

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the newspaper Moskovsky Komsomolets

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Question: February 10 is Diplomats' Day. In the Soviet era, it was traditional to report on achievements ahead of professional holidays. Do you have any achievements to report today? Do you have any positive news for the people?

Sergey Lavrov: Frankly, I never liked that tradition. Instead, you should report on the fulfilment of the authorities' instructions, which usually include deadlines, so it doesn't matter if it's a holiday or just an ordinary day: the deadlines have been set out in the documents signed by the head of state.

I won't speak about what we consider important, but the fact that diplomatic efforts to settle the issue of Iran's nuclear programme were concluded last year, and the relevant agreement is being implemented is obviously one of our main achievements, considering that the crisis lasted for over 10 years and was a major source of irritation in international relations.

Last year we also completed chemical demilitarisation in Syria, also at Russia's initiative. I'd like to remind you that the agreement to this effect was reached between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Barack Obama on the sidelines of the G20 summit in St Petersburg in 2013. This allowed us, first, to liquidate very dangerous abandoned chemical munitions, and second, to prevent military strikes at Syria, at least for a time.

I should highlight these two elements separately, but the fight against terrorism is the most important of our current priorities. We still have much to do on this trek, despite considerable successes in fighting ISIS in Syria. Our efforts would have been more effective and would have achieved their goal much sooner had the United States and the other members of the coalition it leads responded to our numerous proposals to develop true cooperation rather than simply coordinate procedures to avoid air accidents. We have made such proposals ever since the start of the Russian Aerospace Forces' operation in Syria. We continue to discuss this cooperation with the Americans, who are seemingly coming to understand that rejecting such cooperation would be counterproductive. But we haven't achieved any practical results yet.

Question: Shall we wait for February 10, 2017?

Sergey Lavrov: In truth, I don't think the situation is hopeless, even though, I repeat, there is always something they've got that holds back progress. Our partners have hinted that their allies in the region would not understand it if the United States closely coordinated its actions with Russia, which some of the countries in question, for example Turkey, consider to be the main problem in the Middle East. I can understand this reasoning. Turkey has openly stated that Russia has upset Turkey's plans, and it has recently attempted to name and shame the

Americans too. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has recently said that Washington should choose between Turkey and the Kurds. Washington has answered, even if anonymously, that Kurds, including the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, which Turkey associated with terrorism, are Washington's allies in the fight against ISIS. Russia is working with the Kurds too. That they have been prevented from participating in the intra-Syrian talks is the result of Turkey's arrogant stance, which is not shared by anyone else.

Question: In 1856, Russia's new foreign minister, Prince Alexander Gorchakov, sent a famous circular to Russian embassies abroad, which he concluded with the following phrase: "It is said that Russia is angry. No, Russia is not angry, it is only concentrating." What is currently the informal credo of Russian diplomacy? Could it be, "Russia has quarrelled with and has taken offence at nearly everyone"?

Sergey Lavrov: I would say that we don't take offence. President Putin has said that love and friendship are good for personal relations, while states only have interests. Likewise, we leave offences over everyday matters to relations between people. In interstate relations, you cannot allow yourself to take offence, relax or become angry. There is a centuries-old saying that those who are angry are wrong.

Still, we feel that, by and large, the majority of countries support us. There is a feeling that Russia has well-nigh become the main problem in international relations, as media that advocate the Western view have become dominant now. The leadership of NATO and a number of European countries, in particular Britain, the Scandinavian countries, the neighbouring Baltic states, Poland, Romania and several other countries, are hysterical over the alleged Russian threat and our alleged plans to threaten Sweden and the Baltics with nuclear weapons. BBC shows films to this effect. Something strange happens to submarines in Sweden. They present this as breaking news, and their newspapers and TV networks report nothing but these strange events, but it turns out later that there were no submarines but some unidentified but definitely not Russian devices. This is an information war. We are aware of this and we accept it as such. But we don't intend to reciprocate hysterics with hysterics; we try to answer by providing hard facts.

Here is the latest example. An attempt has been made to present the humanitarian situation in Syria as a gauge of the ability to advance towards a political settlement and a preliminary condition for launching intra-Syrian talks. Russia has been accused of worsening the humanitarian situation and even refusing to deliver humanitarian cargo, which is allegedly why the UN had to stop the Syria talks. In response, we sent a multi-page document to the UN, and I hope we'll be able to make it available to the public, using facts to show due to whom and how the suffering of civilians is worsening. It has been reported that 40,000 civilians in Madaya have food shortages and lack medicine and other basic necessities because they are allegedly surrounded by government forces, but nothing has been said about the suffering of over 200,000 people in Deir ez-Zor, which has been blockaded by ISIS and other fighters. As if these civilians don't need humanitarian assistance.

We started airlifting humanitarian assistance to these towns with the assistance and involvement of the Syrian Air Force. And we have been immediately accused of dropping this cargo at random, and there are no guarantees that this aid will end in safe hands. You can invent any reason. We are confident that the main criterion is the ability to find common ground. I keep urging my partners, who complain about our actions, to provide concrete facts proving that we have violated any of the documents to which we are signatory, such as the Geneva Communique of June 30, 2012, the agreement to launch the Geneva 2 talks, or worse still, the Vienna Statements or UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which includes instructions on organising the political process. None of my colleagues can cite a single instance when we have deceived anyone regarding our commitment to assist in the implementation of the above documents.

When speaking with US Secretary of State John Kerry the other day, I provided an example that concerns Ukraine rather than Syria, as the ability to find common ground is becoming a key element in the case of Ukraine just as Syria. On April 17, 2014, Mr Kerry, the then High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton and the then Ukrainian Acting Foreign Minister Andrei Deshchitsa signed the Geneva Statement, one of whose key provisions reads as follows: “The announced constitutional process will (...) include the immediate establishment of a broad national dialogue, with outreach to all of Ukraine’s regions and political constituencies.” In such cases, our partners shrug their shoulders and say the situation has changed. But although the situation may change, this cannot change the simple fact that our Western and Ukrainian colleagues have not implemented the documents they signed. This also concerns the documents that Viktor Yanukovich coordinated with the opposition in February 2014 and which the French, German and Polish foreign ministers signed. But the next morning they couldn’t ensure their implementation.

Question: Yes, they seem to have forgotten this. Syria, Ukraine, the confrontation with the West and an acute conflict with Turkey... Can a country, even such as strong country as Russia, simultaneously deal with this number of foreign policy challenges and threats?

Sergey Lavrov: But we are not doing this alone. Attempts have been made to blame us for much of what’s going on in Syria and Ukraine, but at the same time we are asked to help resolve the Syrian problem and bring about a ceasefire. I cannot disclose details, but I can tell you that unlike those who keep urging an immediate ceasefire, including our American colleagues, which mostly US allies in the region oppose, saying that this issue can only be discussed after it becomes clear that Bashar al-Assad will resign, we have proposed an absolutely concrete plan to Washington, which it is currently analysing. The other day Secretary of State Kerry mentioned this in an interview. I hope that it won’t take Washington very long to analyse our very simple proposals.

As for Ukraine, they say it’s common knowledge that President Poroshenko cannot implement all the provisions now, but they need our assistance nevertheless. No one is staying away from us on the issues of Syria or Ukraine. On the contrary, this hopelessness and

rhetoric are complemented with pragmatic requests for our assistance. We are ready to do this, but we will certainly act based on the principles and concrete agreements that have been signed on Ukraine and Syria.

As for Turkey, we were surprised by the unconditional support for its role in the Syria settlement, which German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed during her visit to Turkey. At the same time, Russia was presented as the main culprit, as the bombing raids by its Aerospace Forces are allegedly increasing the flow of refugees. Not a word was said, at least not publicly, about the obvious fact that the terrorist threat in Syria receives sustenance from smuggling operations via the Turkish border, that fighters, weapons, money and everything else needed to continue terrorist operations move across the border into Syria, while oil and other commodities in the prohibited trade with terrorists are delivered to Turkey.

All of this is happening on the backdrop of Ankara openly blackmailing Europe over the migration crisis. I'd like to remind you that this problem developed several years ago and not today or yesterday, and certainly not after the Russian Aerospace Forces started its operation in Syria upon the request of the Syrian government. Rather, the migration crisis was provoked by the illegal NATO operation against Libya and subsequent actions, which lead to the collapse of other regional countries and the increased number of refugees.

Question: On the issue of blackmail. Has the Russian economy not become a hostage of Russia's proactive foreign policy?

Sergey Lavrov: I don't think so. At least, my modest knowledge in this area allows me to come to the conclusion that there are different cycles in the global economy to which we are open and are part of, even though our reforms are not complete, and so we are feeling the effects. Of course, I consider it important to take more effective steps to bring about structural changes in our economy – something that President Vladimir Putin has been talking about for a long time now, and this also applies to the Russian government. Possibly, now reality will compel us to carry out these structural economic reforms in full so as to make the trend of weakening our dependence on oil and gas revenues irreversible.

To reiterate, a proactive foreign policy is a difficult issue. Many say that foreign policy should, above all, ensure that people live well, are well fed and provided with healthcare. I completely agree with this but our people also have a sense of identity, as they say, a sense of involvement in the millennium-old history of the evolution of the state, our ethnic groups as a single nation, and a feeling of national pride. Remember the debate around what I regard as absolutely unacceptable assertions or suggestions that were made on the air of one media outlet questioning the necessity of the siege of Leningrad, questioning the necessity of such a long resistance and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives instead of simply surrendering and seeing what would happen next. This example may be over the top, too radical, but this is what's at issue. Either you say that you want a piece of bread and sausage and jam with tea and therefore "forget Crimea; we could not care less about what is happening to Russians there or about the fact that there was a coup." Having said this, to reiterate, I will never

suggest that we should completely forget about our economic interests and the need to create favourable conditions for our economic development and growth. However, a country such as Russia cannot be like a weather vane, turning with every shift in the political winds, based on what “the powers that be of this world” want, who believe that they decide the fate of all countries and all nations on the planet.

Question: Russian Orientalist Vitaly Naumkin told me recently he sees three scenarios in Syria: compromise talks in Geneva, the military victory of government forces or a big war with the direct participation of various foreign powers. Do you agree with this view and if so, which scenario do you believe is the most realistic?

Sergey Lavrov: I agree, because everything lies on the surface. If talks fail or even if they are not allowed to get off the ground, then perhaps the bet has been placed on solutions involving the use of force, as certain countries are saying in no uncertain terms. I understand that these countries are guided by nothing short of personal hatred of Bashar Assad. We and the United States were willing and in the course of Vienna meetings of the International Syria Support Group proposed including a very simple phrase in official documents and then in a UN Security Council resolution, specifically that the Syria crisis does not have a military solution. The United States, Russia and European countries supported this phrase. However, some US allies in the region categorically rejected the idea. So this is quite realistic. Now we are hearing about plans to deploy ground forces.

Saudi Arabia has stated that it does not rule out the use of the so-called Islamic Antiterrorist Coalition it has created to fight ISIS. Some other countries say they are ready to support this idea. During King of Bahrain Hamad Al Khalifa’s visit, it was reported that Bahrain had subscribed to it. However, during their presence in Russia (February 8, 2016) his excellency the king of Bahrain and the country’s foreign minister stated that this was not so and that there were no such plans.

We are greatly disturbed by reports that are constantly aired in public and via closed channels, to the effect that Turkey is planning or maybe has already started developing parts of Syrian territory under the pretext of creating tent camps there to amass Syrian refugees and not allowing them to cross the Turkish border where the camps are allegedly overflowing with refugees. Turkey continues to talk about creating a security zone on Syrian territory, free of ISIS. Everyone understands that this refers to a sector of the border between two Kurdish enclaves the integration of which Turkey considers absolutely unacceptable if only because this would make it impossible for Turkey to provide supplies to the militants in Syria and receive contraband from them.

There is information that ISIS leadership maintains secret contact with the Turkish authorities. They are discussing various options for action under the present circumstances where, under our airstrikes, the traditional smuggling routes have been seriously limited. According to our information, the Turks have already discussed with NATO their plans to create ISIS-free zones Syria. This will, of course, be a violation of all the principles of international law and

will seriously escalate the situation. So, of the three scenarios outlined by my good friend Mr Naumkin, Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies, of course, we opt for the first one – i.e., achieving compromise through talks.

Question: How would Russia react if Turkey fulfils its threat of a full-scale invasion of Syria?

Sergey Lavrov: I don't see this happening because the minor provocations I mentioned (construction of tent camps or some engineering work on Syrian territory about 100-200 metres from the border and several kilometres along the front) do not add up to a full-scale invasion. I don't think the US-led coalition that includes Turkey would allow such reckless plans to materialise.

Question: If this worst-case scenario still comes about, wouldn't a Turkish invasion create the real risk of direct clashes between our aircraft and Turkish troops?

Sergey Lavrov: Regrettably, a direct clash has already taken place, on November 24 last year. No apology or even a hint of remorse has been expressed. Moreover, we are being told to apologise for violating Turkish air space even though Turkey's attitude towards the sovereignty of Greece and Cyprus over their air space is common knowledge. We displayed the utmost restraint but have taken precautions: our bombers no longer fly without the fighter cover. Furthermore, we deployed S-400s and other air defence systems that guarantee 100 percent security for the air space where our pilots operate.

Question: Russian President Vladimir Putin refuses to talk with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan for these serious reasons. Does this mean a Moscow-Ankara political dialogue is now frozen? Do you conduct such dialogue at your level?

Sergey Lavrov: I met with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu once, and talked with him over the telephone once, right after this episode. After this contact, I had a feeling that many people in Turkey understand that this act as well as the order to make it happen are unacceptable. To all intents and purposes, the order had been given in advance because it is impossible to down an aircraft in just 17 seconds after noticing it (if we believe the Turks that it was indeed in their air space). It is necessary to prepare to track it first, as the military says.

I admit we'd noticed Turkey's increasingly impertinent actions long before this episode had taken place and before the start of operations by our Aerospace Forces. The Turks began to accuse us of all deadly sins only because we were adamantly against the UN Security Council resolutions demanding the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad and insisted on the implementation of the available agreements on political talks and diplomatic settlement.

You will recall that Erdogan said early last summer that "we'll replace the Russians as trade partners." They were also dragging out the decision on the Turkish Stream pipeline and issuing permits for it, hinting they would find other energy sources. Moreover, when Turkish President Erdogan came to attend the opening of the Cathedral Mosque last September he

took the liberty to make statements that guests should never make in polite company. There were threats to cancel the Turkish-Russian High Level Cooperation Council summit; the agreement on the ministerial meeting was also delayed several times long before all this happened. We noticed this incongruity but we still hoped that common sense would prevail and that the Turks would realise we were neighbours and hadn't harmed them in any way. Quite the contrary, as President Putin put it, we "shut our eyes" to many things.

Question: Maybe it wasn't worth "shutting our eyes"?

Sergey Lavrov: Maybe, but no good deed goes unpunished, as they say. Maybe, this makes it clear to some extent that the Turkish leaders have completely lost their sense of reality.

Question: Ukraine is ostentatiously refusing to fulfil the Minsk Agreements, but for some reason Russia is still under Western sanctions. How long will this go on in your opinion?

Sergey Lavrov: This is the result of Europe losing its foreign policy independence, as with the Syrian crisis, at least today. This fact is graphically revealed in the Ukrainian crisis. The Americans made no secret that they compelled the Europeans to launch anti-Russia sanctions and invented the formula – once the Minsk Agreements are carried out, the anti-Russia sanctions may be lifted. Maybe some less than bright Europeans took this opportunity just because they were looking for a way to say the sanctions wouldn't last forever. And it was offered to them. Now they understand that this was an obvious trap because Ukraine is not going to fulfil the Minsk Agreements unless it is forced into doing so – something that only the Americans can do.

Ukraine's political and economic positions are desperately bad. It's a complete mess. As for the Minsk Agreements, the less Ukraine tries to carry them out, the longer the anti-Russia sanctions will last, and this is said in the open. After all, the Germans and French are taking a direct part in the Normandy format talks where the participants meticulously analyse what should be done by each side and what has been or has not been done to implement the Minsk accords. They have already come to realise that playing the fool won't last for a very long time. The Americans, at least in words, have the desire to move ahead, something they've told us. I regularly discuss this with US State Secretary John Kerry. Presidential Aide Vladislav Surkov had a special meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland in Kaliningrad, where they made reasonable suggestions on the Minsk Agreements and ways of carrying them out. Let me repeat that we are ready to be flexible and our partners know this but Ukraine is making ultimatums. It wants all those who have any influence on the situation in Donbass to leave it. It insists that Donbass must lay down arms, and only after this will Ukraine decide whether to decentralize power and make amendments to the Constitution. But all this is turning the Minsk accords upside down. Europe is coming to realise this.

Question: Are the Americans motivated to force Ukraine to perform under the Minsk Agreements or is the status quo beneficial for them?

Sergey Lavrov: I'm not a proponent of conspiracy theories, but there's some evidence corroborating the theory that some people in Washington wouldn't mind, as they put it during their in-crowd informal conversations, forcing Russia to fight on two fronts. They want to keep up the tensions in Ukraine, namely, Donbass, to perpetuate the crisis with its occasional flare-ups, which would be a greater distraction for us than periods of ceasefire. They also want to make things hard for us in Syria. I do not rule out the possibility that the neocons and the hawks in Washington entertain such thoughts. However, our conversations with the people in charge of Ukrainian politics in the US administration are indicative of the fact that they want to achieve actual results this year. Perhaps, their main motivation is to be able to show something to the public as Barack Obama's term in office is nearing completion.

Question: The US sanctions on Iran were imposed in 1979, and some are still in effect. Do you think the sanctions war between Russia and the West can last for decades as well?

Sergey Lavrov: As far as I know the Americans, it can. On the one hand, the United States is a great country, but, on the other hand, its executive and legislative authorities can be fairly petty. I have often cited the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which concerned sanctions on the Soviet Union for not allowing Jews to emigrate to Israel. After everyone who wanted to had left the Soviet Union and many even returned of their own free will after emigrating, when the doors were flung opened, the Jackson-Vanik Amendment remained in force for more than 20 years and was lifted only because the Americans started fretting the potential trade losses in connection with our accession to the WTO. Keeping the sanctions on us in effect meant that they won't have access to lower customs tariffs in their trade with us within the WTO. However, after the Jewish emigration issue was settled in full and everyone recognised this fact, the United States has been renewing the Jackson-Vanik Amendment upon the request of US senators. For example, they used to say, "the Russians have stopped buying chicken quarters from us (previously, they were sent to us as humanitarian aid, and then our customers were hooked, and we began to buy them from the United States)." It's because of such things. Our prominent dissident and human rights activist Natan Shcharansky who later became a member of the Israeli government, used to say in his public statements at the time when the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was still in effect that he wasn't doing time in a Soviet prison for the sake of US poultry. By the way, as soon as they repealed the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, the United States immediately passed the Magnitsky Act, thus breathing a sigh of relief, knowing that the Russians will still be on the hook. This goes to show that all of this is not happening because of Ukraine or Syria. It's a stronger Russia with its own outlook on things that just doesn't sit well with many in Washington. First, the Magnitsky Act, then the obsession with Edward Snowden, and then, out of the blue and without reason, attempts to disrupt the Olympic Games in Sochi, at least, in the media, with all kinds of fabrications and calls to almost boycott it, etc.

We are not paranoid, and we are well aware of the fact that big leading countries, such as the United States, don't want competitors. Therefore, this mentality will always affect its relations with us, China, India and other rapidly growing economies and financial centres. We are well aware of that fact. But we want our interests to be secured in this rivalry on the international

arena, and we want this to be done honestly and based on the rules. When the rules are constantly rewritten and the goalposts relocated all the time – it’s dishonest and dishonorable. Unfortunately, Washington has done so on many occasions, which is why I’m saying this. However, I’d like to stress that no one is interested in spoiling relations with the United States. We will not do so to hurt ourselves, and they are well aware of that. But we will cooperate inasmuch as they are willing to, based on respect for each other's interests and mutual benefit, rather than succumbing to dictates along the lines of, “We will impose sanctions on you and see how you cope with them.”

Question: How long can the active phase of the sanctions war last?

Sergey Lavrov: I think that the moment of truth is near. At least, this year will show to what extent the European Union is aware of the fact that the current situation is becoming unseemly for the EU's international image. When the term of sanctions expires next summer, we’ll see whether Europe honours its statements about the need to comply with the Minsk Agreements not only by Russia but also by Ukraine, or it will follow the lead of the aggressive minority in the EU formed by five or six Russophobic countries, which call the shots using the principle of consensus and so-called solidarity.

Question: The Turkish state of northern Cyprus has de facto been in existence since 1974, but is recognised only by Turkey. Do you think that Crimea could share its fate in terms of international recognition?

Sergey Lavrov: No, I think everyone understands the difference. In Crimea, the people expressed their will. There was a real threat of the power being grabbed by the coup perpetrators, who declared war on everything that is Russian. I have cited Dmitry Yarosh on several occasions, who said that “the Russians in Crimea will never speak Ukrainian, never celebrate Stepan Bandera or Roman Shukhevych, so they have no place in Crimea.” This is a direct quote. They are now trying to portray him as a marginal politician. That’s not true. During the Maidan protests, he was one of the decision-makers and played a key role in the coup. Then, there were the “friendship trains,” an attempt to capture Crimea’s Supreme Council, which was legitimately elected under the laws of Ukraine and which, as a legitimate body, ruled on holding the referendum.

So, I wouldn’t draw any parallels here, all the more so since there’s a UN Security Council resolution on Cyprus to the effect that this crisis should be resolved based on agreements between the two communities. There was an armed conflict in Cyprus, not in Crimea. A secure environment for voting in Crimea was provided. I do not have any concerns about Crimea’s future. More Europeans, including members of parliaments and businessmen, are visiting Crimea.

Some go there to make some quick money, as there’s demand for foreign investment. However, more members of parliaments and reporters go there to see what’s happening in Crimea with their own eyes. Recently, Swiss diplomat and Special Representative of the

Secretary General of the Council of Europe Gerard Stoudmann visited Crimea and was shown everything that he and his team wanted to see. I very much hope that the report, which he will draft, will be another contribution to forming an unbiased picture of the situation in Crimea.

All those who have been there say what they saw is impossible to fake.

Question: When will the international community recognise Crimea's reunification with Russia?

Sergey Lavrov: It is happening but gradually. For example, Coca-Cola has recognised it. You can pretend that nothing is happening when many things have happened already. There were many emotional deliberations about the legal aspects of Crimea's integration into Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russian politicians, including members of parliament, said that it was all wrong, that it contradicted the laws that were in effect at the time and under which Ukraine seceded from the Soviet Union. Under those laws, Crimea, and especially Sevastopol, could not be incorporated into Ukraine. At that time, our Western partners told us that it was alright, and so tensions were eased, because we were friends living in a new world. Of course, we could have taken more time preparing the (2014) referendum and invited more observers. They ask us why we held the referendum in a matter of one week. We reply that there was a direct military threat, that armed men were on the trains to Crimea, threatening to remove all Russians from the peninsula. You can try to use some legal or technical aspects (to prove the illegality) of what happened, but it's impossible to disregard the results of the referendum. Even the Americans whisper to us: "Hold it again, but this time with all the necessary parameters and precautions. The result will be the same, but everyone will sigh with relief." But this is hypocrisy! While citing various legal or pseudo-legal issues, these people openly ignore the fact that the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 breached the law but suggest that we forget about it. Historical justice is the best driver of history.

Question: Some of Russia's closest foreign policy partners are NATO members. Why then did Russia react so nervously to Montenegro's decision to join NATO?

Sergey Lavrov: It was not a reaction to Montenegro's decision, and I wouldn't describe it as nervous. We believed, just as those who engineered the move, that it was an artificial decision and that it would not strengthen NATO's security. The argument that it is the will of the Montenegrin people is crushed by the unwillingness to hold a referendum on this issue. They are categorically against holding such a referendum, because they know that Montenegrins remember that it was NATO that bombed them several decades ago, and so they are unlikely to be enthusiastic about the desire of their leaders to hide the truth by joining NATO. The fact that NATO is stubbornly expanding eastward is evidence of their complete disregard for the commitments they made during the Soviet Union's dissolution, when they promised not to do this and not to deploy military infrastructure in the territories of the bloc's new members (the latter promise was made later, when expansion became a reality contrary to their previous commitments), of course, after a declaration was adopted under which no European country would attempt to guarantee its security at the expense of another. It was all a lie, which the

Western leaders put down on paper and signed, but which they didn't and don't want to implement under any conditions. When we proposed formalising the idea of the indivisibility of security, they refused categorically. Only NATO members have legal security guarantees. We see them creating a situation in which they can manipulate small countries by telling them: "If you join the bloc, your security will be guaranteed; if not, we won't protect you." By fanning the alleged "Russian threat" and nurturing ungrounded fears, they are trying to expand their geopolitical space ever closer to our border. We see this very well. And they know that we do, but pretend to be naïve simpletons, including on the missile defence issue, which is, just as NATO's expansion, undermining global stability and violating global parity.

The point at issue is not Montenegro and not just NATO's attitude to developing relations with Russia, but its attitude to global stability. NATO is responsible for its part of the world and for collective defence, as the Washington Treaty says. In this case, just sit still within your borders and nobody will offend you. But they are not satisfied with this, because this makes the very existence of this military-political bloc senseless. After that Warsaw Treaty fell apart, many said that NATO's existence lost its meaning. They spent much time searching for a new meaning. First it was Afghanistan. Now they see that their operation has failed, and the troops remaining there are maintaining the minimum requirement of security, but the situation is rapidly deteriorating. When the Afghan issue left the front pages, they announced their victory although the level of terrorism has increased and drug trafficking has increased many times over in Afghanistan. But anything goes in a political publicity campaign. In the context of Crimea and Syria, they are using the so-called "Russian threat." It is being used very actively to justify NATO's continued existence.

Question: Some time ago, you made a statement regarding the case of Liza, a girl who we believe was subjected to sexual violence in Berlin. Are you satisfied with the explanations that the German side promised to give? Have the Germans convinced you that this story is the invention of unscrupulous Russian journalists?

Sergey Lavrov: The answer is "no" to all questions. They didn't convince us of anything and did not give us the promised information. Incidentally, we have never said that Liza was raped and something should be done. We expressed concern over reports that the girl, who is a Russian citizen, which Germany prefers to keep silent about (one of her parents is a Russian citizen and the other a German citizen), disappeared from her family for 30 hours, not on her own will, and asked for an explanation about what happened to her. The no-holds-barred campaign that unfolded in the "free" German media is outrageous. I fully support the statement of your colleagues, members of the Presidential Human Right Council and Russian journalists, to the effect that regardless of political interstate relations, to start criminal proceedings against a journalist for publishing a material with an appeal to the German authorities to explain what happened to a Russian citizen is similar to the actions of Turkish President Recep Erdogan, who gets away with everything, including the trial and sentencing to many years in prison of two journalists for exposing Turkey's arms smuggling to rebels in Syria under the guise of humanitarian relief. This, though, has just occurred to me – there is

an alarming coincidence between Ankara's and Berlin's attitude towards journalists who are trying to uncover the truth.

Question: You compose poetry. Do you have poetry that would graphically describe the current international situation?

Sergey Lavrov: After being appointed minister, I haven't written anything serious except for some humorous verses for the birthday parties of my friends. The situation is difficult and will never be easy in the modern world because we are at a stage of transition – the paradigm of international relations is changing. New powerful centres of growth have appeared but the old ones do not want to accept this.

The advocates of new industrialisation are fighting the proponents of de-industrialisation. The digital economy, the services sector and the role of raw materials – many things are unclear today. Everyone is elbowing everyone else in this competitive world to occupy the best place for future agreements. Everything is clear. The main point is not to engage in unfair play and to be guided by the rules that we have until the new ones are written.

Question: Can diplomacy avoid unfair play?

Sergey Lavrov: It depends on what you consider unfair play. Rules are violated in soccer, hockey or any sports. Of course, diplomacy is not the same as sports but it implies competition. Probably, there are some actions that your partner will not consider elegant. We are trying to act to avoid such grievances. We are reproached for thinking too much about ourselves and wishing for too much in this world, which does not match our abilities and opportunities. But serious people never reprimand us for unfair play. Marginal people, those who are not serious, are even accusing us of lies, including me, personally.

Last time, this happened when one media outlet (I don't want to advertise it – it is little known) claimed that the Foreign Ministry and Lavrov personally are lying that Russia has fulfilled the terms of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 that guaranteed Ukraine's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Indeed, we said that the only specific commitment in this memorandum was that Russia, the United States and United Kingdom will not use nuclear weapons against Ukraine. Media claimed that we lied because we did not mention the other obligation that the memorandum ostensibly contained. Meanwhile, it simply stated that all participants will continue to be guided by OSCE principles, including as regards territorial integrity, sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. Russia was accused of violating these principles, while its Foreign Ministry was blamed for not admitting this and even for lying about Russia's implementation of the entire memorandum. The OSCE principles have never allowed any country to stage coups d'état or encroach on ethnic and linguistic minorities. That said, OSCE principles have been grossly violated by those who staged a coup in Ukraine.

Let me repeat that diplomats are using various methods but should always be honest to themselves. I'm convinced that our partners, whom we also respect, have a correct opinion about our work.

Source: www.mid.ru