

Remarks by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during the Government Hour in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 19 November 2014, in Moscow

Esteemed deputies of the State Duma,

I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you again as part of the Government Hour. The Foreign Ministry appreciates the deputies' focus on cooperation between our ministry and the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the corresponding committees of the State Duma and the Federation Council. Teamwork is important for the effective implementation of Russia's foreign policy. Sincerely, without any flattery, we appreciate the active and constructive contribution that the State Duma makes in promoting Russia's interests in the international arena as it makes use of parliamentary diplomacy and the full range of tools available to members of parliaments across the world.

President Putin has made extensive remarks about how he views the current international situation, including at the meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club and in an interview during his recent Asian tour. The President has been candid in his offers to work with our partners to make a clear and honest appraisal of what's really going on in the world, why it is becoming less safe and predictable, and why risks are multiplying.

Clearly, international relations are going through a transition as a new multipolar international order continues to emerge for objective reasons. A fundamentally different picture of the world is taking shape right before our eyes. The end of one era and the start of the next is never a straightforward process, and it's usually marked by series of intense local conflicts, if not global clashes. Competition is on the rise everywhere, even between socioeconomic development models and value systems.

We face challenges of truly historic proportions whose complexity cannot be underestimated. At the same time, clearly, Russia has every opportunity to consolidate its position as one of the centres of the new multipolar system, have a positive influence on the international situation, strengthen security and stability, and create favourable external conditions for the internal development of our country and sustainable economic growth – all to improve the quality of life of our citizens. Russia's traditionally independent policy is in synch with the times, and is becoming increasingly popular in the world and attracting a wide range of partners in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe.

We are ready to join efforts with all those who are willing to cooperate with us based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit, building on the principles of international law and the UN's central role in international affairs. The activities of the UN Security Council, G20, BRICS, and SCO clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of coordinated action. Recent examples include eliminating Syria's chemical weapons, progress in the talks on the Iranian nuclear programme, and the joint response to the Ebola virus. Conversely, when the emphasis is made on unilateral action or protecting one's own interests at the expense of others, the results tend to be disappointing.

Russia has consistently advocated a positive, integration-based agenda to promote relations between countries rather than drive them apart. Unfortunately, this constructive course is

running into continuing attempts by the US and its allies to divide and conquer, to push for unilateral approaches and to reshape the world to fit their tactical plans.

The Ukraine crisis was the result of the policy pursued by Western countries over the course of the last 25 years, whereby they sought to strengthen their own security at the expense of others and to expand the geopolitical space under their control. This revealed itself in successive waves of NATO enlargement despite assurances to the contrary given at the highest levels and in violation of solemn declarations to create a system of equal and indivisible security in the Euro-Atlantic zone.

With the support of the United States and several European countries, an unconstitutional armed coup was staged in Ukraine. Nationalist radicals brought the country to the brink of a schism and pushed it into civil war. The chances of de-escalating the conflict have been repeatedly torpedoed by the West. I'm referring to the agreement to resolve the crisis signed on 21 February by the Ukrainian authorities and the foreign ministers of three European countries that was forgotten within a few hours of its signing. The key provisions of the Geneva Statement of 17 April, in which the Ukrainian authorities pledged to proceed rapidly with constitutional reform involving all regions and political forces in Ukraine, have so far not been acted upon.

Of course, Russia could not and cannot be a passive onlooker when such events are unfolding in a neighbouring, brotherly nation. As former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger put it in a recent interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, "Ukraine has always had special significance for Russia, and the failure to understand that was a fatal mistake."

Throughout the Ukraine crisis, our country has consistently sought to help Ukraine get through this difficult period in its history, to achieve lasting peace and national accord regarding its future and its political system, so that all Ukrainians can lead a comfortable, safe and dignified life.

As a next step, we call for steady contacts between Kiev and Donbass in order to reach mutually acceptable agreements. The West should encourage this process rather than blindly support everything that the "war party" in Kiev does, turning a blind eye to flagrant human rights violations, lawlessness and war crimes.

Attempts to shift the blame for the Ukraine crisis on Russia won't work, and the truth about these events is making its way out, and is even penetrating the biased media in the West. Nor can one hide behind unlawful unilateral sanctions, which only undermine efforts to stabilise the global economy and don't bring us any closer to resolving the Ukraine crisis. Such views were expressed during President Putin's international visits, in particular, at the recent APEC and G20 summits, during which the Russian leader spoke in-depth with numerous Western representatives.

The current downturn in international affairs is not our choice. We will continue to work in these circumstances, and we are always open to dialogue. There's no real alternative to mutually advantageous and equitable cooperation between Russia and the EU; we are bound by too much in geographical, economic, historical, and human terms. The European Union is our natural trade and economic partner. We have a mutual interest in expanding our business

cooperation, which representatives of leading German companies confirmed to me during their recent visit to Russia to meet with our leaders.

Reduced cooperation between Russia and the West will affect many realms, not just the economy. I'm also referring to the damage caused to our joint efforts in the face of escalating common threats. In this regard, the short-sightedness of the US and EU decision to freeze mechanisms of cooperation with Russia, including those needed to consolidate our approaches to common challenges, such as terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime, is surprising.

We cannot understand what this is all about. Is it an attempt to prove oneself in some new way, the inertia of imperial thinking, or an inability to understand that modern realities do not allow the West to build a worldwide vertical structure to fit its approaches? Of course, we recognise that there are differences, many of which are objective in nature and reflect the actual incompatibility of legitimate interests, but we are willing to bridge the gap between our positions and seek compromises on the basis of equality, true consideration of each other's interests, and a refusal to make any attempts at blackmailing or dictating.

We are convinced that gradual progress towards forming a common economic and humanitarian space based on the principle of equal and indivisible security should be a strategic benchmark for our efforts to create a new architecture on the European continent. This belief will guide us at the upcoming Basel meeting of OSCE foreign ministers scheduled for early December. After all, the original purpose of this organisation was to eliminate any and all dividing lines in the Euro-Atlantic zone.

The ongoing efforts to create a Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) are a concrete contribution to promoting extensive cooperation in this region. We expect Armenia to become a full member in 2015. Work is underway to make Kyrgyzstan part of the EAEU as well.

The Collective Security Treaty Organisation plays an increasingly important role in maintaining security in the region. We are working to make it more effective and improve its rapid response and peace-making capabilities, as we seek to counter diverse threats and challenges like those originating in Afghanistan.

Our foreign policy priorities next year are associated with Russia's presidency of the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. We will host both summits in Ufa in the summer of 2015. We are interested in stepping up SCO activity in every area, building its counter-terrorism and drug enforcement capacity, and resolving issues related to the admission of new members.

BRICS is playing a growing role in international affairs. The New Development Bank with \$100 billion in capital and the currency reserve pool with the same amount are designed to maintain the stability of the international currency and financial system. There has also been more meaningful coordination among the BRICS countries in the international arena. This was confirmed at the G20 summit in Australia, particularly during the discussion of reforming the international currency and financial system and issues related to the global political situation.

Quite recently, breakthrough decisions were made to expand Russia's cooperation and strategic partnership with China. On 9 November, Beijing hosted the fifth Russian-Chinese summit in 2014. Global developments convincingly show that the Moscow-Beijing tandem is a key factor in preserving international stability and security, building a stable multipolar world order, ensuring the primacy of law in international affairs and the democratisation of international relations.

Russia continues to expand its multifaceted ties with India, Vietnam and its other partners in the Asia Pacific region. Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his Asian tour. The dynamic development of Russia's eastern territories will remain a national priority for the entire 21st century. This explains our interest in a more active and result-oriented role in Asia Pacific integration processes and in tapping into the region's potential to promote economic growth in Siberia and the Russian Far East. These goals formed the foundation of Russia's stance at the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Beijing. That said, the eastern direction of our policy should be perceived as part of our multidirectional work on the international scene, rather than as an alternative to ties with the West. It reinforces the country's positions in the world.

We are in favour of creating reliable security mechanisms for the Asia Pacific region that aren't divided into blocs. A Russian-Chinese initiative to draft framework principles for a new regional system aims to achieve this goal. The details of this initiative are currently being discussed during consultations of experts from countries involved in East Asia summits.

Russia continues to actively promote the peaceful settlement of conflicts. One of our top priorities is counteracting the surge in extremism and terrorism in the turbulent Middle East and North Africa. We believe that the international efforts to deter threats from terrorist organisations, including the so-called Islamic State, should be firmly grounded in international law, without double standards or hidden agendas.

For our part, we continue providing support to the governments of Iraq, Syria and other countries in the region to increase their ability to fight extremists. We have proposed using the UN Security Council to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the threats in the Middle East and North Africa in their entirety, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, in order to coordinate a collective strategy for preventing the complete destabilisation of this key region.

There has been broad international recognition of Russia's initiatives to resolve the dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme on the basis of a phased, reciprocal process, and these principles have been at the centre of the approaches discussed at the talks between Iran and the group of six nations. It is obvious that progress on this issue would help improve the situation in the Middle East and facilitate efforts currently being made to create a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region.

In conclusion, I offer my assurance that Russian diplomats will continue to work hard to implement the foreign policy course set by the President of Russia of consistently defending our national interests. We'll continue to coordinate closely with our parliamentarians.

Question: Mr Lavrov, first of all, I would like to thank you for your work. The events in Ukraine are still the focus of attention in Russian society. The Communist Party of the

Russian Federation is doing all it can to alleviate the suffering of Novorossiia's residents, who have fallen victim to the Russophobic forces that have seized power in Kiev. We have sent over 20 columns of vehicles with humanitarian assistance to the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, a total of over 2,000 tonnes. As I accompanied humanitarian convoys, I have repeatedly been to Donetsk and Lugansk and seen with my own eyes the dire consequences of the war crimes committed by the Kiev authorities. Western human rights advocates turn a blind eye to these crimes. It is obvious to all that the Minsk Agreements are not working. What other action can the Russian Foreign Ministry take in terms of international law to put an end to the war against Novorossiia? And how can we, State Duma deputies, help you there?

Sergey Lavrov: Thank you very much. Indeed, the Minsk Agreements are not being observed, at least for the most part. Their implementation requires interaction between both sides. The lines of disengagement is in progress, and I hope is nearing completion, which will make it possible to start the withdrawal of heavy weaponry to the agreed-upon distances on both sides. After this, OSCE monitors are to be deployed between the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, on the one side, and Kiev defence and security forces on the other. This will allow for a truly stable ceasefire regime to be established. To reiterate, this is the utmost priority today, as people are being killed every day on both sides.

We believe that the Minsk Agreements are still relevant. They provide for an entire set of essential short- and medium-term steps, including the provision of security guarantees to the territories in question, and the start of a comprehensive political dialogue. As I said earlier, Kiev has failed to deliver on the obligations it assumed in April this year in the Geneva Statement, regarding the immediate start of constitutional reform with the participation of all regions and political forces. We will work to ensure that the Minsk Agreements remain a basis for the efforts to bring about a peace settlement. It is very important that these arrangements were approved by Kiev and the self-defence forces, and supported by the principal outside players, including Russia, the EU, the OSCE, the United States and the Council of Europe. If we all agree that at present this is a common basis for our work, then it is vital to ensure their implementation and the continuation of direct negotiations between Kiev and DPR and LPR representatives, because they were the principal signatories to the Minsk Agreements.

The attempts to call into question the relevance of the Minsk documents – the Protocol and the Memorandum – are being made by those who would like to reverse the situation and bring the process back into some format where the DPR and the LPR are not represented. This is the purpose that I read into the persistent statements issued in particular by Arseniy Yatsenyuk and members of this team to the effect that the negotiations should return to the Geneva format. The Geneva format is a closed chapter, because it served its purpose when there was no direct dialogue between Kiev and the Southeast. Today, this dialogue has been established, and it would be a crime to disrupt it.

Regarding the last question, as to what the Federal Assembly and the State Duma can do to support the efforts to settle the situation in Ukraine, I believe that your dialogue with Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada, as soon as it overcomes internal political conflicts related to the formation of a [coalition] government, would be very useful. I am aware that the State Duma speaker and the relevant committees have already begun such efforts. We would actively support that.

Question: Mr Lavrov, Kiev authorities continue to amaze. At the end of last week, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed decrees on economic blockade of Donbass, which bears the hallmarks of social genocide and is definitely not conducive to resolving the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe there. Deputies from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and from all other parliamentary parties have been to Donbass and are sure that neither families with many children nor the elderly, nor disabled people are involved in the armed conflict between the forces participating in Kiev's punitive operation and the self-defence forces. Nevertheless, the Kiev authorities are trying to solve their problems at the expense of civilians, because there are no serious victories. The Kiev authorities are once again showing their true colours, their anti-human nature. However, this issue also has another aspect. Do you believe that Kiev's unilateral renunciation of its obligations is a small step towards the recognition of the LPR's and the DPR's special legal status?

Sergey Lavrov: This fact can be used to substantiate your thesis. The decision to deprive the elderly of their pensions, as well as all those who are entitled to social payments and benefits, is a disaster for the people, which further exacerbates their plight. However, what is even more deplorable – there is this school of thought, too – is that standing behind this decree is not only and not so much the wish to stifle this region economically and socially, but to lay the groundwork for a new armed invasion and another attempt to resolve this problem through the use of force. Herein lies a key contradiction today. We act on the premise that the Minsk process has opened the way for direct dialogue, and Kiev has undertaken to conduct a nationwide dialogue. But in reality, first, judging by the draft coalition agreement circulated by the Petro Poroshenko Bloc, the constitutional reform is definitely not conceived as a nationwide dialogue. It will be limited to the Verkhovna Rada walls with the participation of the presidential staff, the government staff, and some experts on constitutional law. There is no reference to the involvement of all regions and political forces, which, to reiterate, is an obligation that Kiev assumed in April. Second, all of these efforts show that the “party of war’ in Kiev is anxious to do all it can to exclude the self-defence forces, the DPR and the LPR from participation in the negotiation process, and force the West to get Russia to agree to act as a party to the conflict. These are utterly counterproductive and provocative lines, which have no chances for success. There must be only a direct conversation with those who have risen against the illegal, anti-constitutional coup d’etat and refused to live according to the rules that the coup organisers and perpetrators started to impose on the entire country, only direct dialogue and respect for their legitimate interests, the interests of those who have always lived in this land, whose ancestors lived in this land, and whose children want to live in this land.

Question: Mr Lavrov, it's no secret that we miscalculated in our relations with Ukraine in the past 20 years. We only maintained contacts with the elites with a focus on developing business ties, while people who were seeking closer ties with Russia and believed that they were part of the Russian world were not receiving support.

At the same time, forces that are alien to us didn't spare any expense in their bid to revive nationalism and manipulated Ukrainian youths. It will take a long time to change people's mindset now, but we must do this. What else in your view should be done to stand up to this unbridled deception and rampant distortion of what is really happening here by a media tamed by the West? How can we support those who do not accept antagonism towards Russia and are seeking to restore good relations?

Sergey Lavrov: I believe that Ukraine did not get enough attention after the breakup of the Soviet Union. We could have done more to defend the rights of Russians there. Frankly speaking, it could never occur to anybody that radicals and neo-Nazis could come to dominate Ukrainian politics and that responsible politicians would be forced to make statements – maybe, even against their will – that are influenced by radicals and neo-Nazis.

Nonetheless, relations with our compatriots were maintained. Our executive branch and the Federal Assembly launched important initiatives to support the Russian world in Crimea. A lot was also done at that time to consolidate our compatriots in the rest of Ukraine. However, regrettably, you were absolutely right when you said that non-governmental organisations backed by our Western colleagues were honestly much more numerous and better funded than was realised. In the end, following the coup, part of the public that spoke in favour of strengthening – rather than severing – historically close and brotherly relations with Russia, ended up feeling vulnerable. Political purges in Ukraine targeted precisely these politicians and civic organisations above all.

Still, the information sphere has not been completely monopolised by the West. We've secured a very strong position in Russian- and English-language media markets, for example with our TV channel Russia Today, and we are also broadcasting in other foreign languages. Russian reporters are practically the only ones who work regularly in southeastern Ukraine, and only their reports allow people in Russia and abroad to keep up with the events in this region.

Of course, your efforts at international forums – for example, Sergei Naryshkin's speeches at various events promoting international parliamentary cooperation and speeches by the heads of committees and other members of delegations during international parliamentary events – are very important for bringing the truth about what is happening in Ukraine to the global and European public.

Question: Mr Lavrov, it's been six years since the tragic events in Tskhinval. During this time, A Just Russia has done a great job strengthening relations with South Ossetia and Abkhazia through parliamentary diplomacy so as to use the Socialist International to gain further recognition of their independence and sovereignty. Unfortunately, our strategic partners in the CIS failed to support us. What's your take on this situation? What are the prospects for developing bilateral relations between Russia and Georgia, as well as Russia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia, including as part of an agreement with Abkhazia in the works.

Sergey Lavrov: I have already spoken on this subject in terms of our allies and in terms of why NATO members see eye-to-eye on all things, while we, in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, for example, have certain nuances regarding our positions. Things in NATO and the EU are not that simple, either. Frankly, the discipline of the rod rules there. It's all nicely wrapped up in words like the "principle of consensus", and everyone is trying to make sure that their individual positions fit one policy. However, we do know how unanimity is reached in these structures, primarily NATO. We are also aware of the fact that US emissaries (I was forthright about this in my recent conversation with US Secretary of State John Kerry in Beijing) travel around the world pushing every government with varying degrees of force to support sanctions on Russia. In most cases, these gimmicks don't work,

but the fact that a great power is running around the globe forcing everyone to follow its course speaks volumes. I'd be ashamed if I had to do this.

In the organisations that Russia is forming in conjunction with its neighbours, including primarily the CSTO, we are guided by the need to unanimously protect, without any “flip-flopping”, the core legitimate security interests of our states. In isolated instances, when it comes to, for example, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, or Crimea, we do not force our partners to adopt our stance 100 percent. We don't want to put them in an awkward situation if for some reason they are not comfortable with it. This is not a matter of life and death for Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Crimea. The security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as subjects of international law is provided by Russia fully and reliably. Crimea is an integral part of Russia, and we are fully responsible for it, just like for any other constituent entity of the Russian Federation. There's no need to force anyone to make any statements. We clearly see that, in practice, our allies are guided by existing realities. This is what matters most to us.

With regard to our relations with these republics, I will say that we are drafting a new agreement which will strengthen our relations with Abkhazia. We are expanding the legal framework with South Ossetia and we are willing to continue to normalise our relations with Georgia.

Question: Mr Lavrov, Russia's international isolation is a popular subject in the West. I believe it's arrogant nonsense, because our world is much bigger than the US and its thirty or so allies. In recent years, a policy of restoring Russia's ties with our old allies in Asia and Latin America seems to have taken shape.

However, it seems that our ties with Africa are not developing vigorously enough, even though Africa has vast natural and human resources. The world powers are competing fiercely for Africa. During Soviet times, we made – using modern parlance – major political, economic and military investments in Africa. Judging from my recent trips to Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa and Namibia, people still remember this.

What do you think about prospects of reviving our extensive relations with Africa?

Sergey Lavrov: I believe the prospects are very good. Indeed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, our country had neither the means nor the time to engage in developing relations with the African continent. Our primary goal was to preserve and strengthen Russia and overcome the deep crisis. Over time, as we overcame our internal challenges and revived the economy, both the Russian government and Russian businesses regained their focus on Africa. Especially in view of the vast contribution that the Soviet Union made to the development of the African continent both politically, being a leading power that upheld the idea of decolonising Africa; economically, creating the foundations of industry and infrastructure in many African countries; and, of course, in humanitarian terms, providing education to thousands of African students. All of that constitutes an invaluable asset, which is now quite in demand and is beginning to bear fruit with Russian companies signing major lucrative deals. Most recently, we attended the launch of one of such projects, a mining plant in Zimbabwe.

This year, I visited the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa and had talks with its leaders. In a couple of days, we will have talks with the foreign ministers of Tanzania and

then Burundi here in Moscow. We have a sustained political dialogue that allows us to establish direct economic ties through infrastructure and major mutually beneficial projects. I can assure you that the prospects are very good. Africa represents the future.

Question: Mr Lavrov, you mentioned today that developing Siberia and the Russian Far East is a priority. We are witnessing a rapprochement with China. But the people residing in the Russian Far East have different ideas about this. We remember the 1990s, when many enterprises in the Russian Far East shut down after working with Chinese businesses.

We also have a border with Mongolia, where, as we have seen recently, countries such as Japan and the United States are increasing their influence. What is the Foreign Ministry doing in order to strengthen our influence in that region?

Sergey Lavrov: Mongolia has two neighbours: Russia and China. Mongols refer to their relations with all other countries as “relations with the third neighbour”. It’s a collective term.

Quite recently, there was a trilateral meeting with the participation of the presidents of Russia, Mongolia and China on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Dushanbe where President of Mongolia Tsahiagiyn stressed that, just like any other country, Mongolia is developing relations with partners across the world, but fully realises that it can overcome the challenges it faces only in cooperation with Russia and China. We operate on the premise that we never tell anyone not to do certain things. The undeniable overlapping interests of Mongolia, Russia and China in implementing a number of important projects is recognised by the Mongolian leadership, and we will actively make use of this important economic and political resource.

Question: Mr Lavrov, in light of the sanctions on our country that restrict our involvement in various projects, we still need to find ways to engage with the world, and not just at the official level.

I am a member of PACE, and I was a co-speaker on combating neo-fascism and neo-Nazism in September. I felt that some PACE members held radical views on these issues. However, there were people who supported us or wanted to support us. Notably, the stands at PACE are filled with ordinary people, such as tourists, students, and regular citizens. I thought that they supported our position. Perhaps we should be proactive about reviving popular diplomacy to reach out to the wider public in other countries? What do you think?

Sergey Lavrov: I’m all for it. In addition to parliamentary diplomacy and the form of popular diplomacy that you mentioned, the Foreign Ministry initiated a few years ago the creation of the Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy Support. Its primary goal is to fund the participation of our non-governmental organisations in international events. Of course, we will provide our support primarily to organisations that represent the interests of Russia, uphold patriotic points of view, our vision and values. The foundation’s activities have been appreciated by our NGOs with which I regularly meet. Of course, there’s never enough money, but we were told that the funding will increase gradually. That said, there’s already enough money to work effectively.

Question: Mr Lavrov, hundreds of tonnes of drugs from Afghanistan make their way to Russia (only 10% of this deadly poison is seized by our services). They come to Russia

mainly through the southern borders of countries with which we have visa-free travel. Also, millions of illegal immigrants pose big problems for Russia.

The same applies to IS militants who could take advantage of visa-free travel to get into Russia.

Are there any plans for a diplomatic solution to these problems, such as greater involvement on the part of the governments of these countries?

Sergey Lavrov: This threat is not new. Terrorist acts emanating from Afghanistan have long been a concern for us. There's a no man's land on the border with Pakistan, where militants, including Al Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, train, rest, regroup and then go elsewhere – some leave for the south, other go to the Caucasus through Central Asia.

Recently, when this threat became clear (as well as the threat of the drug trade - the production of heroin has increased tens of times over while the US-led coalition forces have been in Afghanistan), the CSTO has taken concrete measures to curb drug trafficking (operation Kanal), illegal migration (operation Nelegal), and financial flows that fund these and other types of organised crime (operation Proxy).

Now that the threats that you mentioned are growing immeasurably, the CSTO has taken additional measures, including to improve the ability of Tajikistan and its CSTO allies to control the Tajik-Afghan border.

In December, Moscow will host another meeting of the Council of CSTO Heads of State, which will look into these issues. We focus on these issues on a daily basis.

Question: Mr Lavrov, our current relations with NATO and the United States have reached a low. Despite previous agreements and statements, the US missile defence system will be deployed in Europe by 2018, and NATO continues to gradually build up its forces in the former socialist countries and the post-Soviet republics. They are openly threatening to use military force against us if we misbehave. Ukraine is receiving lethal and nonlethal arms shipments. At the same time, Russia continues to observe international strategic and conventional arms control and limitation treaties.

Please tell us about the current status of, and prospects for honoring such agreements as START III, the Treaty on Open Skies and the Vienna Document.

Please explain why the parliament has not ratified the Vienna Document.

Sergei Lavrov: START III meets our fundamental strategic interests. We are interested in its complete implementation, provided that the US honors the agreement (so far, we have no information about Washington's failure to do so). This would strengthen global stability, without impairing our national security or our ability to ensure global strategic stability.

We consider the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe null and void. After the Warsaw Pact was disbanded, and after the old CFE Treaty was adapted to the post-Warsaw Pact situation, we ratified its adapted version, but NATO refused to do so. Therefore, as you know, we waited a few years and then said that we did not consider the old CFE Treaty

compulsory, and we withdrew from it in line with the stipulated procedures (we suspended it). We consider it dead, and we will not abide by it.

The Treaty on Open Skies is useful. Sometimes, we also find it useful to see what is going on in some parts of NATO territory. We are not doing anything illegal on our own territory. Therefore when our partners want to see how things are going here, we don't object; we have nothing to hide.

Speaking of the Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, it stipulates voluntary confidence-building measures and does not have to be ratified. The document calls for providing information about planned military exercises involving a certain number of soldiers and weapons. Of course, there are many classified elements, including military bases and installations. I would like to stress once again that we are staying on our own territory, and we are not concealing information about the state of our armed forces. We don't plan to go any further with transparency and information exchange than our Western partners are ready to go. Unfortunately, they are now doing everything to stop this cooperation. There is nothing we can do about this. This is their choice.