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**Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow,  
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## **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's meeting with Minister of External Affairs of Burundi**

Later today, on March 23, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will meet with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation of the Republic of Burundi Albert Shingiro in Sochi.

During the conversation, the sides will discuss key issues of the bilateral, regional and international agenda. They will focus on issues of preparing for and holding the 2nd Russia-Africa Summit in St Petersburg in July 2023.

A joint news conference is scheduled, following the talks, and it will be streamed on the Foreign Ministry website and social media.

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## **Upcoming meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund**

On March 27, a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund chaired Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will take place. The participants will sum up the results of the 2022 performance and adopt the areas of work for the upcoming period considering the new geopolitical situation.

This fund was created in 2010 in accordance with a Presidential Executive Order in order to support public diplomacy, promote the participation of Russian non-governmental organisations in international cooperation and actively involve civil society institutions in the foreign policy process. Under the auspices of the fund, scientific and educational programmes are held annually for young experts in international relations from Russia, the CIS countries and other countries, conferences, as well as roundtable discussions and expert meetings, including for bringing key Russian approaches to the main problems of the world agenda to the attention of our foreign partners.

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## **Foreign Minister of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian's working visit to Russia**

On March 29, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian will be in Moscow on a working visit. He will have talks with

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The ministers will continue their discussion of topical international issues, including the developments around the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme, the situation in Syria, Afghanistan, the South Caucasus and Caspian issues. The improvement of the situation in the Middle East will be considered in the context of the announced restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The ministers will touch upon the coordination of actions on international platforms, including the UN and the SCO, as well as the prospects for the negotiation process to conclude a free trade agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the EAEU.

They will focus on a comprehensive review of the bilateral agenda with an emphasis on the trade and economic component, including the implementation of joint infrastructure projects in the field of transport and energy, as well as strengthening the contractual basis of Russian-Iranian relations.

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### **Sergey Lavrov's upcoming talks with Foreign Minister of the Republic of Nicaragua Denis Moncada**

On March 30, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with Foreign Minister of the Republic of Nicaragua Denis Moncada, who will be in Russia on a working visit.

The foreign ministers will discuss the current state and prospects of the further development of the Russian-Nicaraguan partnership, including the strengthening of political dialogue, the expansion of trade, economic, scientific, technical, cultural and humanitarian ties, the implementation of priority projects of bilateral cooperation in the real sector, and the improvement of the legal framework.

Particular attention will be paid to building up close cooperation at international venues, primarily within the UN, as required by the current geopolitical realities. Promoting Russia's dialogue with the leading integration associations of Latin and Central America will also be addressed.

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### **Ukraine crisis**

Peaceful life is being established on the territories of the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions and the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, which were liberated from the neo-Nazi Kiev regime. Tens of thousands of specialists from

other Russian regions are restoring and rebuilding residential blocks and civilian infrastructure and repairing hundreds of kilometres of roads.

On March 15, 2023, a technological complex of an asphalt concrete plant was installed, and a trial batch of road pavement was produced in the Lugutinsky District, LPR. This will make it possible to upgrade about 410 km of roads, 20 bridges and overpasses. In Mariupol, it is planned to repair 54 km of roads and five bridges, complete the restoration of the city centre, and build another 30 multi-storey buildings with 2,700 apartments in total this year. In Donetsk, a perinatal centre with modern equipment, designed for 149 beds, will open its doors by the end of 2023.

Time has shown that the Kiev authorities succeeded only in destruction. Russia returned to these territories forever (there is no doubt about this) and is actively restoring what was destroyed by the Ukrainian neo-Nazis. Naturally, they were not the only destroyers. They were actively assisted by those who created them and illegally brought them to power, first of all, the Anglo-Saxon duo of Washington and London. We will talk about this later today.

On March 18, 2023, President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky introduced another package of sanctions against 300 individuals and 141 legal entities. In addition to Russian nationals, the list includes citizens of Iran and Syria, including Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Restrictive measures were introduced against a number of Russian defence, aviation, shipbuilding and automotive enterprises, including the Kalashnikov and Almaz-Antey concerns, as well as several companies from Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

The Kiev regime has wilfully cranked up the adoption of anti-Russia sanctions. This is being done to keep their own agenda afloat, including in the West, and to continue doing what they do best, where they are truly unequalled – professional scrounging against the backdrop of the total destruction of everything that was created by generations before them.

There is no end to the collective West pumping weapons into the Kiev regime. On March 20, the Pentagon said the amount of US military assistance to Ukraine had exceeded \$32.5 billion since the beginning of the special military operation. According to Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, nine NATO countries agreed to provide Kiev with more than 150 Leopard tanks to put together nine tank brigades.

The EU announced the allocation of funds to purchase more than 1 million rounds of ammunition for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The money – about \$2 billion – will be taken from the European Peace Facility, as before.

On March 21 of this year, UK's Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence Annabel Goldie made a few highly irresponsible statements. She announced that London would supply Ukraine with armour piercing rounds, which contain depleted uranium, alongside two Challenger-2 battle tanks. Her words were later confirmed at the official level in the UK. It was not a slip or another mistake. No, this was downright stupidity confirmed at the official level by the UK.

All the above is additional evidence of the aggressive intentions of the West, which does not need peace in Ukraine, in the region, or in the world. The West is obsessed with the manic idea of inflicting a "strategic defeat" on Russia and is ready to sacrifice an entire country, other nations, millions of lives for this. They would go to any length to have this fevered mind's idea, the need to dominate and feel exceptional, confirmed through such destructive logic and its practical implementation.

The recent statement by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken proved this. Commenting on Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow, he directly said a ceasefire in Ukraine was unacceptable. Let me remind you that the funding mechanism America's satellites in Europe are using to send money to the Kiev regime is called the European Peace Facility. Antony Blinken does not believe there is a possibility of a ceasefire. How these things can coexist in one mind is completely incomprehensible. There can be only one answer – one of them is an overt and cynical lie. Which one? That's obvious. It isn't a "Peace Facility," European or any other kind. That facility should have long been renamed a "War Facility." That would make more sense and deal with any inconsistency.

The Zelensky regime continues to fight dissent and potential opponents. The other day, the Verkhovna Rada approved in the first reading the draft law On Strengthening Democratic Civil Control over the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It limits the ability of the military personnel to participate in the country's political life, which is understandable. Kiev's political life is something sacred that belongs to those who occupied offices on Bankova Street. Those whose lives the Zelensky-led regime decided were cannon fodder should not be involved in governance institutions or even think about ever becoming part of them. They will be barred from pursuing options such as becoming deputies of any level or making public statements of any kind. They are limited in their ability to make public their opinions about domestic policies. Why do you think that is? Just because the Kiev regime fully (to the extent that it is capable) realised the inevitability of its own demise and is trying to do at least something

to delay this terrible moment. I hate to break it to them, but the terrible moment for them came a long time ago. The lack of conscience and morality prevented them from realising this.

By shutting the mouth of its own military, the Kiev regime is, in fact, trying to not only cover up the truth about what is happening in the war zone. Things are much worse. Torn by Western experiments and subjected to pitting people against each other by the West-led political forces, Ukraine is plunging into what, judging from policy statements by its leaders, was their nightmare scenario. Do you remember (I'm not talking only about Zelensky, since everyone prior to him did the same) them talking about the future of Ukraine as a democratic and free state where everyone can say what they want and has the right to participate in public and political life, and that all bodies of authority should be controlled by the media in accordance with the law to keep things open and transparent in order to overcome shortcomings? Unfortunately, what we see are problems that are immanent to that country, namely a merger of an all-out corruption and red tape.

As a reminder, Zelensky put the word "freedom" first, which was followed by concepts such as well-being, economic growth or financial stability. Sure enough, it was important, but came second, whereas freedom was in the first place: freedom and, comma, peace. Take a look. First, the Kiev regime dealt a blow to peace, as it allowed the West to turn Ukraine into a NATO foothold against Russia, to be flooded with weapons, to sell themselves out and be bought. The next blow targeted freedom. Things went incrementally and started out with reprisals against politicians, political scientists and journalists. Murders, disappearances, bullying, harassment and persecution of various kinds followed. After that came blatant censorship. All of that started long before 2022. There was pressure on the channels. Channels were closed down, reformatted and passed over to other influencers. Then something happened that could not be obstructed in any way, because the scale of the disaster was irreversible. The total dictatorship of one representative of the current group of authority (Zelensky) began. There was only one channel for dissemination of information. All others were supposed to join the mainstream. There was the total and most severe censorship of everything that was produced by the Ukrainian media. Persecution was followed by kidnappings, and people were disappearing not only in isolated instances, but systematically.

Today, all of that was enshrined, at least in the first reading, in the new law. This law does not just cross out (there's no place left for crosses) the principles, but formalises the irreversible departure of the current group of ruling

individuals from the principles (at least as voiced by them. There will be no return. It will only get worse).

Kiev also sees the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a threat. Why? Probably because (using the mid-20th century terminology), they refused to flash the Sieg Heil. They refused to swear allegiance to criminals and deviate from the covenants their ancestors had handed down to them. On March 20 of this year, President Vladimir Zelensky refused to meet with members of the Holy Synod who tried to urge him to prevent the escalation of inter-religious tensions in the country and stop persecution of clerics and members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. They tried to do everything in their power to use whatever is left of the system of communication between citizens and what is known (or used to be known) as the state, now the Kiev regime. They called on the regime to keep the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, which is an important Orthodox shrine, and prevent its transfer to the schismatic church. They tried to talk and wanted to be heard. They were denied even that.

Apparently, today's enemies of God who are in power in Ukraine are not going to stop. On March 21, Head of the Ternopol Regional Council Mikhail Golovko spoke about the planned expulsion of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church clergy from the Pochayev Lavra – another holy Orthodox monastery, a “strategic objective” (terrible words, but this is what they said), which must be achieved in the near future. We have spoken about all these trends at international platforms, sent letters, statements and reports, appealed and urged, explained things long and hard, while it could still have been prevented. I am referring to something wider than dividing and trampling upon everything that was proclaimed as high ideals in Ukraine, and in Europe, for that matter.

In a broader sense, it would make sense to capitalise on this topic to prevent the degradation of the general situation in Ukraine. The international community, represented by Western countries blocking any discussion of these topics, was silent. Some refused to hear; others refused to understand. Still others could have heard and understood, but did not want to do anything. Some put up fierce resistance.

The new stage of the religious war in Ukraine unleashed by the Kiev regime will not lead us anywhere good. The consequences will be tragic.

The recent developments, especially the UK decision to supply Ukraine with depleted uranium munitions, show that neither Kiev nor its Western handlers are interested in resolving the conflict. They are interested in the opposite – in escalation. They do not care what their scorched-earth tactics are doing to Ukraine (scorched in the truest sense of the word, given the depleted



uranium ammunition). They're now turning it into a source of radiation pollution.

These are reasons why the special military operation will continue. The Russian leadership has outlined its goals and objectives and repeatedly reaffirmed them. We will go back to the fundamental principles, which, unfortunately, are now violated on the territory of Ukraine, to show what is happening there and give an objective assessment.

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### **NATO and EU military supplies to Ukraine**

We hear daily reports by the Western media about the growing supplies of weapons, ammunition and military equipment sent to the Kiev regime by the United States, the EU and their satellites. New initiatives and training events for the gunmen from the Armed Forces of Ukraine are being announced. This was discussed during the most recent meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (Ramstein group) on March 15, and at a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council with the participation of defence ministers on March 20, which was held as part of a meeting of the Schuman Security and Defence Partnership Forum in Brussels on March 20-21. We are aware that Western intelligence services supply the Kiev regime with intelligence and act as spotters, i.e. carry out target marking, which is then used in hostilities. Tens of billions of dollars and euros are being spent on that. We are surprised at the fanfare with which the Western media reported this. This is not just a reprint of press releases by official bodies, but journalistic work. It turns out they're happy with it too.

As a reminder, the West is not investing money in returning peace and stability to Europe, but in military escalation and further destruction. The West has nothing to brag about in this regard, because it is only interested in its own gains. The current authorities of the United States and the EU, as well as their allies are ready to sacrifice the lives of all Ukrainians and other peoples of the post-Soviet space in order to achieve their own global (as they believe) domination.

I speak about this openly and mention the peoples of neighbouring countries and countries of the region for a simple reason. The UK's announcement about the depleted uranium munition supplies to the Kiev regime is changing the situation, no questions asked. Now, neither the neighbouring states, nor the states of the region will be able to control the impact of the used guns and shells. It simply cannot be done. You can participate in target marking or intelligence exchanges, or ask Washington to control the Kiev regime so that

it does not hit the territory of Poland, and does not shoot down objects over the territories of other countries. You can do anything. But you cannot say anything to radiation. It's impossible to make a bargain with it, or to put it under control.

We went through the tragedy of Chernobyl and Fukushima. We know that both tragedies had dire consequences that last to this day. They are of a different scale, but the lesson is the same: it is impossible to strike a deal with radiation.

When we hear London claiming that nothing special happened, and they are doing as they always do and absolutely everything is within the standard procedure, one gets mixed feeling. Usually, we give clear definitions, but there is a certain duality here. On the one hand, they are prevaricating when they say that these shells do not pose any particular threat. They do. Iraq and Yugoslavia are cases in point. But when they say that they use all of that regularly and it meets their standards, they are not lying. This is really business as usual for them. The use of these shells, which is consequential not only for the participants of the hostilities, but also for the people within the affected area or next to it and, most importantly, for future generations who will be using the fruits of this soil. Indeed, for them, this is a certain standard. Western standard. For us, it is not. That is why we are mentioning this.

This kind of destructive Western approach is not new. There have been many examples in history and recent history. We talk about them regularly. Let me remind you that the world was rid of the "brown plague" only thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the Soviet Union, the entire Soviet people. Our ancestors paid for this with an enormous loss of life and thought that this lesson would last for centuries. But as we can see now, they were wrong.

It's not a secret who is benefiting from the drawn-out conflict in Ukraine. The US defence corporations are raking in windfall profits from arms and equipment supplies. The empty arsenals of the European states are being replenished with new American weapons, and their depleted budgets are being replenished with US (not money) but loans. We know perfectly well what the phrase "US loans" means. In the military-political sphere, the EU has become fully dependent on Washington, completely erasing ideas about its "strategic autonomy." Until recently, they were talking about their security forces. The European Union talked about a lot in the context of ensuring its genuine sovereignty. Apparently, this is unlikely to ever happen. The Baltic countries, Poland and some other Eastern European members of the EU and NATO have found their niche. They are openly using the Ukraine conflict to realise their morbid ambitions and to siphon resources both from their Western coalition allies and Ukraine. Remember the outlandish reports about Poland exporting

Ukrainian black soil? This is one of the most heinous tricks pulled by the current Polish regime.

We have conducted research and summed up the publicly available data about the volume and range of supplies by NATO and the EU countries and weapons and military equipment to Ukraine. We will post visuals on this subject on our website and social media accounts soon.

We do not claim that this provides the full picture. A number of Western NGOs and institutions engaging in these calculations are talking about even larger amounts of military aid to Ukraine. One way or another, the existing information gives us an idea about the level of involvement of individual NATO and EU countries in the Ukraine conflict and, in fact, their complicity in the killing of civilians by the Ukrainian military, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and terrorist attacks against Russians and social facilities located in Russia. Since February 2022, the United States alone has supplied the Kiev neo-Nazi regime with weapons and military equipment worth \$33 billion, the UK \$5.2 billion, Germany \$2.8 billion, and Poland \$2.3 billion. The supplies include tanks and armoured vehicles, artillery systems, multiple launch rocket systems, and unmanned aerial vehicles. According to official statements, NATO countries have allocated at least \$65 billion and the EU countries over \$12 billion towards this end. These sizable funds could be spent on social and economic projects in Europe, which the citizens of these countries have been insisting on with their governments. They could be used to reinforce law enforcement bodies for them to better combat transnational crime, such as drug trafficking. There's much the European states could do with that kind of money. But no. There's a more exciting game to play called "the West's war to the last Ukrainian."

These statistics clearly demonstrate the scale of cynicism and violation of law by Western regimes, their disregard not only for human lives, but also for those theoretical developments that they call "human rights issues" and which they themselves created. Since February 2022, the Ukrainian military has used about 110,000 munitions against the DPR and LPR, including tactical missiles, attack drones, various MLRS missiles and large-calibre artillery shells. More than 4,600 civilians (including almost 200 children) were killed in the DPR, LPR and the liberated regions of the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions during this period, and several thousand people were wounded (more than 300 children among them). After the Ukrainian forces started using heavy weapons supplied by Western countries, the number of civilian casualties quadrupled.

We will post a spreadsheet soon. The world must know its anti-heroes.

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## **Monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church evicted from the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra**

The decision to evict the monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, approved by Ukraine's political leadership, is the peak of Kiev's years-long anti-church policy.

It is another matter that many people only noticed this when the monks were literally thrown out on the street. Before that, when this issue was being prepared for the "final solution" through laws, in the public mind and media, nobody pretended to notice it. We tried to raise the alarm and provided documents to prove our point to international organisations. We would like to ask them what they have done to prevent this turn of events. Regrettably, the answer will be "nothing."

We have long been talking at international organisations about the flagrant violations of human rights in that country. Acts of violence committed against the clergy of Ukraine's largest church and its multimillion congregation, the takeover of churches, numerous searches, detainments, arrests and interrogations of the clergy, the seizure of their property, stripping them of citizenship and psychological pressure, up to and including physical elimination, have long become a way of life in the modern Ukrainian state. It is the new normal. It has replaced the "old normal," but the world hoped that at least some elements remained indelible. This is why the West invented the term "new normal." In fact, there can be no "new normal." Things are either normal or they are not. It is absurd to think otherwise. But we are probably living in the age of the global absurd.

Some people say – not condemn, but mostly state the fact – that there are some "excesses," as they put it. Washington and European capitals, which claim to be supporting Ukraine but are actually pushing it deeper into the abyss, prefer to remain silent, for understandable reasons. They refuse to answer questions. We ask the questions, but they don't answer them. This is so convenient. This is the usual democratic process. The Western political establishment stands up – in word – in defence of believers' rights, which are among the fundamental civil rights and freedoms. But in reality, they have put up an information fence around this issue, a kind of information blockade.

On March 14, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent letters to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President of the UN General Assembly Csaba Korosi, OSCE Chairman-in-Office Bujar Osmani and OSCE Secretary

General Helga Maria Schmid condemning the Kiev regime's repressive policy aimed at destroying the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and urging the international leaders to offer a principled assessment of these actions.

These actions violate at least a dozen universally recognised international legal documents on the freedom of belief. The most important of them are the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the relevant OSCE commitments, and many other documents.

We urge the international community to condemn the Kiev regime's arbitrary actions towards a large part of its own people and demand an end to the persecution of the clergy and believers, which includes the use of methods that throw the world back into the Middle Ages.

An important point. When we call on the international community, this does not mean we are only appealing to countries where people follow Christianity. Definitely not. This topic should become universal. Countries where the majority of the population or large groups of the population aren't Christians but are Muslims, Buddhists, or Jews, should ring the bells in full force for a simple reason. This logic to destroy people and their religion will continue directly in Ukraine.

There are many examples of this. Yesterday we had shocking news. A video of the Quran being desecrated in Ukraine. I would like to point out that this footage is available on the Telegram channel of the head of the Chechen Republic, Mr Kadyrov, and in the media. It shows the Quran being burned. This is not just sacrilege, blasphemy. This implies that the action is irrevocable. They aren't just burning the Quran in this video; they are making a bonfire with the Quran. An attempt not just to destroy it, but to do it in a particularly perverse and cynical way – this is what is now occurring in Ukraine.

True, moral monsters can be found in any country, society, or social group – a person without conscience or just a criminal who has never heard of morality, but violates the law deliberately. That can happen anywhere. The problem is how the state responds to this using whatever powers it has – legislative, executive, law enforcement and judicial – and how society reacts. How the state responds has a big impact on how society reacts. If society reads a clear signal from the state, which is able to suppress and condemn such things and punish the perpetrators, society acts more decisively. People have a clear idea which institutions they need to invoke, what needs to be done to prevent

such things, what gaps the legislative or executive branch has. If society sees the inaction of the authorities, “false tolerance” or criminal negligence on the part of the relevant bodies and representatives of various branches of power, as is now happening in Ukraine, people conclude that either the institutions are useless and inactive, or this is a political signal as to what their attitude should be.

This situation is unfolding on the Ukrainian territory controlled by the Kiev regime. It's going to be ugly. First, people were pitted against each other. They had been incited for a long time, with a lot of money and resources invested. After they created this mess and pitted people against each other politically and socially, they moved on to national, language, cultural and ethnic identity issues. Finally, they hit religion.

I can hardly list all the things they need to do for the situation to become critical. Given that all the media outlets are controlled by the Kiev regime, the censorship is fierce, and many information sources are being blocked so that they could not express their point of view or even cover the events; this is not just tension in society, but a catastrophic convergence of factors that is becoming critical. It is critical already.

The Quran-burning incident, the persecution of Orthodox monks, and now their eviction from their holy places with no access to their shrines, are not isolated cases; it is a system-wide trend. They won't stop there; they'll take it further.

As a reminder, Ukraine is home to representatives of many ethnic, national and religious diasporas. That is why we want this information to be communicated through international organisations and bilateral contacts, to representatives of states, governments, public organisations dealing with issues of religion, religious freedom and confessions. It should be brought to their attention. In any case, they'll make a catastrophic mistake if they overlook it.

I would like to stress once again that if anyone is under the illusion that this is an isolated incident during hostilities (we know that anything can happen in this situation), this is false. We've been saying this for years.

The same holds true for various aspects of modern society in Ukraine, which, unfortunately, is a hostage of the Kiev regime. It is important to make every effort to prevent further deterioration of the situation at least going forward. The Foreign Ministry and Russian foreign missions will do their best to inform the international community about this case.

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**The discriminatory nature of the existing global monetary and financial system**

At one of our recent briefings, we announced the launch of a new section on our website, which would contain various white-books (collections of historical facts and documents) on crimes committed by the Anglo-Saxons and their satellites in different regions of the world, including the Middle East, Afghanistan, Ukraine, etc. We said that we would not stop at that and would keep adding new content. So, we keep our promise. Today, we have posted a selection of materials on the discriminatory nature of the existing global monetary and financial system.

Far from everyone can discern the G7 economic domination policies behind Washington and London's obvious destructive international activities expressed in unleashing open conflicts in the world. Since the global financial crisis and during the Covid pandemic, the US and euro zone monetary authorities have switched on the money printing presses at full capacity to cover the rapidly growing budget deficits and thus maintain the living standards of their populations. These huge money infusions were immediately invested outside of the issuers' markets. The mass-scale purchases of goods, services and assets around the world by Western companies triggered off global inflation processes that aggravated the position of the poorest countries and made achieving sustainable development goals significantly more difficult. The current price growth and food and energy crises are the result of the collective West's monetary and economic policies and an embodiment of a neo-colonial approach to sustaining the lifestyles of the Golden Billion.

The key imbalance in the existing system lies in the fact that only the issuers of the major reserve currencies can enjoy the privilege of building up and later devaluing loans, while the rest of the world has to live within their means and, moreover, depend on these Western "fluctuations." This is a modern manifestation of the imperial principle that allows the "centre" to thrive at the expense of the "peripheries."

The global financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, created by the joint effort of the international community to close the gap between poor and wealthy countries, have been taken hostage by the "chosen few" among the shareholders, who decided that they were in a position to provide financial aid based on the friend-or-foe principle.

International payments systems have become a kind of restrictive tools in the hands of Western politicians. These systems were conceived by their creators as market operations. In fact, they have always been regarded as only tools and neutral mechanisms. But locked within them are the national savings of client

countries and if the latter fall out of favour, the former become sources of free money for major Western banks. Examples are plenty and some are quite astonishing. We have been talking about them for years.

The list of indefinitely “suspended” resources is constantly expanding. According to different estimates, Iran cannot use \$100 billion that belongs to the country and the Iranian people. The same is true of Libya (\$60 billion), Venezuela (\$30 billion), and Afghanistan (\$7 billion). As you may know, in 2022, the West “froze” about \$300 billion of Russia’s gold and currency reserves in violation of their sovereign status. Now add to this “raiding” the use of international payments systems for restrictions, pressure and occasionally sheer blackmail, rather than in capacity of neutral mechanisms. An interesting picture, isn’t it? The West is engaged in real financial piracy.

In the new geopolitical reality, it is possible to protect Russia’s and other sovereign countries’ trade, economic and investment links only by giving up the international payments tools of Western provenance. We are convinced that at the current stage, all sovereign countries are interested in forming an international financial settlement infrastructure immune to outside pressure and meeting enhanced security, confidentiality and reliability criteria. Joint efforts to create alternative models accelerate the transition to a more just multi-polar structure of the global financial system.

I cannot but mention the striking piece of news I heard earlier today. Perhaps financial analysts are already used to this but, frankly, I am not. I noted a statement by US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen. She made the statement, not as a private individual or a speaker at a scientific conference (although such remarks would not be unnoticed either). She was addressing the US Senate Committee on Appropriations and said the following: “Failing to increase the debt limit would trigger catastrophic economic consequences.” The United States currently owes more than \$31 trillion in government debt and, according to information sources, this debt increases by \$2 million every minute.

In order to not just overcome the crisis but to prevent a catastrophe, as the Secretary of the Treasury puts it, they must raise the debt ceiling (which seems to be the favourite word in the US these days). That is, they can issue even more loans on a global scale to themselves. It is a situation where it is not a debtor who must ask the lender if he is still trusted and how much he can still borrow, but, on the contrary, the debtor decides how he will keep borrowing money and manipulating this debt.

This is possible, I admit. But not for a big power that believes it is a) great, b) stable, and c) entitled to dictate its will to others. Essentially, this means



acknowledging that the US economy is in a profound and systemic crisis. As they say, here is your delivery, please sign here.

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### **The recent decisions by the International Criminal Court and questions asked in this connection**

First of all, I would like to warn everyone against confusing two international organisations. There is the United Nations Court of Justice, and there is the International Criminal Court (ICC). The former, namely the International Court of Justice, is a statutory body of the United Nations. It handles disputes between states. The International Criminal Court is a limited-membership organ that has nothing to do with the United Nations. It does not include many states, such as Russia, China, India, Türkiye, Iran, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and many others.

The most surprising fact is that the United States is not an ICC member either. And yet, surprisingly, it welcomed the ICC decision, and not just theoretically but actually acknowledging a certain legal “component” of this decision. It is an astonishing story. But the Americans are fond of doing things of this sort. They did that repeatedly and withdrew from various organisations, including UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council. At first, the United States disregards many organisations, while attempting to hamper their activities. At the same time, it takes steps to use them in its interests. This happens. And this has happened on this occasion.

Despite assertions published by certain Russian media, no ICC moves can affect the nature of Russian involvement in UN operations or Russia’s membership of UN agencies.

It is no secret for anyone that the ICC is openly biased, unprofessional, corrupt and addicted to double standards. We have repeatedly commented on this topic and its various ramifications. This organ discredited itself long ago. It carries out political orders of its sponsors. It is also clear who these sponsors are. They are the Western countries. This has nothing to do with justice. What we see is not even politics but PR stunts. And the ICC is more likely a PR agency involved in implementing black PR projects.

Its “work” has never facilitated conflict settlement. The recently divulged absurd ICC decisions have been anything but revolutionary. They are just the final touches to the general picture. The ICC is absolutely a puppet body that has nothing to do with the goals of objective and unbiased legal proceedings. Can anyone imagine a situation, where sponsors openly pay a court to stage a trial

over someone they have declared guilty in advance? How come? It is not even bribery but a stage-managed farce. But it's OK with the International Criminal Court! For them, it's normal. Earlier, we cited examples of Western bribery of this sort. The Western states go on with these practices to this day, maybe on a different scale and with some adjustments to their goals, strategy and tactics... But globally there is no change at all. The other day, London hosted yet another get-together of Western justice ministers to raise money for the anti-Russia ICC coterie. That's right: witches must be paid for celebrating the Sabbath. Now they will send the hat round to get the money.

To reiterate: Russia has never been a member of the International Criminal Court. Russia does not cooperate with the International Criminal Court, nor will it ever do so, despite calls we are hearing from them. The situation is even more absurd than one could imagine. This body's actions with regard to citizens of Russia are legally null and void.

As for the outside world, a state's officials enjoy immunity under international law. And this immunity is absolute where high-ranking officials are concerned. The International Criminal Court cannot cancel this by its decision.

Questions are coming in concerning certain events, including within the BRICS framework, such as the BRICS Summit. We are confident that our friend South Africa will hold the August Summit at the top organisational level and make it possible for delegations of all BRICS partners at any level to engage in effective and productive work.

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### **The anniversary of NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia**

On March 24, all progressive forces in Russia, Europe and the world will mark a tragic date. On that day in 1999, NATO launched its aggression that brought untold grief and suffering on the people of Serbia, and the alliance's war crimes have eternally disgraced it.

The United States and its allies subjected sovereign Yugoslavia to barbaric air strikes. For 78 days, NATO aviation and warships hit peaceful cities and villages of that country under the cynical pretext of a humanitarian intervention. They destroyed civilian infrastructure, residential areas, hospitals, schools, bridges, passenger transport and refugee columns. They launched over 2,000 missiles and dropped 14,000 bombs and other munitions, including depleted uranium munitions. By the way, the United Kingdom considers the use of depleted uranium munitions to be standard practice. This depleted uranium was dropped on the residents of this region, contaminating large territories and

causing a surge in diseases among the local population and, later, among the service personnel of the KFOR international contingent in Kosovo. Western “peacekeepers” spared no one, they killed hundreds of Yugoslav law enforcement officers, over 2,000 civilians, including 88 children.

It is impossible to justify NATO atrocities in any way, no matter how hard politicians who plunged Yugoslavia into a humanitarian disaster may try to conceal their actions under the fictitious cover of protecting Kosovo’s Albanians, other good intentions, and no matter how much they talk about humanitarian interventions for noble purposes. We can see into what all this has devolved. There can be no other assessments here: an act of aggression was perpetrated, fundamental principles of international law were trampled upon, and the legality of lawlessness was proclaimed. According to this flawed logic, only Washington has a right to decide when to use military force and where. Washington claims the right to be the supreme arbiter in global affairs, while failing to substantiate its role by the law, morality or any other resources, except brazenness, boorish manners and a feeling of absolute impunity.

It may be a paradox, but the West has so far failed to comprehend the true consequences of demolishing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for the system of European and global security. The West is firmly convinced (or is pretending to be convinced) that it defended the values of freedom, fought for democracy and wanted to do humankind a favour. In reality, the West undermined the security system and the international-law foundation of the post-war international order, embodied in the UN Charter. International judicial agencies paid no attention whatsoever to numerous casualties and substantial destruction. No one was brought to account for these obvious crimes.

Later, the United States continued to act like a self-proclaimed moral leader and stubbornly overlooked the long-time genocide in eastern Ukraine. We spoke about it today. On the contrary, Washington prodded Kiev’s neo-Nazis to conduct ethnic cleansing campaigns and to ramp up armed reprisals against the civilian population. At the same time, it cited international norms and so-called rules in an extremely hypocritical manner. Everyone knows into what all this devolved. They are no longer pretending to profess love for humanity, like they did in 1999. NATO started directly encouraging the all-out extermination of people. The alliance virtually turned into an accomplice to horrendous crimes. As all of us see, NATO treats the people of Ukraine as expendables. No one cares about their fate in European capitals or the United States. They used to pit the Ukrainians against each other, to set them at loggerheads and to destroy them. Right now, they have started merely exterminating them.

Recent reports about the UK's readiness to supply depleted uranium munitions to the Kiev regime are the ultimate manifestation of cynicism. I repeat, if this threat (or intention; I do not know how they interpret this) is implemented, these munitions would contaminate water and soil, just like in Serbia. Local residents would also feel the repercussions of these toxic munitions' use for decades. London ought to use these munitions on the British Isles, for openers. They have every opportunity to conduct such experiments there. Let them try and feel the entire range of deadly repercussions, and then they would be able to use these munitions elsewhere.

The US and EU discourse on introducing a certain global order, based on rules that have been invented in Washington, are a priori null and void. They did not inform the West or anyone else about these rules that simply do not exist. The reputation of the collective West as a peacemaker, humanist and righteous entity was buried in Yugoslavia forever.

As it happens in life, every mistake can be forgiven. In any event, at least the possibility of forgiveness. However, there is a small nuance here. Sincere repentance should follow any mistake, no matter whether it was deliberate, unpremeditated or accidental, before this mistake can be forgiven. So far, the West has failed to repent; we have not noticed any such trends, nor can we see anything of the kind today. Consequently, it is impossible to talk about any reputation, forgiveness or even understanding.

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### **Hearings on MH17 plane crash**

On March 17, 2023, the 228th session of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council hosted a hearing on Russia's objections to the competence of the council to address the claims of Australia and the Netherlands against Russia in the MH17 case. The Hague and Canberra claim that Russia allegedly violated Article 3 bis of the Convention on International Civil Aviation of 1944 (the Chicago Convention) which prohibits using weapons against airborne civil aircraft.

In addition to the detailed written position that was previously submitted to the ICAO, the Russian interagency delegation presented balanced legal arguments about the lack of competence of the council to hear this case.

In particular, it was noted that Article 3 bis of the Chicago Convention does not apply to the situation of a domestic armed conflict, which was the case in Ukraine in July 2014. In addition, it is obvious that the council cannot take up the functions of a criminal court or investigator and make any conclusions based

on third party's investigation that does not meet the criteria of independence and objectivity. Ukraine, in whose open airspace the disaster happened, also is not a party to the process. It is no less important that the council does not have authority to take measures that the claimants are asking for.

Nevertheless, it seems that many members of the council did not even deign to get acquainted with the legal arguments and were guided by exclusively political motives when voting against our objections. Following the vote, the council, dominated by the Westerners and their satellites, determined that it has the competence to consider the case. Such an approach arbitrarily expands the council's competence that is outlined in the Chicago Convention, thus undermining its authority as a purely technical body on interaction in international civil aviation and will have negative consequences for the entire aviation community.

We appreciate those members of the council who did not yield to the obedient majority and did not support the illegitimate decision.

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### **The opening of Nazi Germany's first concentration camp at Dachau**

The first concentration camp of the Third Reich opened in Dachau, a small town north-west of Munch, 90 years ago, on March 22, 1933. People from 24 countries were sent to Dachau. It was one of the most horrible death camps. Do you remember the phrase over its gate, Arbeit macht frei, or "Work sets you free?" Those who entered through the gate were deprived of absolutely all rights and went through all the circles of hell. In the camp's 15-year existence, between 42,000 and 70,000 people were exterminated there, according to different estimates, including 7,000 Soviet POWs, and the total number of inmates exceeded 200,000.

Initially, Dachau was presented to the German people as a labour and correctional camp. But soon, other groups of people were sent there, such as Roma, who, along with the Jews, were regarded as an inferior race in the Third Reich, along with members of different faiths who refused to serve in the army, and priests who stood out against Nazi control of the church. Many of those who were seen in the Third Reich as "Untermensch" or subhuman or who dared to criticise the regime were sent to Dachau.

In the summer of 1939, trains packed with several thousand Austrians arrived in the camp, and people from all the countries Germany occupied were sent to Dachau throughout the war.

A special system of punishment was used at Dachau, including physical and psychological abuse. It was subsequently used at all the Nazi camps. The heads and wards of the other “correctional” camps were trained at Dachau. They were actually punitive establishments which subsequently turned into an extermination system. Waffen-SS personnel were sent to Dachau for “advanced training” at a special range, where prisoners were used as targets. The SS-Totenkopfverbände (Death’s Head Units) were established there to administer the Nazi concentration camps.

The first Soviet POWs arrived at Dachau in November 1941. Most of them were killed in the next few months. Later, another 2,000 Soviet citizens were sent to the camp.

The Nazis conducted medical experiments on prisoners at Dachau to study the effects of cold, pressure, gases, toxic agents and infections on the human organism. Surgical operations were also conducted on prisoners, often without anaesthesia.

The Russian underground committee was established at Dachau in the autumn of 1943. The Soviet resistance group was led by Lieutenant Colonel Illarion Panov. A military department was set up at the camp in the spring of 1945 to prepare for an uprising. It was led by Major General Sergey Vishnevsky.

The uprising, which began on April 28, 1945, a day before US troops reached the camp, frustrated the Nazi plan to exterminate all the surviving inmates.

On April 29, the 7th US Army entered Dachau. Shocked by what they saw there, the Americans shot 122 German military personnel, most of them SS troops. Overall, about 600 Army and SS soldiers were taken prisoner and executed the same day.

The Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site opened in 1965 at the initiative of former camp prisoners. A permanent exhibition of the camp’s timeline opened at the museum in 2003. Every April 29, the surviving inmates come to Dachau from all over the world for the Never Again commemorative event, held on the camp’s roll-call square.

It is almost impossible to remain unmoved by this journey into history. I don’t know about you, but for me, this historical evidence, mere facts put down on paper, bring home the horrible story of that period and make me think about the documentaries and feature films I have seen.

These facts were not only thoroughly studied and documented in the Soviet Union. They were also included as an important part of the educational

process, so that from an early age, first at school and then at university, students knew what happened during the war, respected those who stood out against Nazism and, most importantly, looked into their souls and asked themselves if they had done everything necessary to prevent those evil flowers from poisoning their hearts and them from falling victim to something like that ever again.

I would like to tell you that almost nobody wants to hear about this today. They didn't know this 15-20 years ago, but today they don't want to hear about this and are actively preventing this information from becoming public knowledge. Once again, the Dachau camp opened in the centre of Europe in 1933.

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### **Children's inclusive football tournament Under the Banner of Good**

On March 25, the international children's inclusive football tournament Under the Banner of Good will be held at the Sapsan Arena stadium of FC Lokomotiv in Moscow. The event will take place with the support of the Moscow Department of Sport, the Russian Football Union and the Sport is Life federal project of the Demography national project. As per tradition, the Foreign Ministry provides information support to this project.

The Under the Banner of Good international children's inclusive football tournament has been bringing children from various countries together since 2014. The event takes place twice a year, in the spring and in the autumn. This year, 15 teams from Russia, Germany, Israel, India and Tajikistan will take part. Over 150 children, including those with disabilities and disadvantaged children, will participate in the tournament.

The event will also include relay races, entertaining lessons, sports and creative competitions, workshops, quizzes and other interactive events. Legendary athletes will take part in the competition, and prizes and trophies will be presented by sports stars, celebrities and representatives of the country's major football organisations.

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### **A Step into the Future international forum for scientific youth**

From March 27 until May 20, Moscow will host the A Step into the Future international forum for scientific youth as part of the Decade of Science and Technologies proclaimed by President of Russia Vladimir Putin. The forum will mark the 135th anniversary of the birth of prominent Russian aircraft designer



Andrey Tupolev. The organisers are the Bauman Moscow State Technical University and the Russian Youth Polytechnical Society.

This year, the forum will take place in both in-person and online. It will bring together school and university students from Russia, Belarus, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, China, Nepal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan who have only just begun taking their first steps in science and want to show their developments to the representatives of scientific and academic circles. For the first time, young researchers from Russia's new regions will take part in the event.

We hope that the forum will help talented young people to build contacts with audiences abroad and their foreign counterparts to exchange useful experience. It will create additional opportunities for interaction between Russian universities and research organisations with the foreign scientific community.

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### **Gromyko Young CIS Foreign Affairs Experts Competition**

I would like to draw your attention to the announcement on our website that the Gromyko Young CIS Foreign Affairs Experts Competition is now open for entries.

The competition among young foreign affairs experts from the CIS countries has been held annually since 2018 and over these five years, it has brought together more than 1,600 young researchers from 11 countries, 315 cities and 297 leading universities.

The competition has received praise from Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matvienko and as well as from Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who is honorary chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Andrey Gromyko Association of Foreign Policy Studies.

To take part in the competition, entrants need to submit an application on the competition's official website before May 15, 2023.

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*[Answers to media questions:](#)*

**Question: Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the US National Security Council John Kirby said in a recent interview with Fox News that Russia and China were undermining the international order established after World War II. How would you comment on this statement?**

**Maria Zakharova:** This statement is not even absurd; it contradicts the historical truth. I would like to clarify that, from what John Kirby said, he was



referring to something known as the rules-based order, which in fact implies subjugating other states to the collective West, suppressing their will, that is, restraining the development and neglecting the interests of the countries of the global East and South. Apparently, in this order, the West can preserve its competitive advantages and continue draining other nations' resources. The logic of a parasite.

Indeed, we believe that this international order is unacceptable to the overwhelming majority of nations. Only it did not emerge after WWII. But the international legal system based on the UN did. And these Western "rules" are closer to colonialism, to Western imperialism, which had been around for a long time – for many centuries actually. It had been imposed by the Americans, the British and their satellites for a long historical period, and now it is being reincarnated.

We stand for a fairer and a more democratic world order. We hear so much about democracy in the United States, including from US officials. They keep lecturing us, explaining that there are developed democracies – the United States, the UK, and the EU countries (not all of them, true, but some of them are) – while others are undeveloped democracies (or developing, hybrid democracies), with the White House being the top qualifying body.

We've heard a lot about this. We get it that the United States puts democracy above everything – democracy as an expression of freedom and respect for human rights, etc. But if democracy means everything for the United States, if it is their alpha and omega, their air and water, then I would like to ask: why don't they see democracy in the same way in an international context? Why do they insist on being exceptional in global affairs? Why do they talk about dominance and assume that democracy in international relations should suffer from unipolarity? That is baffling. Well, not for us, because we know all of this is false. They aren't really going to observe anything, at home where they are promoting the democracy narrative, or internationally. They keep chanting this mantra to support their own brand, to ensure that the United States, the UK and Western countries are associated with democracy. They keep saying this and personifying this story in every possible way.

But it is not true. International relations are a case in point. The internal situation in many countries (the United States, the UK, France, and Germany) shows that democracy there is going through an acute crisis.

We insist on a fairer and more democratic world order based on the sovereign equality of states, on respect for the cultural and civilisational diversity of the world, and respect for every nation's right to independently

choose their own path of development. Not only Russia and China, but also the global majority seeks to reduce dependence on external factors and increase self-sufficiency, including in making key decisions on foreign and domestic policy issues.

With our partners from the CIS, Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, we are working to create a sustainable infrastructure of international relations in various fields that is not controlled by the West. We intend to continue to jointly resist the sanctions pressure and other neocolonial practices and to prevent the use of the UN and other multilateral institutions and mechanisms (we have already talked about this today) in the interests of just one narrow group of states. That's what we're talking about, not what Washington is saying.

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**Question: The other day, Moldovan Foreign Minister Nicolae Popescu announced that Chisinau was ready to join the anti-Russian sanctions and introduce restrictions against 25 Russian citizens. How would you comment on this?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Of course, this is an anti-Russia move. It is surprising to see the absurd mechanisms built into what is known as the Western “democratic process” unfold before our own eyes. We are talking about Moldova’s official authorities. Their anti-Russia policies are a bad thing that will have a devastating effect on Moldova and the region as a whole. But the sequence their steps will follow is clear. There is certain logic to them.

The most appalling thing is that the official authorities of Moldova are pursuing an anti-Moldova course. The current national leader is a citizen of another country. President Maia Sandu and her team are working for the benefit of other nations rather than their own country. What this signifies is that they are destroying their country from within in the interests of other states, rather than making Moldova adapt to their requirements.

I am trying to recall a single case when a government in possession of the democratic institutions supposed to obey people’s will worked to destroy the very foundations of national sovereignty, culture, and politics. I can’t think of any instance where this was done openly. Certain regimes sometimes did use clandestine methods akin to acts of sabotage. But in Moldova, this is being done openly and no one can do anything about it. Among other things, I am referring to the law that has renamed the Moldovan language into Romanian. The language is now called “Romanian” despite the fact that Moldovan existed, exists and will actually continue to exist primarily in scientific literature (we are

talking about science, not the personal opinions of this or that politician) and in history. There came a group of people who invented a law based on thin air and renamed the native tongue of that country. On the other hand, we saw decades-long linguistic experiments staged in a neighbouring country, Ukraine. This is one of the conceptual foundations of the West's effort to erase and crush the sense of national identity in countries under its tutelage. Today, regrettably, a friendly country, Moldova, has fallen victim to the same experiment.

As to the statement made by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Moldova Nicolae Popescu, as far as we can understand, he was referring to Chisinau's upcoming accession to the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime approved by the EU Council in December 2020 as well as to a number of sanctions lists adopted within its framework.

Moreover, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell referred to Moldova's accession to some of the said sanctions as a *fait accompli* as early as in the first days of March. Surprising, isn't it? A seemingly sovereign country, whose decisions are taken and announced by someone else even before it approves them... What we would like to be clear about is whether it is the EU that is getting ahead of itself or Chisinau that is dragging its feet on formalising the decisions that Brussels has taken on its behalf?

This is a question that the citizens of Moldova themselves would like to get an answer to. It is hard to overlook the fact that the Moldovan authorities, eager as they are to please their Western patrons, are bending over backwards to implement their Russophobic agenda. Joining the EU's anti-Russia sanctions is not the limit of what they are willing to do. Specifically, on March 22, 2023, the Information and Security Service of Moldova issued a writ blocking another five websites of Russia's Sputnik news agency. So much for the democratic transformations.

As you know, the same steps taken by the EU received a response from Russia. Accordingly, we will have to retaliate against Moldova if and when Chisinau joins these restrictions. We would like to underscore that this will not be our choice but a reaction to unfriendly steps.

Russia has always regarded the Moldovan people as a friend. We are tied by many bonds in the historical and modern contexts, including in the economy, business, culture and education, as well as family ties and our common past. Chisinau and its Western mentors are attempting to artificially destroy all this.

Russia is invariably in favour of preserving and promoting in a mutually beneficial way the versatile ties that have always enriched our countries and

people.

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**Question: The Schuman Forum ended in Brussels on March 21. What did the EU establish it for? Did it really want to talk about global issues without inviting two members of the UN Security Council – Russia and China?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I have already mentioned this forum today. Its goals and tasks have been commented on in detail by our Permanent Mission to the EU.

I would like to add that the EU approached the matter with a degree of duplicity, which is usual for them. They were aware of the forum's confrontational nature but neglected to talk about it. Its programme included a discussion of common issues and said that cooperation remained the best way to "jointly address common [security] challenges." This was done to attract as many countries as possible from Europe, Asia, Africa, South and North America and other parts of the world to ensure broad representation.

All doubts about the positive essence of the forum were dispelled by the opening remarks of the EU foreign policy head, Josep Borrell, who made no secret of the forum's anti-Russia focus. The phrase about jointly addressing global security challenges was nothing other than a smokescreen used to conceal the EU's intention to coordinate its actions with NATO to increase collective pressure on the sovereign states that have not yet pledged loyalty to the West and have not accepted its policy of deterrence against the advocates of a fair world order. Methods of deterrence and intrigue are being used against those who support international law, the universal nature of the UN and the priority of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter. It is obvious that the Schuman Forum and the simultaneous promotion of the second edition of the US-sponsored Summit for Democracy are designed to brainwash a broad range of states in the interests of the West and to consolidate them on an anti-Russia and anti-China basis.

The forum is a political propaganda event, which can be concluded from the fact that it was prepared hastily, in just a few weeks. Its programme was not thoroughly considered because its organisers did not plan to hold a serious discussion on the common security challenges. In short, this "platform" adds no value. It will be used to provoke new chasms in the European and global security environments. The aggressive Western attempts to contain Russia, China and other countries will not strengthen stability but will only aggravate and increase international tensions. Who will stand to lose from this? The West

and the world as a whole. These actions will not bring about the declared result but will only increase instability and unpredictability.

They are using neocolonial methods, about which we have been talking all along. They do not want to take other countries' interests into account. Their goal is to control all states and to pump out their resources as cheaply as possible or, better yet, for free or even to get paid for this. They need all kinds of resources – political, economic, military, natural and any other resources – to draw out the conflict in Ukraine and to manipulate the story to their liking. Funds and investment are rerouted from socioeconomic development programmes to the purchase of heavy weaponry, tanks and missiles. They need to find 1 million artillery rounds for Ukrainian armed forces by the end of 2023. It is clear that they cannot do this alone; they need other countries' resources. What else do you want to hear about human rights violations? I believe everything is clear. The right to life is no longer an absolute value in the EU.

We see that the EU is disappointed by the lack of tangible results from their aggressive anti-Russia propaganda. They had different expectations; they have not achieved what they wanted. Their logic of bloc confrontation and anti-Russia and anti-China sentiments is not winning supporters in the world. This shows that the Western “garden” remains a “global minority.” If they continue acting on the basis of that logic, they will not overcome their systemic crisis. They should rethink their approaches and overhaul their inefficient systems. So far, they have only been good at increasing their sovereign debts and adopting price caps on other countries' natural resources. They have learned to do this very well. But this policy is no longer tolerated. Fewer and fewer countries continue to act in accordance with this paradigm. The international community is poignantly aware of the real threats, which the EU policy of dividing the world into “us and them” is creating. I am not word-mongering, and this is not just a hypothetical phrase. This is the painful result of the implementation of unhealthy Western logic.

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**Question: Xi Jinping has paid a history-making visit to Moscow. Notably, Russia and China have agreed to continue upholding international law. In turn, Moscow will continue the One China policy that views Taiwan as an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China.**

**Maria Zakharova:** The Treaty on Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, signed on July 16, 2001, formalises the Russian position on the Taiwan

issue. It is reaffirmed in the Joint Statement on Deepening the Russian-Chinese Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Cooperation for a New Era adopted following the recent Russia-China talks at the highest level. We are invariably committed to the One China principle.

In the very same document, the sides set forth their common approaches towards respecting the legitimate security concerns of all countries. Certainly, Russia and China will continue their close foreign policy coordination on all the relevant issues.

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**Question: Is this a signal to other countries that Russia and China will support other countries whose territorial integrity is under threat, including Serbia, which is experiencing greater pressure from the West?**

**Maria Zakharova:** When was it that we did not support the state of Serbia and its people? Did this happen before? We always lent a helping hand, even when we experienced critical difficulties and when we were teetering on the brink of our own survival. We also did this whenever possible. We have always done this wholeheartedly, sincerely and generously, despite various circumstances.

Are we going to renounce our historical position of supporting the people of Serbia? What do you think? No, we will not because this is part of our blood and soul. Most importantly, we know that the people of Serbia value this position, despite historical circumstances and despite strange statements that various officials sometimes make. They have an in-depth perception of the people of Russia. We have experienced many ordeals together, we have countered many things, and we continue to do so today. As I have already said, we believe that, rather than being a merely principled stand, this position is formalised by history.

As you understand, many countries have their own time-serving political considerations. However, there are certain principled issues that Russia will not forget, nor will it vacillate on them.

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**Question: Could you comment on the Chinese leader's major visit to Moscow, especially in the context of current events? It took place after the ICC decision. At the same time, the Japanese prime minister flew to Ukraine. That story had multiple implications. How important is it for us now? Could China play a special role in the settlement of the Ukrainian conflict?**

**Maria Zakharova:** It seems that everyone has commented on President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia. There is no person on the planet with an access to the media, who has not commented or read about it, that is, has not become part of the comment line.

The talks between President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping have sent shockwaves across the world. Usually – and unfortunately – this is an effect produced by some bad news. We have seen recent man-made disasters, accidents, and other tragedies trigger off this kind of broad coverage. By contrast, we provided a positive and constructive news agenda, a story highlighting the best things in international relations.

It is another matter that the Western media did write a lot of strange things. Some outlets tried to ignore these negotiations at first or dismissed them as insignificant, while others, on the contrary, argued that they marked the beginning of a confrontation between Russia and China, on the one hand, and the West, on the other.

You are right in saying that the scale of this information and comment line drowned out all attempts in the West to interpret it differently from the goals formulated and implemented during the Russian-Chinese negotiations.

President Xi Jinping's state visit to our country is undoubtedly the central political event of the year in Russian-Chinese relations. The decisions taken at the summit will be of key importance for strengthening strategic bilateral ties and consolidating our interstate cooperation. During the talks, President of Russia Vladimir Putin and PRC President Xi Jinping identified the main areas for expanding political dialogue and bilateral cooperation and their practical aspects.

The newly adopted Joint Statement on Deepening Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Cooperation for a New Era reflects the Russian-Chinese political and economic agreements, as well as the two countries' approaches to solving major international problems.

The parties specifically focused on intensifying joint work in the energy sector, industrial cooperation, agriculture, science and technology, transport, humanitarian and tourist exchanges. They placed a special emphasis on developing safe and sustainable financial and investment mechanisms. The agreements reached will be included in the Plan to Promote Key Elements of Russian- Chinese Economic Cooperation until 2030; the two leaders signed a separate Joint Statement on drafting this plan.

According to the two leaders' general assessment, Russian-Chinese relations have reached their all-time high and continue to advance steadily. Although we do not have a military-political alliance of the kind formed during the Cold War, Russian-Chinese ties surpass that form of interstate interaction. They are not of a bloc nature, nor are they confrontational or directed against third countries. There are no taboo topics or constraints in our dialogue and cooperation. The experience of coordinating approaches between Moscow and Beijing, their great international influence are relevant in the new geopolitical situation.

Moscow once again welcomed Beijing's readiness to play a constructive role in the context of political and diplomatic resolution of the Ukraine crisis. We have carefully studied the Position paper published by our Chinese partners and found that many provisions of their peace plan are consonant with the Russian approaches. It can be taken as the basis for further work provided that the Western coalition and the Kiev regime show real interest in the peaceful settlement of the conflict, and take into account the changed situation on the ground.

As you may have noticed, that statement almost immediately caused an uproar, which then devolved into a groan suggesting they had no interest in peace or the cessation of bloodshed, that [the conflict] must be continued, only using more advanced systems of manslaughter and environmental contamination.

The growing Russian-Chinese strategic cooperation amid the new geopolitical realities gives us a historic chance to make the most of the enormous potential of bilateral relations for the sustainable and comprehensive development of Russia and China. Achieving this fully meets the interests of the two countries and their peoples.

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**Question: A lot of events are happening now that concern both the East and the South. Sergey Lavrov is meeting with his African colleagues. Recently, we attended the Russia – Africa International Parliamentary Conference. The Russia – Africa summit is scheduled to take place in St Petersburg. With this avalanche of events, can we say that this is a time when we are turning around and making a global shift towards the south to face Africa like in the Soviet times?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I am not so certain about turnarounds and shifts. It would be more appropriate to say so if our policy had not been multi-directional



before and our relations with those countries had not developed, which is not true.

Indeed, we have broken strong links with a number of regions in the world, due to the changes occurring in our country. Everything was changing. To a great extent, that required consolidating all our resources and capabilities at a qualitatively new level. When internal growth processes were completed, relations with different regions started to take shape on a new foundation.

In the past, relations with a whole range of countries and regions were largely built on ideology. There was no natural foundation in the form of mutually beneficial economic and financial relations. They were always friendly and relevant. Those countries could always rely on our support. Another important aspect is the fabric of actual contacts, not only at the inter-state level but also between economic operators, people, civil society, etc. Those contacts were lacking, despite the extraordinary help provided by our country to African nations. This component needed to be upscaled based on new frameworks, which is happening now.

Russia's active work on the African track is a significant part of the entire scope of measures that our country takes to develop constructive cooperation with a great number of countries that pursue an open and balanced foreign policy guided by common sense and their own, rather than somebody else's, national interests and, most importantly, the principles of the supremacy of international law and indivisible security with the central and coordinating role of the United Nations.

This has been strongly evidenced by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's two successful recent trips to African countries and the Russia-Africa International Parliamentary Conference that took place in Moscow on March 19-20. The conference was attended by 41 delegations from 39 countries and the African Parliamentary Union. In our opinion, these events attest to the fact that we are heard, seen and understood by the continent and that African countries are appreciative of and interested in expanding their dialogue with Russia as a reliable partner.

At the self-organised International Russophile Movement conference in Moscow, African countries were also represented. Preparations for the 2nd Russia-Africa Summit, which is to take place at the end of July in St Petersburg, are in full swing. All this reaffirms our serious and ambitious plans to develop overarching cooperation with Africa.

The level we wish to reach has not been achieved across all components. The fabric of real economic relations is indeed forming now, and this process is

extremely important.

The second Russia-Africa meeting at the highest level will be yet another stepping stone in building a strategic partnership with the continent, and will determine the dynamic of our contacts for years to come, substantially contributing to tackling global and regional challenges.

Committed to the principle of the sovereign equality of states and their inalienable right to determine their domestic and foreign policies on their own, Russia is ready to offer utmost assistance in strengthening the independence of African countries. The summit's political programme will be dedicated to discussing these issues. The economic track will focus on in-depth detailing of the development of our trade and economic links – specifically, on building new logistics chains and a genuinely independent system of financial settlements. During the summit, we expect to discuss and thoroughly review with our African colleagues matters related to food and energy security, healthcare, humanitarian cooperation, and many others.

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**Question: President Vladimir Putin said after his talks with the Chinese leader that China's peace plan could well serve as a foundation for settling the Ukraine crisis. What provisions specifically does Russia agree with, and which ones need to be fine-tuned? Does the Foreign Ministry expect discussions on these provisions with Ukraine to begin soon? Can we expect Beijing to act as a mediator in these possible negotiations?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I have already commented on this topic in my answers to the preceding questions. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that when talking about the Chinese proposals you have to keep in mind that those who were supposed to be on the receiving end have already rejected them.

Even before we could dive into these provisions with our Chinese friends, the West started shouting that they do not need this plan or that it comes at the wrong moment, or that they needed to supply more weapons, that peace was out of the question, that everything would be decided on the battlefield, while Russia must definitely lose. This will never happen, and everyone knows it. This explains all the shouting. As a final note, they suggested supplying the Kiev regime with depleted uranium munitions.

How can we work on something if the party on the receiving end of these proposals has already rejected them? Moreover, they made their rejection irreversible without leaving any room for debate and acting so disrespectfully towards China and our Chinese partners who worked on this document.

Diplomats can always find the right words to indicate that they view discussing a given provision as being irrelevant. But look at the thuggish manner in which the West ridiculed and ostracised the Chinese plan with political observers, journalists, foreign ministers and leaders across many countries, clamouring, shouting, calling China names, chuckling, cackling and disparaging these proposals. This demonstrates the extent to which they abused diplomacy as a profession. And I am not even going to mention what the observers wrote on this topic.

We have expressed our gratitude to China on multiple occasions and in public for its willingness to offer its good offices. We have said repeatedly that we respect and thank anyone who stands for peace and wants to contribute to a possible settlement as mediators. We have heard a wide range of ideas and established contacts on this topic. This goes beyond the situation in question. If history is any guide, there are multiple paths to drafting documents of this kind. There is always the possibility of doing it the right way. But at this precise moment in time, the West is incriminating itself. While two great powers are talking about constructive interaction and effective cooperation, peace and stability, the West is making statements on supplying even more weapons, leading to more casualties and bloodshed.

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**Question: Turkey has suspended the transit of Western-sanctioned goods to Russia following growing U.S. and European pressure on Ankara. Can you confirm this information? If yes, are there any negotiations with the Turkish side on this issue?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I already touched on this topic in a previous briefing on 16 March. My comment is relevant.

We believe that the dynamic and trustful dialogue between Russia and Turkey provides conditions for discussing any issues that arise, including those in the area you have mentioned. We can confirm that our relevant agencies are in close contact with each other.

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**Question: Despite Baku's and Yerevan's stated commitment to the peace process, relations between the sides are only escalating. Does Moscow feel that the issue has reached a deadlock?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We are indeed concerned about the increase in hostile rhetoric and incidents in Nagorno-Karabakh and the unwillingness of the sides to find compromises on resolving the situation around the Lachin corridor.

We believe that there is no alternative to the peace process. At the same time, we are determined and call on the sides to be restrained in their statements and actions, to resume negotiations on all tracks of Armenia-Azerbaijan normalisation, including the unblocking of transport communications, border delimitation, preparation of a peace agreement, and meetings of civil society actors and parliamentarians.

The question is often asked: “How do you assess the involvement of the West, the EU, in normalisation?” As soon as they showed up, there appeared large-scale problems. Behind all the talk about peace and the West’s willingness to help, we see the opposite. One more brushstroke to the overall picture.

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**Question: Antony Blinken stated today that a peace agreement may soon be signed between Baku and Yerevan. How does Moscow assess the possibility of signing soon?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Let’s comment on events that have taken place. Many people are eager to comment on the prospects.

We assume that it has to happen first, and then we can and should discuss it. We are always open to comments. I’ve nothing to say at the moment.

**Question: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that the Biden administration intends to prepare some kind of strategy for the Black Sea regions, including political and economic components, by June. How does the Foreign Ministry assess this?**

**Maria Zakharova:** So far it is impossible to say anything definitive. If even U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has not disclosed the point of his own initiatives, how can we comment on this? I can say that it used to be considered that the USA is not a Black Sea state. Perhaps something has changed and they believe that the Kiev regime has already provided them with such an opportunity. As we understand it, the US has no access to the Black Sea.

On the other hand, we have repeatedly seen attempts by the United States to develop “plans” for regions of the world where they are not historically or factually represented. I do not recall this working positively anywhere.

This is a theoretical answer. Practically, there is nothing to comment on here. The US has not even made its own public aware of this “plan” yet. If you hear any news, call us and we will take a look into it.

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**Question: You have announced that Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian is due to pay a visit to Russia. Given Russia’s focus on**

**good relations with its Caspian neighbours and the importance of the North-South transport corridor, this is a crucial event. What are the prospects for the Russia-Azerbaijan-Iran format in the present-day environment?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We attach much importance to the Russia-Azerbaijan-Iran format. It has proven its worth as an effective interaction framework geared toward implementing joint economic, transport, and energy projects. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was the one to put forward the initiative on this.

We hope that this trilateral cooperation format will continue making an important contribution to the strengthening of mutually beneficial ties between our countries and toward creating a stable transport infrastructure, including the North-South ITC, which is highly relevant under the current conditions. This is of importance for both boosting trade between the three countries and ensuring steady transit in their interests.

We hope that we will soon reach a consensus on the agenda and timeframe for a trilateral meeting. Russia is ready to assist in this.

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**Question: Some time ago, Azerbaijanis, who once lived in Armenia, sent a letter to the Armenian authorities with a proposal to start making contacts for their possible return to their former homes. What is your comment on this proposal and its prospects as part of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process?**

**Maria Zakharova:** As far as I understand, Armenia has also proposed that Armenian [evacuees] go back to Azerbaijan.

This topic is highly sensitive and must be considered in a dialogue between the two parties in the context of bilateral reconciliation. The Armenia-Azerbaijan normalisation is based on a set of trilateral agreements on all aspects of the problem, including the humanitarian one. The main task for today is for Baku and Yerevan to consistently implement all the provisions of the said agreements.

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**Question: On March 20, Armenian Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan went on record as saying that even after the recent visit to the republic by the CSTO Secretary-General, Yerevan still thought that the Organisation was withdrawing from the region and that the visit had failed to change anything. “The CSTO is doing nothing and, in effect, is demonstrating its absence,” Simonyan said. This statement was made on the same day as**

**Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan claimed, following talks with Sergey Lavrov, that Yerevan was not giving up on the CSTO mission. How can the Foreign Ministry comment on these two parallel statements?**

**Maria Zakharova:** In fact, we recently heard Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan say what they were considering the CSTO. This is the official position. He is authorised to make these statements.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that the materials of the meeting are posted on the Russian Foreign Ministry website. It was confirmed that the issue of a CSTO deployment in Armenia was being studied.

There are as many politicians as there are different opinions, interpretations, and chances to get into the limelight thanks to an attention-grabbing statement. It is not for the first time that I am asked to explain what the phrase “the CSTO is withdrawing from Armenia” means. Once again, I want to address these questions to the Armenian side. I can add yet another question: How do those, who said this, see the process of the CSTO entering Armenia, if they are recording its withdrawal?

**Question: Azerbaijan said that the EU mission was being used for purposes of escalation. What is your comment?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We said today that it was necessary to tone down statements on both sides and that nothing should lead to escalation. There is no evidence of any value-added accruing from the West’s participation in conflict “settlement.” But there should be at least some results. Their activities must yield at least some measure of success. Yet, there is none. People can say whatever they want, but there are no facts confirming that they are playing a constructive role.

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**Question: On March 21, Bloomberg reported on Hungary’s blocking of a joint EU statement on the ICC arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova. It was also reported that Hungary would make a separate statement to explain its position. What does the Foreign Ministry think about Hungary’s position and the fact that it decided not to go with the tide and has been reluctant to join those who supported this statement?**

**Maria Zakharova:** First, we would need to make more than 200 comments to be able to share our view of the way in which each specific country treated this document. Second, why have you decided to focus on unity? You say that Hungary decided not to go along with the EU. But why are you interested in the

EU's unity, and not the African Union, ASEAN, the SCO, or the CSTO? Why such a snobbish attitude towards other regions of the world? As a representative of Reuters, you can hardly afford to do this. I don't think this is what you meant.

We have shared our vision of the International Criminal Court's structure, and have done this more than once, including during this briefing. I have also talked about its performance in general. The countries that have picked up the ICC's decision as some sort of a banner, or a poster, are precisely the ones who set this body against us and pushed it in this direction, including by investing money in order for this decision to materialise. It is obvious that those who demonstrated so much resolve in supporting the ICC's decision adopted this position before it was issued. Many countries distanced themselves from this controversy, clear-eyed as they were that Washington and London were behind this "Sabbath" and that it would bring nothing by an artificial escalation of hysteria.

It is for this reason that I do not think it expedient to comment on every country specifically. These are global matters. This specific step is part of the overall Sabbath the West has initiated for various reasons.

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**Question: Serbia and Kosovo agreed on several provisions from the EU's peace plan. Under this document, Kosovo must help establish an association of Serbian municipalities on its territories, while Serbia must refrain from blocking Kosovo's accession to various international organisations and institutions. How effective, according to the Foreign Ministry, will this agreement be? Will it deliver?**

**Maria Zakharova:** The European Union signed a proposal on this topic 10 years ago. It consisted of establishing a Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo with specific executive authority. You should have asked me about its implementation. Let me explain why: because it remained dead in the water with Brussels' demonstration of its connivance and total unwillingness to contribute to the fulfilment of this proposal.

It would be impossible to discuss efforts to fulfil this would-be new proposal without taking into consideration that the preceding ones have not been carried out. Why not sign several new EU proposals? What we need is to identify the provisions that were carried out as agreed by the parties. Let me give you a specific example: the provisions signed by the parties to assume certain obligations have not been complied with for 10 years.



As for the matter you have raised in your question – the would-be proposals to bring relations between Belgrade and Pristina back to normal, it has not been put on paper, making it even easier for the Kosovo Albanians to sabotage the agreement, compared to a hard copy document signed by the parties.

We believe that the EU mediators, and the United States who stands behind them, have long sought to undermine the international legal framework for the Kosovo settlement, as set forth primarily in the UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Against this backdrop, they are now trying to cast yet another political declaration as a breakthrough and some kind of a momentous achievement. It was not a coincidence that Washington rushed to call the deal to implement the fundamental agreement between Belgrade and Pristina a legally binding initiative, while the EU announced that it would be integrated into the negotiating process with Serbia. The EU has clearly drafted its plan under the influence of the Kosovo Albanians. In order to please Kosovo, it does not even mention the Community of Kosovo's Serb Municipalities as a major condition for enabling the Serbs living on this territory to survive. This is an example demonstrating whether this entire construct is viable.

Taken together, all these shortcomings demonstrate that there is no alternative to dialogue with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 as its cornerstone, since it establishes an international legal framework for the Kosovo settlement, whether anyone likes it or not.

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**Question: On March 21, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on Channel One that more countries wish to join BRICS. Considering this interest in the BRICS countries, it has been proposed to create a common currency for BRICS and MERCOSUR. How far have discussions of this idea advanced?**

**Maria Zakharova:** The idea of creating a common single currency based on a basket of BRICS countries' currencies for mutual settlements between group members was put forth by President Vladimir Putin during the BRICS Summit on June 23, 2022. In January 2023, President of Brazil Luiz Lula da Silva spoke out in support of that idea. It is possible that this issue will be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the five countries' leaders in South Africa.

This initiative looks to the future. It should be thoroughly analysed by the five countries' experts because the establishment of supranational currencies is



not a simple matter. In any case, issues related to payment mechanisms are always in the focus of the BRICS countries' relevant agencies.

The current situation on the global financial market and the Western countries' use of the dollar to gain competitive advantages and put pressure on other states is stimulating movement away from the dollar monopoly. More and more countries are contemplating the possibility of increasing the role of alternative currencies in mutual settlements. BRICS is no exception. The idea is not to destroy the existing payment systems but to survive amid the unilateral Western sanctions that are destroying the financial mechanisms that have been in effect for years.

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**Question: While President Xi Jinping was in Russia, Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida visited Kiev. What do you think about that move by Japan?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Could it be that Japan fulfilled its commitment to visit Kiev under a G7 travel schedule? That they have a schedule under which those who live according to Washington's logic and under its pressure must report on their trips? Or was this done to distract public attention from President Xi's visit and his talks with President Putin, which are more important by far.

Anyway, we don't care much about this, because everything is clear from Japan's stance and the state of Kiev's regime.

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**Question: President Xi Jinping has finished his visit to Russia. How would you assess its results? What opportunities has it created for trade between Russia and China?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I have already commented on this issue when I answered your colleagues' questions. I am not going to repeat it.

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**Question: The concept of a community of common destiny for humankind marks its 10th anniversary. President Xi formulated the idea at MGIMO University in his speech there ten years ago. How do you understand this concept in the context of the today's complicated international situation? What do you think about its prospects?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Russia welcomed this concept proposed by our Chinese friends more than once, including at the highest level. Its importance was noted in the Joint Statement made by the leaders of Russia and China on February 4, 2022, during President Putin's visit to China.

On March 21, 2023, the presidents of Russia and China issued a Joint Statement, which noted that Russia holds a positive view of the Chinese concept of building a community of common destiny for humankind for strengthening solidarity within the international community and rallying its efforts to respond to common challenges.

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**Question: The Foreign Ministry of China has recently published a report titled The State of Democracy in the United States: 2022. It has brought together numerous facts, media reports, and expert assessments and offers a structural analysis of the maladies that afflicted US democracy in 2022. What is your opinion of the report? What do you think about American democracy? What can Washington's efforts to force it on other countries lead to?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We appreciate the high professionalism of our Chinese colleagues, who prepare first-class reports that are not based on speculation or lop-sided presentation but on facts and the dynamic of developments in any given country. We appreciate this.

We use their information and analysis reports for our ministry's relevant surveys of human rights situations in different countries, including the United States. Such reports are prepared every year by the office of the Foreign Ministry's Commissioner for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law. The next report is scheduled to be issued in the first half of the year. We hope that both the Russian and the Chinese documents will attract the attention of the relevant human rights bodies of the UN and other international organisations.

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**Question: More and more statements are being made on the increasing danger of a nuclear conflict. Are you considering the possibility of organising direct Russia-West talks on Ukraine in this context?**

**Maria Zakharova:** It appears you didn't pay close enough attention to what I have said or what Sergey Lavrov said at news conferences, interviews, and statements, including in the past few weeks and days.

All the options for discussing initiatives from intermediaries that mention the word "peace" have been banished at the political level in the West. Kiev's regime has also banned them legislatively. There is nothing new I can say on this score.

**Question: I did not mean intermediaries but direct talks.**

**Maria Zakharova:** Have you heard what Antony Blinken and other officials have said while two great powers talked about China's peace initiatives and their consideration? They have also said that the time and historical situation are not right for halting the hostilities, and that more weapons must be provided, including depleted uranium shells. The question is not for us.

When we were asked and then talks were proposed, and we felt their desire to talk, we responded accordingly. But later they blocked the negotiating process. We have taken note of this. We believe that they have clearly outlined their stance, to the extent that they are able to do anything clearly. This is the current state of affairs. They have completely blocked this possibility in favour of building up their aggression and escalating the conflict.

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**Question: Will there be consequences for the German media operating in Russia after the German government published a report on journalists' connections with the special services?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We haven't learned anything new. We have been saying all along that the German media and their journalism trade unionists were biased and paid off by political players in the Federal Republic of Germany, that they were biased on the propaganda and self-censorship side. They tried to deny this. We cited examples. Our suspicions were confirmed when they began to remove [Russian channels] from satellite platforms (RT Deutsch was denied broadcast). Later, for some reason, they decided to intervene in decision-making of a sovereign country. They did, as a matter of fact.

We spoke about the pressure being placed on the Russian media, pointed out that the German government was also behind German banks' decision to block accounts and create difficulties for Russian journalists. They denied all that, too. Now the German media themselves have published the relevant materials provided by the German side. It's official now. It proves that indeed, the German government, contrary to its own statements, including by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in Moscow (she asserted that they did not interfere in that situation), is not just interfering, but is also moderating content and paying for it. Because they've been doing that, historically, and they're still doing it now. This is nothing new.

We have said this publicly. Will this affect the work of German journalists here? Haven't we outlined our approach before? If Russian journalists in Germany are harassed, indeed there will be retaliatory measures against German journalists in Russia. This is our policy.

We are always happy to have journalists here who come to work as reporters and comply with Russian legislation. We ensure a most-favoured status to such correspondents, journalists, and media outlets.

But if Russian media are attacked, literally or figuratively, in the countries concerned, and their governments fail to take action to protect these journalists (including Russian ones) from such attacks or are themselves engaged in campaigns against our journalists and media outlets, then we will retaliate. There will be no exceptions. Everybody knows that.

We are ready to constructively address any issues, but if we meet with stonewall after stonewall (we've been stonewalled by the German government more than once; worse than that, we heard lies from Annalena Baerbock in Moscow, who said Russian media had nothing in common with an independent media, and now they admit they're paying their own), if our media have had no chance of being heard, then, unfortunately (I'm really saying this with sincere regret), we were forced to learn how to apply tit-for-tat measures.

I believe German journalists currently enjoy every privilege that the Russian Foreign Ministry accreditation can give them. Their favourable status regime is incomparable to what Russian journalists in Germany have to endure.

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**Question: It is clear that recent talks with China included military-technical cooperation aspects. Obviously, there are reasons not to publish this information. What can you say about the aspects that were known even before the talks – how was cooperation between Russia and China unfolding in this area earlier this year? How do our Chinese partners assess it, and what do they say about its prospects?**

**Maria Zakharova:** The relevant agencies regularly comment on military-technical cooperation – the Russian Defence Ministry and other agencies responsible for military-technical cooperation. They can answer your question. This is outside the competence of the Foreign Ministry.

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**Question: What can you say about the global reaction to the seizure of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra? What else can Russia do in this situation?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I commented on this at the beginning of the briefing. The international response is very weak, it is practically non-existent. We hope that it should become stronger and will directly stir representatives of other religions. The reaction should be strong and collective. But unfortunately, there has been no such reaction.

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**Question: What could be Russia's response to Ankara's decision to ban re-exports of sanctioned products to Russia?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I can refer you to what I said earlier. The relevant Russian agencies are in touch with their Turkish colleagues on this matter.

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**Question: During his joint press conference with Ararat Mirzoyan, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that he supported Nikol Pashinyan's position that Karabakh and Baku representatives must be the ones to decide on security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh residents and ensure their rights. Does this mean that Russia gave up on the peace agreement it drafted stipulating that Artsakh's status must be decided at a later time? If so, how will the Russian plan be different from the joint settlement proposal by the United States and the EU, which is designed to drive Russia out of Armenia and the region?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I have just said that we view trilateral agreements as the foundation for promoting a settlement. All I can do now is reaffirm this position.

As for the EU, I have also covered this issue. If its involvement creates added value, if it does not seek to engage in provocative action towards any of the parties, and if it delivers tangible results, then this will probably become visible to us. So far, things have been heading in the opposite direction. What can we say about this? They failed to deliver and to build positive momentum on the ground, which, unfortunately, promotes instability in several spheres. This is more than just a political assessment, but the way we view developments on the ground.

There is one more thing I wanted to emphasise. You have mentioned the Russian proposal. In fact, it is a trilateral document with many initiatives submitted by each of the parties. The three parties created this powerful synergy to produce a single-outcome document. I would not designate Russia as the one and only sponsor of this agreement. It resulted from an exemplary cooperative effort, just the way it should happen – with debates, each side seeking to promote the position of its country, and then finding compromise. I would refer to this proposal as a shared collective position of the three parties.

**Question: During the same press conference, Sergey Lavrov talked about the need to set forth the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh residents in the future agreement, saying that "It's not as difficult to do as it may seem." He**

went on to say: “Everything will depend on integrity of the parties who will have to comply with the new agreements.” However, he referred to the Minsk Agreements on Donbass and the agreement on the rights of Serbs in Kosovo. We know that the Minsk Agreements remained dead in the water, paving the way to the special military operation. Serbs in Kosovo regularly suffer from serious violations of their rights. Azerbaijan fails to comply with the trilateral statements and has been brazenly violating them. With all this in mind, what could be the solution for the Karabakh conflict, and what can be done to ensure that the rights of Artsakh residents be respected?

**Maria Zakharova:** The trilateral agreements are in place. What we need is political will. Having a specific plan and the willingness to fulfil it opens up a path towards success, and I mean success for all the parties involved. They all contributed to drafting these agreements. They were not imposed or concocted by someone else in any way. In fact, everyone contributed in formulating them.

As for making sure that these agreements do not follow down the same road as the Minsk Agreements, we proceed from the premise that the parties have reaffirmed their commitment to the trilateral agreements on multiple occasions. Let me remind you that for several years the Kiev regime kept inventing pretexts for not complying with the Minsk Agreements, and went on to say that they were no longer relevant, adding that they were irrelevant for the current government because they were signed by the preceding administration.

We kept tabs on all the times the Kiev regime undermined these efforts. We also pointed to the unwillingness of those who sponsored this initiative, and those who were responsible for the Kiev regime, to facilitate Kiev’s efforts to abide by these agreements, and that their lack of political will to do so. We talked about this all the time. This is one of possible answers to your question.

**Question:** You spoke about approaches of the parties. But we can see that the blockade has continued for 100 days, and other violations have been reported. Nobody, even Russia, is able to influence Azerbaijan and encourage it to fulfil its obligations under these agreements.

**Maria Zakharova:** This is not the only thing we see. There is nothing wrong with our vision.

**Question:** Armenian media outlets and Telegram channels reported that Azerbaijan had wounded two members of the Russian military on Armenian territory. The regional administration of the Syunik Province also reported that these members of the military had received medical help. What will be Russia’s response to the attack on their own troops by

**Azerbaijan on the internationally recognised territory of the Republic of Armenia? Could it be that this incident comes from Baku's confidence in its own impunity as Moscow has not given a harsh response to violations of the bilateral statement in the past?**

**Maria Zakharova:** The Russian Defence Ministry is working to establish the circumstances of the incident. I believe that we must wait for the results of this investigation. When they become available, I will be able to comment. There have been responses to different cases and incidents at the level of corresponding agencies.

There is one more small but important nuance. A response does not have to be public. We develop dialogue almost continuously. I hope that you do not think that if something was not said at the podium this means that it wasn't communicated over the phone or face to face or during routine correspondence. You don't think this, do you? Our allies, partners and friends have different ways of conveying our position on various matters.

**Question: At a meeting between Sergey Lavrov and Ararat Mirzoyan, it was also declared that "Armenia did not refuse to sign the resolution on the CSTO mission." Does it mean that, along with the EU mission at the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, there will be a CSTO mission as well? And if yes, when can we expect a decision on this matter?**

**Maria Zakharova:** That statement was made at the news conference of Sergey Lavrov and Ararat Mirzoyan. The matter concerning a CSTO mission is still being developed.

**Question: During talks with Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan said that Yerevan expects to cooperate with Moscow on sending an international mission to Karabakh. What does Russia think about Armenia's idea to deploy an international mission in Karabakh?**

**Maria Zakharova:** In accordance with the statement made by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia on November 9, 2020, a Russian Peacekeeping Force has been deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh. Our peacekeepers have made consistent efforts to ensure stability and security in the region and prevent escalation.

A great deal depends on the political will and actual intention of the parties to settle existing disagreements and find solutions. It is important that they (and we all) unfailingly comply with all the trilateral agreements that determined the road map for normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.



As concerns deploying a new mission, that would require consent from both Yerevan and Baku, which has not been given to date.

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**Question: Head of the Investigative Committee Alexander Bastrykin believes that Russia should create an international court similar to the International Criminal Court in The Hague or the European Court of Human Rights. Is the Foreign Ministry supportive of this initiative? Are steps being taken to establish a new international court? Which friendly countries have backed this idea so far?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I don't have any updates to offer with regard to ready-to-go solutions. This is work in progress. I will definitely get back to you with any updates forthcoming.

The issue is that many international institutions, in particular, the International Criminal Court, have long since lost their credibility and pass off their concocted functions as some kind of an international absolute. It is not only about pumping out things that are at odds with international law, the logic of events, or historical truth. Unfortunately, it is replacing in the public mind the functionality of genuine universal international organisations. Of course, the greater the number of such provocations, the more questions the international community will have. What are we going to do next? After all, you can't just say that international law no longer exists, because Western countries are at their wits end trying to figure out what else they can do to annihilate it.

No, it must be in place. It must be preserved and remain operational. Questions about finding a way out of this situation will only multiply.

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**Question: Former National Security Adviser to the President of the United States John Bolton called on Ukraine to strike targets located deep in Russia. Does it mean international declarations have broken new ground this week? When will a large number of analysts realise that their advice is just making things worse?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I'm not going to discuss this statement even as a fact of international politics. I think only emotionally unstable people can make such statements. Unfortunately, many statements that we hear coming from officials in the United States and the United Kingdom and those who do not hold any formal positions can be described in these terms.

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**Question: It was reported yesterday that Ukrainian Minister of Culture Alexander Tkachenko had said he didn't believe in "good Russians," but believed those who condemn Moscow's policies were useful to Ukraine and should be put to good use.**

**Maria Zakharova:** You are downplaying the scope of the issue. They have long had doubts that Russians exist. If they truly believe we are not Russia, but Muscovy, then any talk about good and bad Russians is irrelevant.

A global substitution of concepts is underway. President of Moldova Maia Sandu signed a law to the effect that the Moldavian language does not exist and Romanian will now be used instead of it. She is a Romanian national.

We are being forcibly fed a narrative that there are no males or females, but there is some kind of a biological entity which can decide what it is or what they are in their body. We are told there's no family, but there are "partnerships." There's a global substitution of concepts. Now they are trying to force it on us. We are resisting.

We are being told Russia is non-existent. Next thing you know they are Rus' and we are Muscovy. In that case, they are the suburbs of Moscow. This should be taken as a certain phase of their illness. All countries go through difficult times. Nations experience tragic chapters in their history. Many repent and learn from their mistakes. Others are trying (successfully) to integrate the past with the present and the future. People overcome the legacy of their societies in different ways.

Today, Ukraine is going through a terrible moment in history. It was roped into this situation by deceit and false narratives by those who gave it money and promises, lied, deceived, and pitted it against other nations, etc. It is, first and foremost, Washington, which was open about it, and the European Union. They brought Ukraine to where it is now. Now, they are openly destroying and mocking it.

I think it's important to see the truth behind these processes and to commit them to a history book. Sometime down the line, no one will even believe the kind of nonsense the figures who describe themselves as Ukrainian leaders were spouting from bully pulpits. Deep down, I believe there is no leadership in Ukraine at all, but rather a genuine regime and a back-alley cabal.

It is important that we document this historical process. It is vital that future generations not make the same mistakes, that they not sell out their sovereignty, not auction off their historical memory and conscience, not let down their ancestors and not sell themselves for a song, that they not be lured by false promises and the belief that tomorrow will bring a comfortable life, one

that has yet to materialise, believing that this promised life is more important than that which was done by their ancestors in the name of future generations.

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**Question: I am in Yakutsk, where a climate change conference has wrapped up its second day. Apart from making their presentations, some speakers thanked the Foreign Ministry for helping organise this important international event.**

**Today, March 23, Pakistan marks Pakistan Day, its national holiday. Pakistan and Russia have spared no diplomatic effort to promote friendly relations and mutual understanding, and to maintain the present constructive political dialogue. What is your view of the relations between the two countries in 2023? What would you like to wish the people of Pakistan on their national holiday?**

**Maria Zakharova:** We would like to congratulate the people of Pakistan on their national holiday – Pakistan Day, and wish them every success, as well as peace and wellbeing.

Russia views Pakistan as an important foreign policy partner. Relations between us have their own inherent value.

Our countries maintain regular political dialogue, and have been effective in working together on the Afghan settlement and fighting terrorism.

Moscow and Islamabad share similar positions on most key international and regional matters, and have been consistent in expanding their cooperation within multilateral frameworks, including the UN and the SCO, as well as bilaterally.

We stand ready to step up our trade and economic ties and hope to be able to engage in joint energy projects soon.

Thank you very much for praising the Foreign Ministry for its contribution to holding the civil society events you mentioned.

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**Question: Türkiye and Hungary are probably about to ratify Finland's accession to NATO. Russia is known to oppose NATO's expansion. Has it done anything to influence Türkiye and Hungary in order to slow down Finland's accession to NATO, and if so, how?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Our approach has always been straightforward by being honest and open when talking about the way we see processes related to building a common security architecture. We believe that prioritising one's security over someone else's, drawing these dividing lines and ensuring one's

security at the expense of others does create certain risks. We have always spoken openly about this. We have devoted so many events, conferences and forums to this topic, and I will not even mention how many times we have raised this issue during various talks.

It would be strange for me to say that we tried to get this message across to someone specifically. We tried to persuade everyone, and we talked about this with everyone. We called for the world order to be shaped through a collective effort. We offered various modalities for doing this, and were ready to work on them. Unfortunately, the collective West turned its back on all these efforts.

This new wave of NATO expansion not only fails to help Europe overcome its existing security issues, but actually makes them worse. NATO's open door policy is designed to enable its maximum geographical expansion to give it the capability it needs to contain unwanted states and regimes, primarily Russia. Over the past decade, we saw NATO bases creep up all around us.

As for Finland's decision to join NATO, this can hardly be called a wise move. Taken without a broad public debate, it came on the heels of an unprecedented Russophobic media campaign. We do understand that the United States and some of its NATO allies were behind this political campaign.

Russia sought to reassure Finland that it was committed to building a shared collective security framework, and we made proposals to this effect. We did not have any hostile intentions towards Finland, and share lasting neighbourly and mutually beneficial relations. None of these factors persuaded Helsinki to stick to its traditional military non-aligned status.

We have stressed that this step would be counterproductive, and have said so honestly and openly on multiple occasions. It would do nothing but aggravate the military and political environment in Europe by contributing to the militarisation of the Baltic region and increasing tensions in the Arctic. This could lead to a series of problems. Helsinki's decision has already had a serious negative effect on Russian-Finnish relations, including in terms of our economic ties.

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**Question: March 23, 2023 marks the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan for Muslims around the world. Ramadan, which will last until April 21, is a special time for Muslims when they try to spend more time praying and reading the Quran and doing good deeds that matter to people. We had a question about Ukrainian soldiers who burned and desecrated scriptures**

**that are sacred to every Muslim. You have provided a detailed comment on that.**

**Russia has many friends and partners in the Muslim world. What are your wishes for Muslims around the world at the beginning of the holy month?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I wish the best to everyone who professes Islam. I'm speaking mostly on a personal note. However, what I feel on a personal level fully agrees with our overall position of respect for all world religions and all those who peacefully profess different religious and philosophical views in accordance with the traditions and laws.

Everything that has been developed over the past decades (an alliance of civilisations and a dialogue of cultures) has been brought to fruition in many ways in our country. It's not because it was defined by some Western concepts. This is our traditional way of life. So, my best wishes.

As for the terrible incident you mentioned, I covered it earlier, but I can add to what I said before. The Ukrainian servicemen's actions are indeed dangerous and provocative and are aimed at insulting the feelings of the entire Muslim community not just in a specific country, but in general. Episodes like this one call for thorough investigation, consolidation of international efforts and holding the perpetrators accountable, so that it does not happen again and, accordingly, does not cause interreligious intolerance or, God forbid, more conflicts.

We are fully aware that counting on the objectivity of the international community (I'm talking about specialised Western organisations) is not an option. The atmosphere of disrespect for other cultures and religions that reigns in the Ukrainian army and society as a whole is a logical result of the Kiev regime's long-term atheistic policy.

It is not about atheism or a secular state. It's about disrespecting people who have different political or religious views. Clearly, the consistent infringement of believers' rights in Ukraine hardly encourages interreligious harmony in that country.

To reiterate, people in our country have respect for the followers of all world religions. We strongly condemn such unacceptable acts and call on the Ukrainian authorities to respect the rights of believers regardless of their religious affiliation.

You are absolutely right. The month of Ramadan is a special time for Muslims. Fasting during this month implies spiritual cleansing and

concentration, taking care of other people and making peace with the parties to disputes and disagreements.

We wish Russian Muslims and their fellow believers around the world a peaceful and calm fast time, prosperity to their loved ones, and patience and focus on good deeds.

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**Question: Russia has pivoted to the East. Will this make our compatriots residing in the EU second-rate compatriots who enjoy less protection on the part of Russia? There were almost no compatriots from the EU at the recently held Constituent Congress of the International Russophile Movement. Isn't that a sign of waning support for our compatriots in the EU? They are having a particularly difficult time right now.**

**Maria Zakharova:** First, this is not a pivot to the East, but taking advantage of the readily available opportunities. We see the EU and the West building walls and fences. We will focus on the opportunities that hold the most promise. We pursue a multipronged policy. I don't see why we should discuss any pivots in this regard.

Second, the Constituent Congress of the International Russophile Movement that was held in Moscow on March 14 brought together delegates from 42 countries, including Europe. The small number of EU representatives does not mean we do not want to see them or we don't support them enough. Nothing like that. We will continue to support them without drawing any lines between countries. For us, the concept of compatriot is linked not to any particular country, but to Russia, Russian culture, history, roots, bonds and humanitarian ties.

The EU countries impact people, and that includes our compatriots, the Chinese and people from other countries. We can see it perfectly well. Rest assured, we will never let our help, support and a sense of affinity wane.

The people who spearheaded the Russophile Movement were not going to single out specific groups of activists. They strive to interact with all interested parties, be they foreign nationals or Russians living abroad. It's a wide range of participants. I think Russophiles are at the beginning of their journey. This question is best addressed to them and their institutional programme. We are just helping them. We respond to requests for help. This is what our course of action is going to be.

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