for these purposes. Without them, their future harvests will be in jeopardy. We once again bring to everyone's attention the fact that normal functioning of the supply chains must be restored as soon as possible and the restrictions artificially imposed by the West on Russian economic operators as they carry out their foreign economic activities must be lifted.

We stand ready to supply both food and fertilisers and everything that may be needed to make sure that global food security is not at risk, but they won't let us do so. The United States is targeting global food security as it blocks financial transactions with regard to our products in every way it can. This is the shortest description of their malicious activity available. It is not just about blocking financial transactions, but also persecuting operators that work with our country, companies or intermediaries operating on the market that are perfectly legit and duly authorised to make such transactions. But they are still persecuted by the United States: blackmailed, threatened, and have their activities blocked by all available means.

The United States is targeting global food security and is doing everything to block one of the largest suppliers of agricultural products' ability to supply food to global food markets.

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Investigation of incidents at Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines

In the first days following the explosions at the gas pipelines, when Western and Central Europe were repeating the prompted word "sabotage," the meaning of which they didn't even understand, we were talking about subversion, explosions, detonations, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure that has vital importance for Europe.

Looking for "Moscow's hand" and "the Kremlin's or Russian traces," Western journalists used the data of a commercial service that monitors the movement of ships with transmitters that show their location. Can you imagine what would have happened if they had tracked the presence of Russian ships at the incident site? I can easily imagine it. Even children's programmes, cartoons and ads would have reported breaking news about the detection of Russian ships at the detonation site. There would have been no need for better evidence of "Russia's guilt" than the established movement pattern of Russian ships. They would have "found" a Russian ship, linked it with water bubbles and told the public a horror story or two. That would have been it. They would have drawn the line and formed the evidence base. Western journalists would have fully explored the theme.

The problem is that Swedish journalists detected the movement of ships at the explosion sites (September 22-25) but these were not Russian ships. They belonged to the Swedish Navy.

The Swedish Navy confirmed the presence of its ships in this area and the fact that they were there on a surveillance mission but did not comment on its purpose. Do you know why? They said that this is “strictly classified” information. How come? There were explosions at a civilian facility. NATO had a big meeting and defence ministers of the allied countries spoke about the need to protect these facilities. Are you in Stockholm unable to say to this day what your ships were doing there on the eve of the explosions? Is it classified information? Seriously?

The other day, the Swedish tabloid Expressen (the same tabloid which is often used to leak “confidential” information from Swedish government sources, including the country’s security services) published a report on the results of a visit to one of the areas of Sweden’s exclusive economic zone hit by the blasts. Journalists and experts from the Norwegian robotics company Blueye Robotics allegedly went out to sea on their own and used a deep-water drone to take photos and videos of the damaged section of the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline.

Among other things, the report clearly shows close surveillance in the area conducted by the Swedish and neighbouring Danish authorities. Now and then, you can see Swedish Coast Guard aircraft hovering above the reporters, a Swedish fighter jet whinging by, or a Danish warship looming on the horizon. All told, even a bird would hardly fly to the middle of the Baltic Sea unnoticed...

Freedom of the press, you might say. That may well be the case only if we look past the fact that ordinary journalists with powerful photographic equipment were allowed into the area after almost a month of painstaking work by the Swedish law enforcement and security service officers in this area.

The Swedish authorities (by the way, they have seriously exceeded their authority with regard to their exclusive economic zone, which, under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, is part of international waters) have shut down access to the area of the blast for more than a week citing “the need to conduct a preliminary inspection of the crime scene.” At the same time, a special ban was imposed on diving operations and underwater vehicles.

All restrictions on access to this area have been lifted now. However, reportedly, the Swedish law enforcement agencies and security services classified the materials obtained during the inspection, seized some physical evidence and are not willing to share the findings even with their EU partners, not to mention Russia.

I can't believe the Swedish authorities have done this. Usually, they are in the loop and are the first to share their findings. I remember well what Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde said. She knew right there and then what happened in the deep waters and who was to blame: Russia. What's stopping the minister from sharing information with us, the owners and co-owners of this infrastructure and certainly owners of the resource that was transported through it? What secrets have you unearthed that you don't want to share with anyone? Is this some kind of a NATO conspiracy of silence? Is it that if something fell into your hands, you will not let anyone know about it? It doesn't work that way. You know why? You are making it clear for everyone that you have something to hide. No one else should see what you found there. This goes to show that the collective West is behind everything that happened there. These were the ships of NATO, the collective West and Western regimes that were hanging out there right before the events unfolded. As you may be aware, back in 2015, NATO shells were discovered there that could have caused a blast like that. You are now hiding things that you must share with the international community.

The Swedish government chose not to review Moscow's proposal to conduct a joint investigation and issued a perfunctory note to the effect that the investigation is the exclusive jurisdiction of the Swedish prosecutor's office, which is (the funniest part) "independent" in its decisions. Is that right? Now your law enforcement agencies need time, privacy and independence to arrive at a decision? What about all that Novichok, Navalny and Skripal stuff? Did you need anything to accuse others? Of course, not. You just took the microphone and accused everyone, primarily us, of everything. Always. You had no time to talk about law enforcement agencies' independence or law. All you needed to do was accuse us of something as quickly as possible.

The Swedish government is defiantly sabotaging constructive dialogue with Russia on a matter that is so important to European security. Why? Because there are things to hide.

The question is what are you afraid of in Stockholm? Are you afraid that some of the Swedish backers or new allies didn't have time to destroy all the evidence? This is exactly what it looks like.

These Swedish games increasingly look like an attempt to hide important facts and limit the spread of information and the possibility of alternative investigations. When I say "alternative" I'm not talking about investigations that arrive at different conclusions, but investigations that each stakeholder must conduct in compliance with their national legislation and based on international legal norms.

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Signals regarding JCPOA negotiations

We have noticed signals from Washington implying that the United States has in effect lost all interest in talks to reset the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and intends to focus on supporting anti-government activities in Iran by inciting unrest and blatantly interfering in the domestic affairs of that country.

All this once again shows clearly that the United States is unable to act as a reliable partner that fulfils its obligations. We can see its desire to camouflage the mistakes and shortcomings in negotiations with Tehran and to exert customary pressure on undesirable parties by interfering in domestic affairs once again. This is not the first time that the Americans are trying to get out of fulfilling their obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and to deviate from the road aiming to reinstate a full-fledged Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

It appears that Washington intends to continue crudely trampling upon the provisions of this resolution in line with more convenient election campaign considerations or due to other circumstances on the domestic political agenda.

The international community closely follows and keeps track of all these developments. It is highly unlikely that at least one responsible state will be ready to accept this inadequate American logic. It was precisely the United States that decided to crudely violate its JCPOA obligations and those formalised by UN Security Council Resolution 2231 in 2018. Just like any other UN Security Council resolution, this legally binding document must be fulfilled, no matter what. The new US administration later came and said it was re-joining the deal, and talks got underway. However, something broke down in Washington once again, and they are now voicing a different position.

We once again urge Washington to irreversibly renounce all illegal anti-Iran sanctions as soon as possible and to unhesitatingly return into the legal framework of the JCPOA and UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

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New European sanctions against Iran and their destructive effect on JCPOA talks

On October 17, 2022 in Luxembourg, the European Council on Foreign Affairs adopted sanctions against “perpetrators of serious human rights violations” in Iran.

Before sanctioning Iran, the EU should take a look at its own human rights situation, considering its problems with migrants and refugees. These people came to Europe, which Josep Borrell described as “a garden,” in search of assistance. You have been bragging about special economic conditions and a better life than anywhere else. Europe is a garden, you said, and the rest of the world is a jungle. People from the jungle went to Europe, but it turned out that their rights are violated, that they are expelled, harassed and stripped of their rights.

The point is not the EU’s concern about alleged human rights violations in Iran. The point is the JCPOA deal, the implementation of which the United States has decided to postpone again. The European Council’s decision is obviously designed to fuel anti-Iran sentiments in the European and global communities. Such “feats” of Iranophobia happened many times before. The illegal and subversive nature of these sanctions should be obvious to everyone. Russia has more than once condemned the practice of unilateral sanctions adopted in violation of UN Security Council decisions. Our position has not changed.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the other day that Washington was taking “aggressive steps” aimed at supporting the protesters in Iran. The EU has probably decided to act in concert with these “signals” from overseas. I think they have received Washington’s instructions regarding this totally unsavoury act. This is especially deplorable because Europe’s policy in Iran seemed to be focused on a different matter during the past years. It should be said that Brussels has done a great deal to keep the nuclear deal afloat after the United States illegally withdrew from the JCPOA and adopted sanctions against Iran. Brussels acted wisely during the Vienna negotiations. It worked hard to formulate a package of decisions aimed at reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the basis that was coordinated by the signatory countries in 2015.

The EU’s foreign policy department can definitely see a connection between the achievements reached within the framework of the JCPOA and the current regrettable measures, which are seriously undermining all efforts to return to a comprehensive implementation of the nuclear deal.

Washington, unable to use diplomatic instruments for settling arising problems, has opted to put pressure on Iran, but the EU is not obliged to follow suit and interfere in Iran's internal affairs under the guise of "human rights violations." If some people think that nobody can see this, they should know that they are wrong.

Nobody is surprised any longer when the EU shoots itself in the foot; it has made so many mistakes that it's black and blue all over. However, apart from condemning the new European sanctions, which are an unacceptable and vile move taken contrary to the letter and spirit of the JCPOA and UN Security Council Resolution 2231, I would like to warn the EU and its member states against escalating tensions with Tehran and to call on them to set out their foreign policy priorities so that their deeds correspond to their declarations on strengthening international peace and security.

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The new Trans-Atlantic Data Privacy Framework

On October 7, 2022, President of the United States Joe Biden signed an executive order allegedly designed to introduce stronger safeguards regarding citizens' rights as part of online surveillance efforts by the American intelligence authorities.

In reality, this initiative introduces a new framework for trans-Atlantic personal data flows between the European Union and the United States, which follows up on the corresponding agreements the two sides reached in March 2022.

The European Commission welcomed the signing of this document on October 10, 2022. It will be now up to various EU structures to approve it, and if they do, it will come into force.

According to the text, the document introduces strict restrictions regarding the ability of the US intelligence authorities to access the data in question, i.e., the personal data of Europeans, while this access can be granted to protect national security only. Therefore, the US intelligence authorities will have access to all personal data of the Europeans, which is presented as having added value for the European states themselves. Can it be any other way? In other words, Washington will access this data whenever it needs. How charming.

Russia views the introduction of this mechanism as another step in the EU's path towards giving up on its digital sovereignty for the sake of enabling the United States to dominate this sector. This new initiative is nothing but yet another attempt by the US administration to set up a system for harvesting personal data from EU nationals in bulk and indiscriminately with the acquiescence and connivance of the bureaucrats in Brussels. These are the same officials who have been voicing concerns regarding cyber security threats emanating from Russia, China and other countries. However, they are willing to hand over the personal data of their own citizens to the US intelligence authorities just like that. The United States wiretapped Angela Merkel, and it had the Chancellor's personal data and disposed of it at their own discretion. So why not do the same with ordinary EU citizens? They are in the same boat, right? Interestingly, many European experts share this point of view and are also concerned and even shocked by these developments.

We would like to draw the attention of Russian nationals permanently residing on EU territory that they need to manage their personal data with extreme caution. If the EU and Brussels accept the new framework as imposed by Washington, the United States will have full access to this data and will be able to use it at its discretion.

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Disruption of the Russian delegation's work at the meetings of the First Committee of the UN General Assembly

We have noted the unacceptable working conditions the Russian delegation was faced with at the United Nations General Assembly First Committee meetings on international information security. The United States is hampering our efforts to influence negotiations and decision-making as part of the proven United Nations mechanism, the Open-ended Working Group. Without explanation or under far-fetched pretexts, senior officials from the Department of International Information Security have been denied visas. As a result, the values and interests of Russia and those who share them have to be defended by an extremely limited number of delegates at the current session of the General Assembly.

The motivation behind these lowly actions is clear: Washington and its allies (collaborators, I'd say) continue to promote the interests of Western monopolies on the UN platform – primarily, information and telecommunications companies whose products and services are used to extract and “capitalise” the intellectual resources of developing countries. Other Western corporations are copycatting the practices of the infamous Microsoft. We know that many of them feel offended by our exposure of their unfair policies towards users.

We are aware, in particular, of Washington's aggressive plans to fragment the internet in the follow-up to the April Declaration on the Future of the Internet, and to tighten total control over the internet to the detriment of its own people's interests. If Washington considers the EU as an ally, then why seek to move its citizens' personal data out of the region?

Russia will continue efforts to uncover the intentions and double standards of unfriendly states in the information landscape. We will continue to disseminate, on international platforms, any information we obtain on manipulations they use for surveillance, theft, sabotage, and slander that serve their political and, by and large, neocolonial ambitions.

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Russian delegation at the 7th Singapore International Cyber Week

The 7th Singapore International Cyber Week, held on October 18-20, 2022, is the largest event in Southeast Asia that brings the region's countries and their dialogue partners together to strengthen international cybersecurity. Russia has participated in this forum since 2018 at a high level.

This year, we noted the traditionally warm welcome and streamlined organisation on behalf of the hosts of the Singapore International Cyber Week. They created conditions to conduct bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the forum and to introduce foreign delegations to Russia's approaches and goals in cyberspace, which are to develop and enhance international legal mechanisms to prevent conflicts.

Many participants expressed genuine interest in Russian solutions to strengthen digital sovereignty, confirming our mutual understanding on this matter.

Unfortunately, US officials could not help but exploit the event to promote their propaganda materials about “unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine” that is “against international law.” The United States believes it is appropriate to use information and communication technology (ICT) for military purposes and to accuse our country, without proof, of hacking their critical infrastructure. They did not even mention that, in cooperation with the Kiev regime, they are perpetrating cyberattacks and using ICT to wage a hybrid war. These are their own affairs that, therefore, are of no interest to others. Clearly, these are attempts to manipulate public opinion in the world and once again demonstrate their imaginary domination in cyber affairs.

Many of our friends and supporters in the region refuse to fall for these propaganda tactics and have clear knowledge of Russia’s efforts within international and regional frameworks, including within ASEAN-centric mechanisms, with respect to building information security architecture. They are well aware of Russia’s consistent and thorough line at the UN General Assembly First Committee and the UN Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communication technologies 2021-2025. We are ready to address the international security agenda together with our partners on solid international legal grounds.

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Decision by the Svalbard Tourism Board to expel a Russian agency

On October 12, 2022, the Svalbard Tourism Board – an association of travel operators on Spitsbergen – decided to expel Arctic Travel Centre Grumant, which is part of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Arctikugol State Trust, Russia’s main entity operating in Spitsbergen. In particular, the Arctic Travel Centre will now be unable to display information about its travel offers on the Board’s resources, access its online booking system or participate in marketing initiatives.

This situation is an extension of the discriminatory boycott of the Russian operator by the local travel industry in March 2022, when the Board called on all tourism companies to refrain from using the services provided by the Arctic Travel Centre. The Arctikugol executives tried to settle the issue, but the Board refused to engage in dialogue on this matter.

This unfriendly step by the Svalbard Tourism Board nurtures Russophobia and fuels hostility and adversity on the archipelago by politicising the tourism industry. In addition, people travelling to the archipelago are the ones who suffer from this, since they will be denied the unique opportunity to visit Russian mining towns of Barentsburg and Piramida.

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Ritual offering by Prime Minister of Japan to war-linked Yasukuni shrine

On October 17, 2022, Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida once again sent a ritual offering to Yasukuni, a Shinto shrine.

As you know, all the country's Shinto shrines hold religious festivals every autumn. The Japanese leader could have picked any other shrine to send an offering to, but Fumio Kishida chose Yasukuni, the unwavering symbol of revanchism. This temple honours the souls of the most prominent Japanese war criminals convicted by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. By undertaking this initiative, the Prime Minister has once again demonstrated his cynical disdain for the feelings of the people in neighbouring countries who suffered from militarist Japan, the main Nazi accomplice in the Pacific Ocean during World War II.

We would like to remind Tokyo that it must fully acknowledge its responsibility for the war crimes committed by the Japanese militarist regime, as demonstrated once again in great detail by Russian and international experts during an international conference at the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy on September 28, 2022.

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Valery Gergiev's expulsion from the Swedish Royal Academy of Music

We have noted the unfriendly steps undertaken by Sweden against Russia in the wake of Western anti-Russia policy. This time, Valery Gergiev, a world-famous Russian conductor, was excluded from the Swedish Royal Academy of Music as a foreign member. The Academy approved the decision to this effect during its October 10, 2022, meeting. As a formal pretext, the Academy pointed to the unwillingness by this renowned musician, a genius and a prominent professional to make political statements the collective West wanted to hear from him.

Unfortunately, not only the Swedish authorities, but also cultural figures have been seeking to politicise art instead of prioritising talent and creativity. The officials in this country support neo-Nazism in the European continent. They could have kept their civility, at least on cultural matters, but no, they decided otherwise.

It was Valery Gergiev who initiated the annual Baltic Sea Festival which has brought Sweden so much praise and glory. For 17 years, from 2003 through 2019, he took part in it with the Mariinsky Theatre orchestra and soloists. It was he who, by investing his authority and brilliant performances, made this festival and its host country, Sweden, a high-profile destination.

The decision by the Swedish Academy to sever its ties with the great conductor once and for all will always remain a stain on its reputation.

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UN Disarmament Week

On October 24-30, the annual Disarmament Week will be held under UN auspices.

The Russian Federation invariably strives to support and improve the global security architecture. We consistently advocate efforts to preserve and strengthen international law on arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. We prioritise the need to respect the interests of all UN member states without exception on the basis of the equal and indivisible security principle.

Russian initiatives are well-known. We hope that they will receive support, including draft resolutions submitted by the Russian Federation at the First Committee of the 77th UN General Assembly (transparency and confidence-building measures in space activity, proposals on no first placement of weapons in space and efforts to support the system of international agreements on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation). All essential arguments are reflected in detailed remarks and statements by Russian representatives at the Committee's meetings.

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The Days of Russian Spiritual Culture in Armenia and Belarus

On October 5-7, 2022, Yerevan hosted the Days of Russian Spiritual Culture in Armenia, featuring a performance of the Moscow Synod Choir and a unique exhibition called Russia, Country of Museums, which numerous visitors enjoyed and praised.

A forum dealing with the current status of bilateral cooperation and its future prospects became the main event. The participants agreed to prepare and hold joint events marking the 100th anniversary of the Armenian film industry and the 150th birth anniversary of Sergey Rachmaninoff to be celebrated in 2023. They also discussed plans to prepare exhibitions, studies and digital projects with the participation of museums.

On October 13-14, 2022, Minsk hosted the Days of Russian Spiritual Culture in Belarus. This outstanding event featured a packed programme, with the Russian side organising performances by folk bands and choirs, workshops on the restoration of museum collections and a conference dealing with the common cultural, historical and spiritual legacy of our countries.

An exhibition called Holy Relics of Ancient Novgorod: The Light Shining through the Ages at the National History Museum of the Republic of Belarus features icons and architectural landmarks of ancient Novgorod. These art masterpieces are rightfully recognised as treasures of the world civilisation.

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16th Youth Delphic Games in the CIS

The Foreign Ministry continues to promote the development of youth exchanges. On October 14-18, 2022, Dushanbe hosted the 16th Youth Delphic Games of the CIS member states. This major cultural project helps young talents to unleash their potential and reach new heights in painting, music, choreography and other arts. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent greetings to the participants of the games.

This year, the Delphic Games marked their 20th anniversary. Timed to coincide with the Year of Folk Art and Cultural Heritage in the CIS, they became a memorable event for the CIS states, and contributed to greater mutual understanding between young people in our countries.

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Thirty years of diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan

October 22, 2022 is the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tleuberdi exchanged greetings on the occasion, praising the high level of Russian-Kazakh cooperation.

Russia and Kazakhstan are holding numerous events to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations under the earlier adopted Plan of Events.

Cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan stands at a high level, relying on a solid foundation of strategic partnership, alliance and neighbourly ties. Over the past three decades, the two countries have developed a solid legal framework (more than 300 treaties and agreements) regulating their relations. At its core is the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of May 25, 1992; the Declaration on Eternal Friendship and Alliance Looking Towards the 21st Century of July 6, 1998; and the Russia-Kazakhstan Agreement on Good-Neighbourliness and Alliance in the 21st Century of November 11, 2013. Moscow and Astana have a close relationship based on equality and mutual benefit. As before, its most important components are multifaceted trade, economic and investment ties, horizontal cooperation between the regions, industrial and transport cooperation, as well as coordinated steps at key international and regional platforms, including the EAEU, the CSTO, the CIS and the SCO.

Regular cultural and educational exchanges contribute to greater mutual understanding between the two friendly nations. In particular, in February 2022, the two countries signed an intergovernmental agreement in Nur-Sultan to open branches of universities in each other's territories. We expect that this document will give an additional impetus to cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in research and education. In September, a branch of the MEPhI National Research Nuclear University opened in Almaty and a branch of Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas opened in Atyrau. This created opportunities for as many as 200 students to receive Russian education in the fields that are in demand in Kazakhstan.

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Anniversary of the UN Charter

On October 24, the world will celebrate another anniversary of the United Nations Charter. This date prompts us not so much to celebrate the achievements of the UN but to think about the world's current attitude to this Organisation and how much the world actually respects the UN Charter. This historic event paved the way for the activity of this global Organisation, a cornerstone of modern international relations and foundation of genuine multilateralism.

Russia traditionally defends the UN's central coordinating role in global affairs. We are confident that, 77 years on, the UN must remain a unique framework for seeking collective solutions to topical problems, making a decisive contribution to supporting international peace and security, promoting human rights and consistent socioeconomic development.

Unfortunately, a group of states representing the collective West, led by the United States, will not abandon attempts to retain its monopoly on global decisions. They will not abandon the parent state philosophy or cease considering other countries as their areas of influence and colonies. In line with their notorious rules-based world order, they are reinventing the universal principles of interaction between states and forming alternative, non-inclusive frameworks bypassing the global Organisation or its specialised bodies.

We cannot ignore such flawed practices as unlawful unilateral coercive measures and increasingly frequent steps to transform the UN into a platform for demonising countries that pursue their individual course – a course independent from the collective West or particular states but still grounded in international law. This is particularly true in the context of the crisis in Ukraine and around it. The actions of Western countries not only run counter to the UN Charter but cause irreparable damage to the authority and effectiveness of the entire UN system.

It is with deep regret that we have to note frequent attempts of the Western camp to bend the UN Secretariat to its will and privatise it by aggressively promoting nationals of Western countries to senior posts. Therefore, we would like to remind everybody once again that members of the Secretariat, regardless of their ethnicity and nationality, must unfailingly adhere to the principles of impartiality and centrality as stipulated by Article 100 of the UN Charter.

We believe that, in the current momentous period, it is important more than ever to ensure meticulous compliance with the founding document of the United Nations, its Charter, and the enshrined generally recognised international legal norms. There must be a special focus on maintaining sovereign equality between countries. International communication must be based on respect for the opinions and concerns of all countries without exception, no matter the size, resources and influence.

As a founding member of the UN and permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia will continue to insist on universal respect for this global organisation's Charter. We will continue to work with those who share its ideals and support building a more just and democratic multipolar world order. We attach particular importance to the work within the Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter established in July 2021 with Russia's direct involvement.

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50th anniversary of World Development Information Day

In 1972, the UN General Assembly issued Resolution 3038 establishing World Development Information Day that draws attention of the world public to development issues and the need to strengthen international cooperation to address such issues.

The General Assembly also ruled that the date will coincide with United Nations Day, marked on October 24.

In the circumstances when competition is starting to prevail over cooperation between countries, and the pandemic continues to take lives, universal and constructive initiatives are becoming extremely relevant as they facilitate consolidation of political and economic potentials of countries to balance out the finance and technology industries, overcome discrimination and double standards and to build a truly just and inclusive world order.

It is important to give a qualitatively new impetus to such instruments as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which formalised the general vision of all member states concerning the future development of humanity in the form of Sustainable Development Goals. We believe that this document holds the required potential to mobilise additional resources for coordinated post-Covid recovery of the global economy and for meeting new challenges in sustainable development.

On our part, we are open to partnerships with all countries that respect the principles of international law and mutually beneficial cooperation.

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Answers to media questions:

Question: The EU foreign ministers have announced the establishment of the Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM Ukraine) to further support the Ukrainian armed forces. The announcement of the EU Council says that the aim of the mission is “to contribute to enhancing the military capability of Ukraine’s Armed Forces to effectively conduct military operations, in order to allow Ukraine to defend its territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, effectively exercise its sovereignty and protect civilians.” Could you comment on the Council’s decision and the declared goals of the mission?

Maria Zakharova: Indeed, on October 17, 2022, Brussels announced the establishment of a military mission to train the Ukrainian military in the EU countries. Needless to say, this EU decision is reckless and dangerous. In fact, it is pushing the EU towards a situation where it will become a party to the conflict. By adopting that decision, the leaders of the European countries that have joined this mission have become accomplices in the war crimes committed by the Ukrainian Armed Forces and nationalist battalions.

At the same time, they continue to flood Ukraine with lethal weapons. On the same day, the EU foreign ministers have coordinated the allocation of additional 500 million euros under the European Peace Facility (this is unabashed cynicism) for purchasing and sending weapons, military equipment, uniforms and the like to Ukraine. The Ukrainian military are using these “peace facility” weapons to kill civilians, destroy their homes, hospitals, kindergartens and schools, and threaten to attack critical infrastructure facilities such as the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant. Since the Ukrainian political and military leadership is corrupt through and through, these weapons quickly find their way to the black market and are not only smuggled from it to the world’s hot spots but also to crime groups, terrorists and extremists in Europe.

Instead of working towards a peaceful settlement of crises and stronger security, Brussels has invested over 3 billion euros in supporting a “military solution” to the Ukrainian conflict, which it has been fostering for years by staging anti-constitutional coups, interfering in internal affairs and installing a specific model of democracy in Ukraine. By making hypocritical geopolitical statements, the EU leaders are reinforcing the Ukrainian Nazi government’s illusion that it can win “on the battlefield.” They deliberately invest mind-boggling funds in drawing out the armed confrontation, as if unaware that this is inexorably pushing them towards their own collapse. They say that they want to damage Russia’s interests but are actually harming the well-being of their own citizens.

The protest rallies held in European capitals are evidence of the ordinary Europeans’ growing discontent and unwillingness to pay for this short-sighted policy. Not all of them are guided by the noble ideals of peace. Not at all. But they are unwilling to accept their governments’ assurances of the need to pay for such actions out of their own pockets. People in the EU countries don’t regard this as necessary without making any political conclusions. They no longer want to take part in this, but they have no other option because nobody has ever asked for their opinions.

To follow up on the EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell’s allusion, the European garden has been taken over by weeds whose malicious influence is threatening their neighbours’ ecosystems and the survival of civilised species at home.

I think that Josep Borrell has added his name to the history of international relations with his phrase about the European garden. He will never get rid of it now.

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Question: US Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance Mallory Stewart said that Washington was ready to resume talks with Moscow on a new arms control framework to replace the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). But the parties should approach the discussions in good faith. To what extent is the US diplomat’s statement true to reality?

Maria Zakharova: There is nothing new in her remarks. Other US officials, including President Biden, spoke in the same vein. These utterances are not supported with concrete proposals sent via working channels. All of these remain in the information environment. These statements are exemplars of megaphone diplomacy and, as we understand, pursue propaganda aims. At the same time, they invariably urge Russia to demonstrate readiness for a resumption of interaction with the United States “in the spirit of goodwill.” It’s a bungling piece of work intended for internal public consumption.

Basically, we remain open to a dialogue with Washington on de-escalation, strategic stability, and risk-reduction measures, including with the use of arms control tools. But this is possible solely on the basis of equality and respect for our country’s interests.

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Question: What is your comment on yet another surge of spy hysteria in the Netherlands?

Maria Zakharova: It is just another outburst of spy mania in the Netherlands and an attempt on the part of a certain segment of that country’s political establishment and the collective West as a whole to spoil bilateral relations with Russia. It is a hobby horse for the Rutte government in its diverse reincarnations. Obviously, the Dutch authorities cannot invent anything better. Just think of all the fantastic and odd assertions regarding Russia that we have heard since 2014.

In their latest screed (which the Dutch have created jointly with their Belgian brethren and clearly this was done with the involvement of both countries’ government authorities), the local media did not hesitate to publish personal data of Russian diplomats and their family members. Apart from Russophobia and spy mania, there is a clear disdain for the elementary norms of morality, practice and law, let alone the canons of diplomacy and journalist ethics.

We are sorry to state that publications of this sort tally with the Dutch authorities’ general Russophobic policy. It is absolutely obvious that the Kingdom goes out of its way to remain at the vanguard of the Russophobic forces in Europe. We see this as a clear attempt to divert the attention of the pragmatic Dutch from real problems besetting their country and put the blame for the existing and future hardships on “Russian spies.”

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Question: During her October 18, 2022 briefing for foreign journalists, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said that there was nothing in Russian actions to suggest a desire to engage in good-faith negotiations. Washington believes that this war will end at the negotiating table. What is your take on the statements by the United States that Moscow must indicate that it is ready to engage in good-faith dialogue?

Maria Zakharova: It would be interesting for us to learn during what talks we failed to act in good faith, as she sees it. If she believes that we have not been engaging in any specific negotiations in good faith, we need to know what they are and determine the specific elements in the negotiating process they believe to be inappropriate.

If this is just a general statement, they better look in the mirror. We have already mentioned the Iran nuclear deal today and the would-be good faith demonstrated by the United States as a negotiator on this topic. Do you remember the statements in the early 2000s on the need to bomb Iran, including by former National Security Advisor to the US President John Bolton? Later, they said even without bombing Iran they could only use force against this country. They sat down at the negotiating table, went on to sign a deal and voted for it in the UN Security Council. But after that, the United States withdrew from the deal, even though it lacked an exit mechanism, by simply saying that they did not want to know anything about it anymore and did not hear about the UN Security Council resolution. The US later returned to the deal. When the negotiations resumed on equal terms, the US once again reverted to undermining the talks and interfering in Iran's domestic affairs to push through its agenda. This is all about the United States. After that, they criticise us for the way we engage in talks. We have other examples of talks and the way the US engages in them. Take the climate: one day they are in, the next day they are out, they refuse to talk, and then change their mind. I can also mention the missile defence talks. In what talks have we not been forthcoming?

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Question: On Ukraine...

Maria Zakharova: Let me remind you that there was a time when the United States failed to honour its promises not to expand NATO or not to reinforce its security at the expense of others. Today, the United States is subjecting countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East to coarse blackmail by forcing them to join the illegal sanctions and act against Russia. This is what American-style negotiating methods look like.

First, US officials lack the moral authority to teach other countries, especially Russia, what acting in good faith means. Everyone knows the Anglo-Saxon negotiating methods, and I have already listed them: double standards, lies, forgery, blackmail, hypocrisy, failing to honour commitments, and manipulation.

Second, the Kiev regime has become known for its inability to come to any agreement or deliver on its commitments. This is now obvious to everyone.

Let me give you a brief reminder. It was the United States that brought the Kiev regime to power by staging an unconstitutional coup. It happened in 2014 when the opposition, with people like Yatsenyuk, Tyagnibok and the like at its head, trampled upon the agreement they signed with the legitimate government. This is to answer your question on negotiating in good faith.

In early 2014, President Viktor Yanukovich held talks with the opposition. But they trampled upon all the agreements. The Minsk Agreements resulted from a negotiating process. For eight years, the leaders in Kiev violated them by bombing Donbass and sabotaging their implementation. They have recently admitted that they did not intend to carry out the agreements from the outset.

The Kiev regime gave negotiations another go when the special military operation started. They asked Russia to start talks but withdrew a month and a half later, clearly at the instructions from Washington. Does anyone have the slightest doubt over whether they can be trusted during talks?

Third, for eight years Russia has performed its mediating offices in the talks between Kiev and Donbass in good faith. We responded positively when Kiev asked for talks after the launch of the special military operation, and contributed to the negotiating process in good faith for discussing a treaty on Ukraine's neutrality and security guarantees. But it was Kiev that withdrew from the talks and acted in bad faith. We have always been open to talks. You will not find a single statement on our behalf saying that we refuse to talk to someone. We have always been open to talks, considering that the officials taking this stand do not express their personal views, but an official position.

As of today, the Ukrainian authorities formalised the ban on talks by approving a presidential executive order to this effect on September 30, 2022. Washington probably knows this.

The United States continues pumping more weapons into Ukraine, spending tens of billions of dollars, which does nothing but drag out the conflict and make it as bloody as possible, which clearly demonstrates that they are not committed to diplomacy. Therefore, it is not up to Washington to teach how to engage in talks or question our good faith during the negotiating process.

It is not Russia but the United States and the Kiev regime that must demonstrate their ability and readiness to negotiate in good faith and deliver on the agreements they reach. As for the United States, they must also demonstrate this on other matters. We have already mentioned Iran and the JCPOA today.

With this in mind, I return to Karen Donfried what she said about Russia.

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Question: On October 17, NATO launched its Steadfast Noon nuclear exercise. According to NATO officials, the exercise has nothing to do with current global developments, and will not involve any nuclear munitions. Western media outlets are expecting Russia to hold a similar exercise involving its Strategic Nuclear Forces. What does Moscow think about these statements and the exercise?

Maria Zakharova: We appreciate its name, Steadfast Noon, and this makes us wonder whether subsequent exercises should be called A Tree Hollow for an Elephant or Apples not Pears. These names are a real masterpiece. Soon they could announce a contest to name the next NATO exercise. It appears that NATO people cannot handle it.

Regardless of whether the organisers of the above-mentioned NATO exercise link it with current developments, we continue to see its destabilising aspect linked with the very essence of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements. We consistently point out that the involvement of aircraft and service personnel from NATO's non-nuclear member countries in practicing the use of US nuclear munitions that are deployed in Europe runs counter to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This also creates obvious security risks for Russia. This practice has to be stopped, and US nuclear weapons should be re-deployed stateside. Moreover, the relevant infrastructure for quickly deploying these weapons abroad should be dismantled.

In this context, the Western media has no grounds for discussing the organisation of similar exercises by Russia. We do not hold such exercises. All Russian nuclear weapons are located on Russian territory alone. Moreover, Russia stores its non-strategic and completely non-deployed nuclear weapons at centralised depots alone. As for Russian strategic deterrence forces, they hold regular scheduled exercises.

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Question: The Communist Party of China is now holding its 20th Congress. In his report, Xi Jinping mentioned the word “development” 108 times. What, in your opinion, does this signify? What do you think about the global development initiative set forth by Xi Jinping at the Congress?

Maria Zakharova: We are closely following the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China. According to Chinese representatives, the Congress is meant to determine the priorities of the country’s party and state development for the next five years.

We are happy to note that friendly China has scored considerable success in the field of state and socioeconomic development. China’s influence in global affairs continues to increase steadily. We intend to strengthen comprehensive political, economic, cultural and educational cooperation with China and our coordination on the international scene still further; this is what we are doing regularly.

An interview I gave to the Argumenty i Fakty newspaper contains detailed answers to all questions.

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Question: In a New York Times and Siena College survey, the largest number of respondents, 26 percent, said the economy is the most important problem facing the United States today. Inflation and the growing cost of living was in second place, cited by 19 percent. According to Bloomberg analysts, the US economy is bound to fall into recession this year. What do you think are the main causes of the impending recession in the United States?

Maria Zakharova: This is hardly a question for the Russian Foreign Ministry. This should be asked of economists or the United States.

I understand why you’re asking this question. They say, America isn’t having a recession. Ostensibly, it is something very similar to a recession, but not a recession exactly. Taking a broader view, this isn’t just an economic crisis, but the onset of a systemic crisis in the United States.

The current US Administration's stats have been disappointing. Judging by the published figures, they are in recession already. I am referring to the country's astronomical national debt of \$31 trillion, inflation accelerating above 8 percent, as well as a 1.6 percent drop in GDP in the first quarter of 2022 and another 0.9 percent in the second. They have printed about 6 billion unsecured dollars, which naturally provokes all these processes. Not to mention, they're printing one of the world's [reserve] currencies. How could they come to this with such a resource base?

Naturally, it is the price they're paying for injecting trillions of unsecured dollars into the American economy and the logical consequence of the liberal globalism model they've been following.

One could spend hours listing direct and indirect causes of this.

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Question: You just said that the US is in a systemic crisis. Could you explain what you meant?

Maria Zakharova: We explain this often enough. A systemic crisis is not an economic downturn caused by an emergency, such as the pandemic, for example. An economic crisis can be caused by a pandemic, by temporary difficulties, economic disruptions such as the US real estate market collapse in 2008, when the bubble burst. In this case, we are witnessing more manifestations of a systemic nature, which indicate systemic problems in the economy, in domestic and foreign policy, and this means a bigger crisis.

It is a crisis of the liberal ideology that has dominated in the United States for many years. It is failing economically. This speculative model at the core of the economy calls itself liberal but it is not even close to being liberal. Take Joe Biden's address to US oil producers, refiners and traders where he told them what they should or should not do. Last time I checked, the United States was not at war or adopting any emergency packages that would warrant moving from liberal economic values and management to complete subordination to the political system due to special circumstances.

A president who has not announced the bills he initiated, nor cited any special circumstances to explain his decisions, is suddenly making a demand to his country's economic operators. Of course, this is a system failure.

We always hear about the American economic model being self-regulatory, relying on freedom of supply and demand. But do we really see this? Using sanctions to direct global economic processes to benefit its own economic operators is killing the very idea of liberalism in the economy. They always need to create more and more world crises to gain the political and economic resources that keep them going. They want total control over global energy. Look what's going on. Price caps dictated by Washington, control over foreign energy markets, and forceful capture of a field for their energy operators to play their games. All this is evidence of a systemic crisis. This means that their liberal model isn't working anymore, and its self-regulation and its achievements can't help it. Only force can.

I will not talk much about their domestic politics. The ruling party's political opponents are being persecuted; a repressive machine is used (from legislation to law enforcement agencies), while media outlets belonging to political figures that need to be removed from the information and political agenda are blocked.

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Question: Can you tell us more about the current relationship between Russia and Israel in view of the special operation in Ukraine?

Maria Zakharova: I cannot tell you anything specific about the details of our relationship. We have said that we do not accept Israel's support for the Nazi Kiev regime. We do not understand it, particularly because Israel constantly declares its adherence to certain values, implying zero tolerance of nationalist ideology, rehabilitation of collaborationism, fascism and Nazism in any form. We do not understand this [support for Kiev], and we have expressed our stance clearly on this matter.

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Question: Do you believe Israel is involved in the conflict like Western countries?

Maria Zakharova: Israel has politically declared its support for the Kiev regime. We have declared our stance. They are aware of it.

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Question: Is Russia ready to start talks with Washington?

Maria Zakharova: We have never declined any contacts with Washington. We have had no intention of breaking contact with them. It was the US' initiative to block us, withdraw from joint treaties and breach commitments.

We have never had any issues with maintaining contact. But it becomes impossible when the other party blocks you.

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Question: Foreign Affairs published an article by former Russian diplomat Boris Bondarev, who served in the Russian permanent mission to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva. As he said, he resigned in protest of Russia's actions in Ukraine. In the article, he wrote that "Soviet-style propaganda had fully returned to Russian diplomacy." Specifically, Boris Bondarev wrote that diplomats enthusiastically report to Moscow about their success, describing a world picture that their superiors want to hear instead of the actual state of affairs. What can the Foreign Ministry say about this article? How much of this is true?

Maria Zakharova: I want to say that Andrey Vlasovs are not the same these days, as is the Foreign Affairs magazine. I sincerely recommend that you do actual journalism.

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Question: As far as I understand, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is about to visit a Middle Eastern country. Could you tell us which one?

Maria Zakharova: I can confirm that indeed, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has plans to make a foreign visit. The countries and dates will be confirmed once all the details are set.

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Question: The G20 trade and investment ministers failed to agree on a joint statement in September. The foreign ministers' meeting in July was also rather challenging. How does the Foreign Ministry assess the G20's ability to positively influence the global economy in the current context?

Maria Zakharova: Russia views the G20 as a key global economic forum. The G20 is directly related to one of the elements of the systemic failure in the US economic model. It was actually established as a response to the global economic crisis caused by the 2008 housing market crash in the United States.

Usually, any supranational organisation is formed to address the totality of problems affecting global development, etc. The Group of Twenty is one of the unique international forums formed in response to the problems created by one particular country. It was the United States that generated a major economic crisis that swept through the world, crashed more than one exchange, led to a massive wave of large, medium and small businesses' bankruptcies, ruined millions of people around the world, destroyed lives of a great number of people in the United States and abroad.

The G20 countries have come together to try to collectively help the world address that crisis. We are confident that the efforts made by this association, in which developed and developing economies are equally represented, can give an impetus to building a fair and inclusive world economic system with multiple decision-making centres.

At the same time, the Western countries' attempts to politicise the G20 and include off-topic and openly confrontational stories in its agenda have an extremely destructive impact on the forum's efficacy. They have the G7 – why don't they continue to take this approach in their narrow circle, without influencing anything, without solving anything, wrapped up in their intrigues? The G20 has a different mission – by and large, to clean up the mess the G7 and certain G7 members have made.

Nearly all drafts of G20 ministerial statements, in any field, contain deeply opportunistic anti-Russia provisions on Ukraine that Washington and its satellites chip in, often at the very last moment, obviously to complicate the work as much as they can. Challenges in any sphere are attributed to the aggravation of the situation in that country, without taking into account their real causes or features. Such provocative moves lead to the disruption of agreements that were as good as reached otherwise, and ministerial meetings, including the September meeting on trade and investment, close without any final documents signed.

It seems that all the West is ever trying to achieve is to denigrate and discredit Russia by any means, including the G20, and to shift responsibility for all the troubles and even their own mistakes onto someone else. Russia is not the only country that is dissatisfied – other G20 members, who are also BRICS Plus member states, are also dissatisfied with the escalation and are calling for a diplomatic solution to the situation around Ukraine. Many delegations have called for a depoliticised collective effort in agreed areas of cooperation rather than a show trial that would patently lead to a rift in the G20. Unfortunately, the G7 and those who dominate it are ignoring these calls and trying to paralyse the G20's work to achieve their own geopolitical ambitions and interests. If the G7 countries want to bring their satellites in there, let them invite them rather than spoil something created to correct their mistakes.

At the same time, we note the balanced and impartial course of the Indonesian presidency in the G20, which, despite the growing tension, is playing the role of an honest broker at this international platform. We highly appreciate Jakarta's principled approach and hope that the upcoming G20 summit in Bali on November 15-16 will make a tangible contribution to resolving the pressing global socioeconomic problems. For our part, we continue to interact with our partners to find compromise solutions to be able to achieve the adoption of the final leaders' declaration, which matters to the whole world.

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Question: Konstantin Gavrillov, Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation to the Vienna Negotiations on Military Security and Arms Control, said the current NATO nuclear exercise in Europe violated the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Earlier, he said that Western countries' support for the Kiev regime was tantamount to becoming directly involved in the conflict. Minsk said that NATO's Iron Wolf exercise could serve as a foundation for setting up strike formations on the borders with Russia and Belarus. What is the current status of the 2011 Vienna document, and what should we expect in the field of arms control and treaties with the West under the current circumstances?

Maria Zakharova: Iron Wolf is another amazing name. What other names can we suggest? How about Plush Turtle or Nylon Crocodile? Who is inventing all these names? They are either absurd or aggressive. They say nothing about peace, friendship and security. These names always resemble the glare of a rabid beast.

We cannot but feel concerned over NATO's current nuclear exercise, Steadfast Noon. Russia has repeatedly pointed out that US nuclear weapons are deployed in non-nuclear NATO member states, and that these countries are involved in practical scenarios for using nuclear weapons. US nuclear weapons that are deployed in Europe can reach Russian territory and hit strategic installations. This factor poses a direct and permanent threat to Russia. These actions grossly violate the letter and spirit of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; they hamper disarmament efforts and increase the risks of a nuclear conflict many times over.

Konstantin Gavrillov, Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation to the Vienna Negotiations on Military Security and Arms Control, noted precisely these violations and irresponsible actions on the part of NATO.

As I have already said, all Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons (whose amount was reduced four-fold on 1991 levels) are no longer deployed and are stored at centralised depots within the country's borders.

Regarding Western countries' direct support for the Kiev regime, they do not conceal this fact. On the contrary, they are proud of this. They openly aim to drag out hostilities for as long as possible, despite casualties and destruction. They say that they want Russia to be defeated. This stance emphasises their involvement in these developments. This cannot help but affect the situation in the field of arms control.

It will be possible to overcome the current profound crisis only when representatives of Western elites realise that it is impossible to maintain security on our continent without guaranteeing the security of Russia and its allies.

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Question: There are many reports about public demonstrations and protests over prices, energy and anti-Russia sanctions in Europe. What are our embassies saying on this score? What is your impression of the situation?

Maria Zakharova: Our comments are not necessary at this point. For now we have an opportunity to watch the developments in the beautiful EU "gardens"; they have not yet blocked the streaming. You can see everything yourself.

The leaders of the European Commission have admitted that the current high level of social well-being in the EU countries and the competitiveness of their economies were largely based on cheap energy coming from Russia, as the chief "gardener", Josep Borrell, said in a statement in Brussels on October 10, 2022.

Now that deliveries from Russia have been slashed and put in question by Western actions towards Russia, ordinary Europeans are suffering the consequences of the unwise sanctions policy and a biased attitude to the situation in Ukraine. Many of them used to be apolitical, some supported the policy of the collective West, and others felt sympathy for us. Now everyone can feel the effects. The protests in several European capitals are the people's logical reaction to their plummeting living standards. (I will not speak about the legitimacy of their actions; this is the competence of their countries.) The threats their economic systems are facing and will continue to face for some time now are the result of the anti-Russia policies of their ruling elites. EU citizens understand that there are no objective reasons for the current situation. They see that it has been created by their officials, EU bureaucrats and their own governments under the guidance of the United States and the pro-American officials who have been appointed to their positions in Brussels. The main idea is Russophobia generated by the economic, political and other interests of Washington. EU citizens have been fed this poisonous cocktail for years. They were told that it is medicine, but it turned out to be poison. This is why they are in a state of shock now. But we tried to warn them.

The NATO defence ministers discussed the protection of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines. Who will they protect them from? Themselves? It is their territory, their zone of responsibility and their security. It is their military blocs that are the dominant force everywhere, even in the non-member countries. They are controlling everything. From whom will they protect the pipes? Are they hinting that it is the notorious ISIS terrorist divers who are planting mines in Sweden's waters?

The initiative to launch a mutually beneficial project to deliver energy to Europe via the two pipelines came from Russia. We did everything to accomplish it. I have been asked many times in this room if the pipelines would ever work. I replied that we would do our best, and we did, despite the anti-Russia actions and slander campaigns. The EU has failed to do its job, allegedly because of the anti-Russia stand it had to take under US pressure. It turned out that they stood against the interests of their own citizens.

The scale and specific features of protests in different countries depend on their political and socioeconomic situation. I would not like to comment on that. It is a purely domestic affair.

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Question: President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan has proposed extending the grain deal to President Putin. Towards this end, the Turkish authorities have asked Washington to guarantee market access for Russian agricultural products, and their request has reportedly been granted. How far have the talks progressed? Will Moscow agree to extend the agreement, and if so, what will its conditions be?

Maria Zakharova: Our experts will provide their comments today. I would not like to step in before them.

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Question: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said during talks with his Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan, that the CSTO could send its observers to Armenia. Yerevan said it was ready to receive this delegation, but no practical steps followed. At the same time, this week, members of the EU civilian mission voiced their intention to deploy on Armenian territory. They are also talking about an OSCE mission. Is the CSTO planning to deploy its forces in the republic? What is the current status of talks on this issue?

Maria Zakharova: The sides are now discussing the issue of holding an extraordinary session of the CSTO's Collective Security Council.

During the upcoming meeting, the leaders of member states will discuss the results of the CSTO Mission's work in Armenia via videoconference, and they will review proposals on joint measures for assisting Yerevan, including a draft decision of the CSTO's Collective Security Council on joint measures to assist the Republic of Armenia.

The CSTO Secretariat will provide additional information. We will also share the news in this sphere.

Question: What particular assistance are you talking about?

Maria Zakharova: This issue is within the CSTO's remit.

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Question: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that it is pointless to maintain the current diplomatic presence in Western countries because the working conditions of Russian diplomats stationed there can hardly be called human. Does this mean that the work of Russian diplomatic missions in other countries will change soon? If the answer is yes, what changes do you expect?

Maria Zakharova: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has noted a fait accompli. Russia did not modify these formats. This was done by unfriendly countries that expel diplomats, suffer from spy mania, search for enemies among diplomatic personnel, refuse to issue visas and link diplomats' political views with the extension and accreditation of their activities in other countries.

We have always believed that diplomats should establish relations, strive to resolve problems and maintain contacts even during confrontation. The collective West has made a different conclusion. I know nothing about their motives. I can only guess that this, too, was done under US pressure, so that the EU and Russia would not maintain dialogue, including diplomatic dialogue. They wanted to sever ties in many places where normal and natural integration-oriented work, as well as economic convergence, were conducted for many years, and where diplomatic, cultural and political contacts were maintained. It was in Washington's interests to sever all this.

I am stating what has already taken place. There is no point knocking at their door, which has been closed (possibly not by the EU) and barricaded. There are many other areas and regions that want to work with us and which are waiting for us. They have even reproached us for failing to take advantage of available opportunities. We will work where we find it profitable and in mutually beneficial areas. There is a multitude of opportunities for implementing our national priorities.

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Question: A US Department of State representative said that Washington shares the views expressed by Paris, Berlin and London that if Iran does supply drones to Russia, this would amount to a violation of the nuclear deal. Can you comment on that?

Maria Zakharova: I have already commented on this matter during today's briefing. There is a single goal behind everything that is being done on the Iranian track today – the United States seeks to put this country under pressure. Washington has mobilised NATO and EU countries to back its position. They intend to pressure Iran in several areas: by interfering in its domestic affairs, pressuring its political leaders, coming up with far-fetched pretexts and using all the opportunities they have to this effect. The West knows its way around these matters.

The US administration has been trying to pin all kinds of violations of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 on Iran for several years now. Just a few days ago, Deputy Spokesperson for the US Department of State Vedant Patel made new allegations to this effect to piggyback on the topic of the supposed Iranian deliveries of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to Russia, which has been one of the top news stories in the American media lately.

Proving an axiom that does not require any proof to begin with is the hardest part. But we live in a world where this is precisely what we must do all the time. Who, in fact, is in violation of UNSC Resolution 2231? The United States of America. It simply withdrew from the deal. In 2018, the US said that it would not abide by it. If we follow its logic, they should have sanctioned themselves for failing to comply with the resolution. For some reason, they have not done this. Now, the US is making these absurd and irrational attempts to blame others for their failure to comply.

This is not the first time the Americans have shifted the blame on others, while presenting their phobias and assumptions as true facts. We have seen this under preceding administrations too. The tricks officials from Joe Biden's team used have not surprised us. On closer inspection, they follow the same policy line which consists of derailing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and UN Security Council Resolution 2231. If they did not want to return to this deal, why did they start all this? Why have all this circus with negotiations? If Donald Trump decided not to be part of it, they had to follow-up on this issue. Or maybe Joe Biden's team could not accept what Donald Trump was doing considering their opposition to everything the former president did, and simply pretended that they wanted to revive the deal. After that they decided to find someone to blame for their failure to find legal grounds for reviving the deal to suit their domestic agenda.

Vedant Patel grossly misrepresented the actual situation in his statements, showing that the US administration did have its moment of lucidity when it joined the Vienna talks to revive the nuclear deal, but after that Washington reverted to its usual policy of exerting maximum pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran. When the US fails to achieve something by diplomatic means, through talks, they instantly switch to Plan B and start pulling strings, pressing buttons, and pushing down on the accelerator even when it is illegal.

US Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley has also made some telling statements. Recently, he said that the question of whether the United States would return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was currently not on the agenda. Is there a way to know what is and what is not on Washington's agenda? We could not fail to note that the US administration and the European capitals that are on the same wavelength with Washington were so quick to utilise protests in Iran as a pretext for imposing new restrictions on Tehran without even thinking how this would affect the JCPOA talks and the nuclear deal in general.

We are convinced that nothing justifies the grave violations by the Western countries, primarily the United States. It was the US which decided to derail UN Security Council Resolution 2231 by walking away from its commitments and creating obstacles for other countries in implementing it. You cannot hide the truth behind statements or veil them with intrigues and false accusations against Iran, Russia, or any other country.

Despite UN Security Council Resolution 2231, the United States kept the unilateral embargo on military and technical cooperation between Iran and other countries in place and seeks to impose its illegitimate approaches around the world. Russia has condemned this policy many times and will persevere in its efforts to ensure strict compliance with all the requirements set forth in UNSC Resolution 2231 while Washington seeks to finish it off with any possible means at its disposal.

Both Iranian and Russian officials have recently refuted rumours circulating in so-called independent US media outlets with reference to "unnamed" sources about the Iranian UAVs. There is no need to comment on the claims Teheran faces since what we are dealing with here is just a series of groundless inferences and far-fetched allegations. The UK and France have been seeking to build these perorations into a single structure but every time they do it, the whole construct comes apart.

The question we need to answer is the following: is UNSC Resolution 2231 still alive? If the answer is yes, the United States must abide by it. It is currently not complying with it, and Washington is to blame for that. The United States is under obligation to perform this UN Security Council Resolution. This is Washington's moral duty since it voted for it. They were part of the whole construct but stopped complying with it later. Now they have objections regarding what others are doing. This is what I was talking about – proving an axiom is almost impossible.

The October 19, 2022, debate in the UN Security Council on this matter was quite telling. The United States and those aligned with it received a fitting rebuff. Once again, delegates talked about massive arms supplies to Ukraine by NATO, including heavy artillery and long-range missiles targeting peaceful cities. These flows have been going on for several months despite the requirements under international law and national regulations of the exporting countries. They seem to have lost common sense or any instinct of self-preservation. Interestingly, nobody seems to care about human rights in Lugansk or Donetsk. At the same time, the US made human rights in Iran its priority, for some reason. Against this backdrop, Tehran is not allowed to deliver anything to anyone, while Washington can, even if these supplies kill civilians. It is an open secret that some of these weapons have been popping up on the black market, including in Europe. By prolonging the agony for Vladimir Zelensky's regime, these suppliers have no problem causing as much damage as possible to Ukraine, its people, the European continent and the entire world.

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Question: Despite significant difficulties in air travel with the EU, there is need for European trips among Russian citizens. They have to follow complex itineraries, often transiting through third countries. They have to cross several borders and go through border control several times. Is there a risk of unsubstantiated detention of Russian nationals abroad (for example, for posting certain messages online, blogging, etc.)? Would you recommend that they limit such travel or advise against it? Could you perhaps give useful recommendations to Russian nationals on how to protect their rights abroad?

Maria Zakharova: Currently, entry into certain European countries for tourism or transit is prohibited to Russians as per decision of these countries' senior officials. These countries include Baltic states, Poland, Finland and the Czech Republic (starting October 25, 2022). All logistics questions should be addressed to them. Speaking about grounds for crossing the external EU border that are considered acceptable by local authorities, the border and customs services of said countries have been reported to make unsubstantiated and provocative demands of Russian nationals, which includes coercing them into signing documents condemning Russian officials' activity or conducting additional checks, down to confiscating cash.

The Russian Foreign Ministry condemns the discriminatory policy of the countries whose border officers act in the described manner, that is the Baltic states, Poland, Finland and the Czech Republic.

As concerns state borders inside the EU, it has been reported that Russian nationals can cross them as usual, on the same grounds as EU citizens.

Under the current circumstances, the Russian Foreign Ministry strongly recommends that Russian citizens planning to travel to Europe thoroughly familiarise themselves with up-to-date entry requirements at their destinations and weigh any potential risks against the necessity of such travel. These risks include denial of entry, possible annulment of a valid visa and being included on a restricted list. All sorts of provocations are in use. We are embarrassed for the European Union that goes against the very basic values that it has tried to exercise for decades.

It should be specifically noted that it is not the duty of Russian diplomats to assist with crossing foreign borders or resolving any related disputes. There are no Russia representatives at those borders. Russian embassies are greatly diminished due to mass expulsion of staff, including consular officers.

As a general bit of advice, I would like to remind the public that Russian nationals can use the services of lawyers and law firms that have expressed willingness to provide legal protection of Russians' rights abroad. The list of such professionals and firms can be found on the websites of Russian diplomatic missions.

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Question: The new government of Sweden has scrapped the concept of feminist foreign policy. According to Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström, it is a label with no substance behind it. How can you comment on this term? As a female diplomat, do you think that Russia could use the same concept?

Maria Zakharova: Where do I find strength to answer? It is ridiculous. The collective West has come to reject everything it was imposing on others as priorities.

When visiting Moscow, the former Swedish foreign minister took this exact tack when she addressed many issues that had nothing to do with gender. I remember our dialogue. She tried to push gender aspects of diplomacy and international relations. It is absurd.

To all such attempts one should say that first and foremost, a diplomat must be a professional, an expert, as well as a good person with morals, ethics and a conscience. Gender is not the decisive aspect in dealing with foreign affairs. Other aspects take precedence. The rest should be part of staffing, logistics and mutual understanding. But my view was not understood.

Now they call it a label with no substance. I fully agree. Unfortunately, many things that the collective West forces on others as mandatory when it comes to values are, in fact, labels with no substance, at best. And sometimes the label is the opposite of what's inside, which is more dangerous.

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