

## Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to questions at a meeting with students and faculty at MGIMO University

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*Moscow, September 1, 2016*

Mr Torkunov,

Mr Bazhanov

Friends and colleagues,

It is a real pleasure to be here at this traditional gathering to mark the start of the new academic year. I want to congratulate everyone present, especially the first-year students. You are taking the first steps in your independent life, and there are many opportunities opening up before you that you can seize if you consistently follow your hearts and dreams, pursue your goals and ambitions and become true professionals and worthy citizens of Russia and other countries represented by the student body of MGIMO.

I firmly believe that you are fortunate because there can be no overestimating the role played by the university you have chosen. An MGIMO diploma has always been a mark of quality and guarantee of solid fundamental knowledge and excellent practical skills. MGIMO is a unique platform for education, research and expert analysis, providing comprehensive training in international relations, the global economy, international law and political science. The university's research makes a real contribution to the Foreign Ministry's work and is used in the foreign policy decision-making process. It is especially welcome to see that our alma mater is not resting on its laurels but continues its dynamic development. Mr Torkunov, Mr Bazhanov and I recently opened the MGIMO branch in Odintsovo, which will focus primarily on management and economic training. MGIMO continues to expand the range of fields and knowledge it offers. The university traditionally ranks high in international rankings and we are rightly proud of this.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has great need today for the highly qualified specialists in international relations that MGIMO produces. As President of Russia Vladimir Putin noted at the recent conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives abroad, the diversity and complexity of the international issues, challenges and threats facing Russia require constant improvement of our diplomatic instruments in the political, economic, humanitarian and information areas.

These significant demands arise from the fact that the world is going through a profound and protracted (and we are going to have to get used to this) reformatting of the system of international relations from a unipolar and a bipolar system to a polycentric one, which

reflects the modern world's cultural and civilizational diversity, respects peoples' right to decide their own future, and will ultimately reinforce global and regional security by setting it on an enduring foundation of international law. It is clear that only together and through collective action can we find solutions to the numerous challenges we face today, and which are truly global in scale. In this respect, diplomacy will have an ever greater role to play. Technology has developed at a very rapid pace and brought about another revolution in our lives over these last years, and yet we see that even the most advanced information and communications technology cannot replace a face-to-face talk. You will see this for yourselves. I hope very much that this generation, so enamoured of social networks and games, will not lose its capacity for direct human interaction.

Unfortunately, the natural process of establishing a polycentric international system based on compromises, mutual concessions and respect, as well as empathy and consideration of each other's interests, has run into numerous major obstacles, which stem, primarily, from the desire of our Western partners (I'm referring to the West in a broad historical sense) to maintain their global dominance. They operate on the premise that they "have been calling the shots" in this world for several centuries now (which is, in fact, true), and want to continue to dictate solutions to all problems from their own perspective. In fact, they claim to own "the monopoly on the truth" and use, to this end, a wide range of mostly illegitimate coercion methods and unethical means of pressure on their partners ranging from rewriting history and conducting powerful and fairly aggressive information campaigns to imposing unilateral sanctions, sponsoring coups, fomenting regional conflicts, and even engaging in direct military interventions. The implications of these destructive activities can be seen in many parts of the world, particularly, the Middle East and North Africa, and much closer to our borders as well.

Such a self-serving line of conduct is unacceptable for many, not just us. More and more countries (although, perhaps, not all of them can say it loudly and openly) are dissatisfied with such rude politics and coercion methods. The trend towards rejecting the one-sided policy of force in international affairs builds on objective processes, above all, as I mentioned earlier, on the formation of a polycentric system of international relations. It's not some kind of a far-fetched theory. In fact, it's an objective process. New centres of economic growth and financial strength have emerged, and greater political clout usually comes in the wake of stronger economy and finance. That way, global power and influence are being redistributed. These processes can primarily be observed in the Asia-Pacific region, which has become, and will continue to be for a long time, the driver of global economic growth. It is happening as the European Union, our largest trading partner, which remains such even despite the crisis and sanctions, is gradually losing ground in global economic and political affairs in relative terms.

We are not going to go to any extremes. We are a Eurasian power by virtue of history, nature, and above all, our great ancestors. Therefore, given our history, we must focus on all areas as we strive to provide the best possible external environment for developing our country and improving our people's living standards. This includes ensuring the security of our borders,

the best possible conditions for our citizens travelling abroad for them to feel safe and secure, as well as for our economic operators doing business with their foreign partners in the East, the South and the West. We are doing our best to make this environment comfortable, so that there's no discrimination with regard to our companies or business owners.

We refer to our foreign policy as a “multi-vector” foreign policy as we strive to cover all the bases while maintaining our independence, because Russia as a country, no matter what name it had throughout history, has always pursued a path of its own, which is what it is all about. We promote a policy which does not split the international community but rather consolidates it; we promote a peace-loving policy, which implies resolving problems through political and diplomatic methods and based on international law. We are open to cooperation with everyone, without exception, who is willing to cooperate with us on the basis of equality, account for each other's interests and mutual advantage. Make no mistake, the approaches which we profess and which differ from the approaches imposed by way of unilateral actions are shared by the vast majority of states, which represent at least 80 per cent of the world population. They want to build state-to-state relations based on mutual respect. Thus, we are natural partners with the majority of states.

I reiterate that the EU remains our largest partner. But we'd be remiss not to take advantage of the vast opportunities opening up as a result of a rapid growth of economy, logistics and transport in the Asia-Pacific region, especially so, since promoting Eurasian economic integration is among our policy priorities. This is much more than just achieving all the goals set by the leaders of the Eurasian Economic Community. It is also a continuation of integration processes in the open mode.

As you know, President of Russia Vladimir Putin has put forward an initiative for a project, which is tentatively called the Great Eurasian Partnership. The project envisages not just a larger number of EAEU partners willing to establish free trade zones with the EAEU, but also the development of stable systemic ties with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The interest in such an open partnership involving the above-mentioned organisations was displayed during the last SCO summit (Ufa, July 2015) and the Russia-ASEAN summit that took place in Sochi in May.

Without doubt, the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership plays a crucial role in all those processes. Much attention is being given to the implementation of agreements, reached by our presidents, on bolstering Russian-Chinese strategic relations. In May, President Vladimir Putin paid an official visit to China. And the day after tomorrow, he will leave for the G20 summit in Hangzhou where yet another round of talks between our head of state and President of the Chinese People's Republic Xi Jinping will be held.

Tomorrow, we are opening the 2nd Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok. It will be a highly important event for promoting the tasks facing us in the Asian-Pacific region, which means that our country should move toward integration processes in that part of the world in order to use these opportunities as fully as possible in the development of Eastern Siberia and

the Russian Far East. Certainly, as we seek to build new fair relations in the global economy and global politics, we will also use other formats such as the G20 (its summit will begin in Hangzhou on September 3) and BRICS (this year will see two BRICS summits: first, an informal meeting on the sidelines of the G20, followed by a summit in India in a month and a half).

All we have been doing is aimed at creating the most secure conditions possible for our country's development, international projects and human contacts. Here, our common enemy is international terrorism. We are convinced that it can be fought only through international law, without double standards and with respect for the central role of the United Nations. We were guided by these principles when in response to the Syrian government's request, we sent our aerospace forces to the Syrian Arab Republic to combat ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and the extremist groups supporting them. Simultaneously, we are resolving the important task of alleviating the humanitarian problems of the Syrian population, especially in areas blocked by militants, and we are working to get a full-fledged political dialogue underway as soon as possible.

The UN has issued relevant instructions, but so far, it has been moving slowly in that direction. The task set by the UN Security Council to launch intra-Syrian talks that must involve all political, ethnic and religious groups without exception has never been more urgent. I discussed this with US Secretary of State John Kerry during our regular meeting in Geneva a few days ago. I have already said that we do not want to turn our backs on anyone and are ready to resume normal full-fledged relations with the European Union and the United States, but only on an equal basis without any attempts to turn these relations into a one-way street.

The situation in Ukraine is very complicated. The crisis in that country has truly become a catalyst of processes that have laid bare the imperfections of the security structure in Europe and the Euro-Atlantic region as a whole and the systemic flaws of this structure, which could not be reformed for many years. The proposals that we put forward came up against the egoism of political elites in a number of states, which clearly sought to obtain geostrategic advantages at the expense of other countries' interests, grossly violating the solemn declarations that were made in the 1990s at the OSCE and between Russia and NATO at the highest level, namely that security is indivisible and no one [country] will strengthen its security at the expense of the security of others. These political obligations were grossly violated and continue to be violated. Our proposals to upgrade the status of these obligations from ordinary political declarations to legally binding obligations were rejected out of hand. I hope that our partners remember this. If they forgot, we will, of course, remind them about it. It will no longer be business as usual either with the US or with the EU, let alone with NATO.

Until recently [they] have been constantly trying to cast us as problem students. But neither the US nor the EU, nor especially NATO, is the MGIMO University. We all studied at the MGIMO and we will continue to study there and remain committed to the knowledge and principles of dealing with factors and people that are taught at our great University.

Regardless of the ongoing processes in and around Ukraine, our Western partners have to do a great deal to restore Russia's trust and the predictability of European affairs. Of course, we can see that the West is beginning to understand the need to normalise the situation. It is good that we are united by our determination to fight international terrorism as represented by ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, at least in word, and we are united by our resolve to ensure the implementation of the Minsk agreements on the Ukraine crisis. Naturally, we support our Western partners' positions in this regard but we keep saying that the Minsk agreements should be implemented as it was agreed – through Kiev's direct dialogue with Donetsk and Lugansk. This concerns above all the passage of a law on the special status for Donbass, the implementation of constitutional reforms, the granting of amnesty and the holding of local elections. All of this is envisioned in the Minsk agreements and should be implemented.

Our diplomacy will continue to defend the interests of Russia, of our citizens proactively, resolutely and, I hope, reliably. In the present volatile situation it is difficult to overestimate the role of human contacts and cultural exchanges in strengthening trust and mutual understanding between nations. In this respect, too, MGIMO is doing all it can to remain in the front ranks. We appreciate the university's contribution to the effort along this line in numerous formats. Today, in Vladivostok, where we are flying together with university Rector Anatoly Torkunov, on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum, the Russia-ASEAN University Forum will be launched. MGIMO has played a direct and very active role in organising it.

That's it for my remarks but before asking you to proceed with questions, I'd like once again to wish the university administration, faculty, undergraduate and postgraduate students good health, new successes in their endeavours and all the very best in their lives. I'd especially like to wish luck to first-year students. The young people who are getting a start in their professional life hold the key to our country's future. A great deal in our country and the international community as a whole will depend on your professionalism, your expertise, the knowledge and skills that you will acquire here at the MGIMO university when you leave these walls.

Thank you.

**Question:** The United States will soon have presidential elections. How will they affect our relations with that country?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I've already said that we stand for developing normal relations with all countries, be it the United States or some other, average or small country. We always proceed from the premise that the destiny of each country should be determined by its people. We are ready to work with any American leader who gains the trust of the people in free and democratic elections. This is a brief answer to your question. However, you touched on the issue that is linked with the US election campaign. Of course, we feel bad for our American

partners. After all, this is a mighty power in which democratic principles, the principles of promoting political concepts traditionally played a large role.

Sometimes opponents, rivals resort to fairly unconventional agitprop methods in their political fight, especially on the eve of different elections. However, I think it is over the top when Russia, which the current president called a regional power a couple of years ago, has turned during the US election campaign into all but the main arbiter of fate and a country that is exerting decisive influence on processes in the United States. It is clear to everyone that these are exaggerated slogans designed to hit the voters on the head and use this gross anti-Russian propaganda just to say that one of the nominees is a Russian spy, so choose the other one. I am almost quoting what is said during this agitprop campaign. We feel bad for the United States, Americans, and the American political class. All this is undignified.

We are largely watching this as philosophers, albeit making certain conclusions. Whoever wins, this person will be the US president and this title speaks for itself. We will be ready to work with this person, of course, to the extent to which the new US leader will be ready to work with the Russian Federation and not just work but work on the basis of mutually agreed-upon principles: equality, consideration for each other's interests and mutual respect. I am convinced that in this case we will manage to achieve much despite all the vicissitudes of the past few years, and despite the anti-Russian campaign in the press, the economy and finances. We worked together and achieved results when Russia and the West had similar interests and when we felt that Russia and the United States could help resolve very serious global problems on an equitable basis. This applies to the agreement on Iran's nuclear programme, chemical demilitarisation, the destruction of Syrian chemical arms and a number of other issues, including the formation of a multilateral mechanism for the political settlement of the Syrian crisis, which is headed by Russia and the United States as two co-chairs.

Therefore, the experience of the past two or three years shows that if we put aside artificial problems and concentrate on real common threats, such as nuclear weapons proliferation, international terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime, we can achieve fairly decent results. I hope that the US political class's traditional pragmatism will prevail over agitprop slogans and obvious ideology-driven rhetoric.

**Question:** There are heated debates going on about Mongolia's project to build a hydropower station on the Selenga River, which may lead to the degradation of Lake Baikal since this river is its main tributary. What can Russia do to minimise potential environmental losses from this project?

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is a very serious issue. We've been dealing with it since our Mongolian neighbours began to develop this project. We raised this issue at the level of our presidents, and I discussed it with Mongolia's president, prime minister and my counterpart during my visit to that country last spring. We have an agreement, and I hope it will soon become reality, to establish a working group from adjacent regions of Russia and Mongolia, including the Irkutsk Region and Buryatia. This working group will be instructed to make very specific

proposals that will be submitted for consideration to the leaders of both countries. We will proceed from the need to protect the unique environmental system of Lake Baikal and the surrounding areas.

**Question:** People have been asking about a new Cold War for several years now. Has your view changed at all about Russia not being on the threshold of a new Cold War?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It's very difficult to compare what are really two very different situations. I see no reason why we should expect a repeat of the Cold War. Unlike during those years, we have no ideological differences now, and we have common principles that find shared expression within the framework of the OSCE and the UN. These common principles presume democratic development of societies, though democracy has many forms and concrete manifestations, reflecting different societies' historic traditions, development stage, culture and much more. By definition, there can therefore be no one democratic system. If this were the case, it would be a form of authoritarian regime or unitary global organisation applied in all countries.

We share democratic principles, the most important of which is free and fair elections, and we make every effort to resolve the issues that arise in our own country and in our electoral system to the satisfaction of all forces in society. Of course, we also have the market economy in common, and this too cannot take exactly the same form within each country's system. If you look at it, we have much in common. Most important is that we do not have ideological differences.

During the Cold War, any conflict was viewed exclusively through the prism of "it's either us or them" and the bipolar system built around the USA and the Soviet Union, and NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This logic of mutual deterrence subsumed everything else, and it was simply not acceptable to let anyone get away with grabbing a bit extra. If conflicts broke out in Africa, with authoritarian dictatorial regimes coming under pressure from revolutionaries and anticolonial forces, people tried not to let these conflicts reach the point when the big powers or their military blocs would have to intervene, but such conflicts were nonetheless viewed from an "us or them" perspective, a zero-sum game. If "our" clients got the upper hand, "theirs" lost, and vice versa.

Today, we face threats of a truly global nature that cannot be turned into a zero-sum game. Either we all lose, or we all win. We can all win only if we work together and combine our efforts. I already mentioned terrorism, weapons proliferation in an age of nuclear annihilation, drug trafficking, organised crime of all kinds, and cybercrime.

Incidentally, among the various accusations that have come our way during the US presidential campaign, you will have heard the allegations that we are supposedly engaged in cybercrime and our hackers are breaking into the sites of the Democratic Party, the FBI and National Security Agency. Experts with real knowledge of how the hacker community is organised say that this is nonsense. But the accusations keep coming even so. Furthermore,

over many years now, a couple dozen of our citizens have been arrested at the USA's request in third countries, and in half of these cases have been illegally extradited to the United States and prosecuted there. Nearly all of them have been accused of cybercrime. A year ago now, our General Prosecutor's Office made an official request to the United States to hold consultations on cooperation in ensuring cybersecurity, as this is an issue of great concern to us too. We do not want our citizens, if the accusations against them should prove true, to be taking part in unlawful activity. Last November, we proposed holding serious consultations at the expert level, but we got no response. This January, I reminded US Secretary of State John Kerry about this matter and said that we would at least like to receive a response. He said that the idea is a good one and that he would work on it. I reminded him again in May, and yet again when we met a week ago in Geneva to discuss Syria. He was surprised that we still had not received a response. The US Justice Department, to which the request was sent after our reminder, refused to send a written response. We were given a verbal response that they do not see any sense in cooperation in this area. US Secretary of State John Kerry said that this was not really the right approach and that he would try to change this very arrogant and, most important, incomprehensible position taken by the Justice Department. This is an anomaly that just goes to show that there is an exception to every rule.

Generally, of course, there is a growing realisation in the West, including in the United States, that without us it is very difficult to resolve certain problems, be it Syria, Iraq, Libya or many other crises. Apart from geographical issues – the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and eliminating risks related to chemical and biological weapons – we are now working to put in place a mechanism to ensure the verification of the implementation of the convention on the prohibition of biological and toxic weapons by all parties concerned. Everyone seems to be ready but the Americans are effectively blocking the process. We know that the Americans have an array of biological research programmes, including with our neighbours. Their refusal to create a mechanism to oversee the implementation of The Biological Weapons Convention suggests that these research projects are far from peaceful. We are also in dialogue with them but so far they are dodging a frank conversation. Backed by China and other countries, we have proposed drafting a convention to counter acts of chemical and biological terrorism.

To reiterate, these initiatives enjoy broad support, which would not have been possible during the Cold War years. The fact that so far the Americans are opposed to moving forward with practical steps along these lines only goes to show that they are slower than others to abandon bad habits, one of which is of course the belief in their own exceptionalism. However, time cures all. Unfortunately, this will not happen anytime soon. Our American colleagues have developed a genetic code whereby the most important thing is that they decide everything themselves. But life is more complicated than a genetic code. So I hope that in the historically foreseeable future they will eventually come to understand the need to be in sync with the objective trends of global development.

**Question:** Mr Lavrov, apart from an excellent command of foreign languages, what set of qualities, competences and skills should a would-be diplomat have?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The list is endless. Diplomacy has long emerged from the medieval phase when it was primarily devoted to negotiations and intrigue around the issues of war and peace. Today, we refer to them as international security issues but all the same these are issues of war and peace. These issues are very important for diplomacy. It has been dealing with them and will continue to deal with them as long as there are such issues and attempts to use force in international affairs. Unfortunately, these attempts continue. We see that the high hopes everyone had 15-20 years ago that the importance of military force in the world would sharply decline were not justified. Regrettably, this is not the case yet. We believe that the importance of this factor as a method of resolving international problems should diminish but not everything depends on us. So sometimes it is necessary – as we are doing in Syria – to pool efforts to conduct relentless military operations to eliminate a common threat to humankind in the form of international terrorism. The trajectory certainly favours political and diplomatic methods of dealing with various problems.

Apart from war and peace and the related issues, present-day diplomacy deals with practically everything without exception, including climate and energy, which remain subjects of gruelling negotiations. At the Paris climate conference, a document was coordinated, resulting from years-long negotiations between experts and ministers, negotiations at the highest level. Of course, it is a compromise. It is very difficult to find a common denominator in a situation where countries refuse to limit their industrial development. Someone once overtook somebody else and has now moved into a post-industrial economy but you still have to heavily invest under industrial laws in an economy that pollutes the environment. This is a very complicated process. So, while we coordinated a climate agreement, we have failed to agree on how to oversee its implementation, the way it will be put into practice. This remains to be done. Before going ahead with ratification of the agreement we would like to understand how it will work.

Another example that I already mentioned is energy. Serious political games are being played around this subject. This is what is happening in Europe. This also involves gas transit via Ukraine, which has more than once demonstrated its complete unreliability, and our plans to diversify gas supply routes to Europe for EU members, build our own routes and expand western pipelines with eastern and southern pipelines. This also involves the EU's wish, while ignoring economic realities and its own financial interest, to politicise issues related to our gas supplies to Europe, and look for new suppliers to its own detriment. Meanwhile, the United States is trying to take advantage of the present cooling in our relations with the EU to foist on the Europeans its liquefied natural gas, which requires very expensive infrastructure, and once it is built, it will be very difficult to get rid of it.

I can cite many other examples, but a diplomat should be at home, at least in general terms, with practically any sphere of human activity, even healthcare and pharmaceuticals. This can suddenly pop up at talks and it is important to understand what it's about and where to look for concrete arguments. You have mentioned foreign languages. This is a must. We at the ministry have a long-established rule: at least two foreign languages are needed to get a job.

Of course, this involves culture as well. Cultural diplomacy plays a colossal, if not a leading role in a situation where there is a cooling in interstate ties. We have fallen on hard times in our relations with Western Europe, including the UK, which has frozen antiterror collaboration mechanisms, among other things. Nevertheless, our humanitarian contacts and cultural ties continue to develop. A number of cultural events and concerts are held in London every year, for example, Russian Shrovetide Festival and the Russian Art Week.

What is now taking place in Arkhangelsk, where Princess Anne is attending events dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the first Dervish Allied convoy, shows that a diplomat should have a very good knowledge of history. In difficult times, events from the apparently distant past, especially if they are related to allied actions, help maintain dialogue and revive historical memory in people. I'm sure that many of our Western colleagues have preserved the memory of the events when through joint efforts we defeated a terrible enemy. It is necessary to sustain these feelings by all means and prevent attempts that are now being made with regard to any European leader who says that he remembers and respects the joint heroic deed of his own people and the Soviet people. I will not name names but such honest politicians with a clean conscience are attacked by those who would like to rewrite the whole of history and smear everything that is related to the Soviet victory. This is becoming a true instrument of modern politics. History is a special sphere of knowledge for a diplomat. After all is said and done, it is important, if not to have encyclopaedic knowledge in all spheres of human activity, then to have some idea about where humankind is headed in economic and technological terms, trends in the world of art and culture, and under no circumstances, consign history to oblivion. Otherwise we will be people who do not know their roots.

**Question:** Mr Lavrov, how do you assess the concept of realpolitik, its future in a multipolar world and amid globalization, in a situation where its problems have been laid bare?

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is exactly what I've been talking about all the time. Briefly, in general terms, "realpolitik" is not our word. It has acquired a negative connotation. I already mentioned pragmatism as an inherent part of diplomacy and generally, a state's activity in the sense that what you do should be, first, understandable, and second, useful to your people in the broadest possible sense of this word. When "realpolitik" is interpreted as a manifestation of cynicism and the ability to turn a blind eye to certain outrageous practices in order to get what you want (this often happens), this method of achieving results is somewhat different than the one we use. We always seek to translate pragmatism into a language of compromise with our partners – importantly, doing this so as not to abandon our key interests, our foreign policy independence, not trying to meet halfway those who refuse to take a step in our direction. This is equality based on taking each other's interests into account and mutual respect. I already spoke about this.

Occasionally, under certain circumstances, diplomats or politicians have to say or do things that are almost cynical. We always try to do our best not to cross that line. A couple of times in my previous remarks I have already spoken about why we are so heartbroken about things that are happening in Syria, or why we did what we did just because someone out there

wanted to make Crimea residents live in a country where the masterminds of an armed anti-constitutional coup had taken power. All those who criticised and still criticise us in this regard are saying that we are spending fortunes and that the entire world community has turned its back on us. I beg to differ. First, no one has turned their back on us, and saying “the entire international community” is plainly incorrect. I have already mentioned that 80 percent of the population live in the countries that share our approaches and want justice to prevail in international affairs. Therefore, any talk of isolation is ridiculous. Second, those who retaliated by imposing sanctions on us, by which we are inconvenienced economically and financially, include Western countries, primarily, the United States, which used the aggressive minority in the EU to literally force Europe to follow their lead. They also coerced Australia, Japan and several other countries into doing the same thing.

Here’s an improper analogy, but that’s all I have left. When we are asked why we are doing what we are doing in Syria or Crimea, where a referendum was held, which has frozen our cooperation with the West for quite a while, I go back in my mind to a televised discussion with the audience broadcast by one of our free and democratic channels. Among other things, there was a question of whether it was necessary to dig our heels in and stay through the siege of Leningrad during WWII, because otherwise so many lives could have been saved. What is that about? Realpolitik, pragmatism, or taking care of the people? It’s hard to say. I believe those people in besieged Leningrad were saints. Anyone in their right mind who knows a thing or two about World War II, the Great Patriotic War, thinks of them as saints. Therefore, in addition to realpolitik, pragmatism, or whatever you may call it, in addition to the obligation to clearly see what’s good for your own country, I don’t see Russian foreign policy as immoral or detached from the sentiment and dignity of a great nation.

**Question:** When can we expect the international recognition of Crimea as part of the Russian Federation?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I may be off with the number of years it took the international community to recognise the Soviet Union as a state. Was it seven or eight? Initially, the Soviet Union was recognised for trading purposes. Later, it was recognised as a state.

Crimea becoming part of Russia, the reunification of Crimea with Russia, took place in full accordance with international law. Article 1 of the UN Charter incorporates the key principles, among which the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. In the next few lines, the article refers to the need to respect the territorial integrity of states, but as part of respecting the right to self-determination. These two principles have gone together from day one of the UN and are enshrined in this fundamental international legal instrument of our time. The form of self-determination invoked by Crimea residents is fairly specific, but it was invoked in response to the coup and the ideas proclaimed by the new government. In particular, Dmitry Yarosh, one of the key perpetrators of the coup and all the mayhem during the Maidan protests, said that Crimea is for the Ukrainians, since Russians will never speak Ukrainian, will never think like Ukrainians, and will never celebrate Stepan Bandera or Roman Shukhevych, so the Russians should be banished from Crimea, and those who do not

go of their own accord should be destroyed. He said this in late February 2014, a few days before a wave of protest hit Crimea. Therefore, in the face of overt threats and attempts to act on them, the people of Crimea didn't have much choice, I believe.

With regard to the legal aspect of the situation, we have covered it extensively and circulated relevant documents. I have already mentioned Article 1 of the UN Charter. There are laws dating back to 1966 on international civil and political rights and international economic, social and cultural rights, which also mention the right to self-determination. The UN General Assembly Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations among States adopted by consensus in 1970 is the most detailed such document. It says that creating a sovereign and independent state, free accession to an independent state, association with it, or establishing any other political status determined by the free will of the people constitutes a form of exercising its right to self-determination by such a nation. Of course, those who drafted the declaration made sure they include the principle of territorial integrity. The above declaration says that the territorial integrity of a state, which one of its territories is leaving, must also be respected. But the state is entitled to the full support of its territorial integrity only if the state provides all the people living on this territory with the right to self-determination. The Ukrainian state stripped the people of Crimea of this right. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Crimeans held a referendum, which was at first ignored by the central authorities in Kiev, and in 1996 its results were cancelled. In other words, the people of Crimea have been seeking to exercise their right to be treated in accordance with the UN General Assembly's Declaration of 1970 for a long time. The right to self-determination has been repeatedly confirmed by the decisions of the International Court of Justice and in the comments of the human rights committees that I mentioned.

As for parallels, our Western partners run like the devil from a cross at any proposal to analyse what happened in Crimea from the perspective of what they did in Kosovo. They say that Kosovo was a special case and cannot serve as a comparison, though comparisons are more than apt. There were no referendums in Kosovo, and at the moment when independence was unilaterally proclaimed, there was no physical threat to the Kosovo Albanians. Military hostilities had long since ended, the war ended years earlier, and no one faced any discrimination. They were essentially living as an independent autonomous entity. Basic conditions set out in the UN General Assembly's resolution were not respected. Under the provisions of Resolution 1244, Kosovo was to accept the return of a limited contingent of Serbian customs officers and border guards. This was not done. At the time when independence was declared no one faced discrimination, no one was killed or arrested, and people lived as they wished. Dialogue continued under the aegis of the UN on new terms for organising relations between Belgrade and Pristina. And then suddenly, out of the blue, those who were organising the dialogue, the Europeans above all, said that time and their patience were running out. Why was this? As I said, there was no threat at that moment. In the end, Kosovo's independence was declared and recognised. But the top leaders of important and serious countries say that this was all done on the basis of a properly organised referendum, unlike the "improperly" organised referendum in Crimea. No referendum at all was held in Kosovo. This is just one example.

Another example comes from the decolonisation process in Africa, when the UN General Assembly decided that the French colony of the Comoros should decide its own future through a referendum. The agreement was that the result would be counted based on the votes cast by the people on all islands in the Comoros archipelago. They all voted for independence, but on one island, Mayotte, the majority voted to remain a French territory. The UN General Assembly's resolution stated that the result produced by the overall number of votes cast throughout the country would decide the matter, and the UN General Assembly continued with this line. But France refused to accept the result and said that no matter what the criteria and rules, what mattered was that Mayotte wanted to remain with France and France would let it do so. This was followed by many resolutions and by protests from the African Union and the UN General Assembly, but France refused to budge. In 2011, Mayotte became a French overseas territory and the European Union did not cut off economic ties with its member state.

Overall, as far as the European Union goes, back in 1991, when the Warsaw Pact collapsed and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and the Soviet Union ceased to exist, the European Community took a decision called Guidelines on Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. These guidelines stated that peoples' right to self-determination could be realised on the basis of recognition of these states. If there are any shrewd lawyers here, they will sense how this is quite a model of work with words. In other words, the right to self-determination is not exercised through a referendum or similar thing, but very simply: you declare independence and your independence is recognised. That was the approach the European Union took to the situation with new states emerging as the Warsaw Pact, Comecon and the USSR collapsed. This was no doubt an example of the kind of "Realpolitik" we were talking about. They probably thought that otherwise, they would have to wait too long while all the formalities were taken care of. The criteria for recognising states, as set out in the 1991 guidelines, make no mention of extreme situations that would make the coexistence of peoples within one state impossible. It's simply recognition and that's it. There is not even any mention of needing to respect some kind of constitutional procedures for decisions on secession. In 1991, it was on this basis that they recognised all of the former Soviet republics, including Ukraine.

There is therefore no legal obstacle to having our Western partners recognise Crimea's reunification with the Russian Federation. But there is no political will, and there is a clear political desire to use this situation as a means to contain Russia, a stance the West, led by the USA, had been taking toward Russia long before the Ukraine issue came along, because from their point of view Russia was starting to become too independent. They have not yet understood that this is not some opportunist decision but is quite simply part of our existence.

**Question:** The Gorchakov Lyceum opens in MGIMO University this year. What qualities should its students have to be up to the MGIMO standards?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I don't want to repeat myself but they should strive to be very educated and gain knowledge in as many areas as they can. The main thing is to want it. The lyceum will have a good academic programme considering that it is endorsed by MGIMO. You must simply fulfil everything that it provides for. And, of course, learn languages and study history.

**Question:** Could you please tell us what you remember the most from your student years? Were you concerned with poetry as a student?

**Sergey Lavrov:** If I tell the truth about what I remember the best from my student years, it would not be very educational. Indeed, don't forget that student years offer fantastic opportunities to find one's bearings in life, to make friends and to feel like a free man. But it is particularly pleasant to do this when lessons are learned. Anatoly Torkunov and I both studied hard but knew how to relax. We went to different places as members of construction teams and became so friendly that we did not want to leave. We earned money there and then flew to the South – Crimea or Sochi to rest and swim in the sea for four or five days before the academic year.

We were fond of arts and loved amateur variety revues. We wrote texts from the first year. Our parties were the most popular ones at the institute. We distributed (but never sold) tickets for them. Tickets were always in short supply. Until the fourth year, these parties were very popular for this type of recreation. Sometimes we invited friends from the Foreign Languages Institute (Now Moscow State Linguistic University). By the way, in those days we had to get approval for the scenarios for these evenings from the party committee. We had censorship then and now there is none.

Since graduation we have tried to meet – at least some of our former classmates – every year. Once every five years we all get together. This is a large gathering and all classmates synchronise their vacations from abroad. We also hosted parties during such meetings. In fact, we held the last one five or six years ago. We should not forget to restore this tradition.

Anatoly Torkunov and I were also interested in serious art. With one more classmate we took part during the second year in the national poetry recital contest. We read an excerpt from Andrei Voznesensky's poem "Antiworlds" on the stage of the Small Sports Arena in Luzhniki, where the final of the contest was held. We received a second degree diploma for our reading. Of course, we sang songs. I probably tried to sing for the first time in my first year. We went hiking with guitars and made fires. All this filled our lives with completely unforgettable emotions. But, let me repeat that you only derive pleasure from this when all lessons have been learned.

**Question:** Recently the British PR agency Portland ranked Russia in the top 30 nations for using "soft power". We don't know if this information is trustworthy. What methods of "soft power" is the Foreign Ministry using and planning to use apart from its brilliant media policy, especially in social media?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We are following the example of Russian President Vladimir Putin because apart from formal and legal contexts, it is the Constitution that gives the President the right to determine the main dimensions of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation with due account of recent developments. I am convinced that we should not change the key dimensions outlined by President Putin way back in 2000. According to them Russia should pursue a multi-vector foreign policy and be open to cooperation with all those who are ready for it on the basis of equality and consideration of partners' interests. First and foremost, Russia should firmly uphold its interests but without descending into confrontation. That said, there will be certain nuances in the upgraded version of the concept.

I don't think it's worth trying to codify the notion of "soft power". What methods should it include? Usually non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are mentioned and an ability to influence them via funding or by some other methods, use them in protest movements and for staging "yellow" or other revolutions. Naturally, the media are also mentioned. How to work with them, what grants they should receive, how to invite representatives of civil society and journalists to some country in order to establish a group of influence in the state whose policy you want to affect. Such efforts are also made at meetings of political scientists.

The media in the modern sense of the word mean social media. We are working in all areas – with NGOs, journalists, social media – and we encourage contacts between young people, diplomats and scientists from different countries. The Russian Foreign Ministry was one of the first government organisations to work with social media. Now I periodically look at the information on media activities: we are always among the top three and sometimes the leader. Probably, it is necessary to get such statistics in order to understand who is doing what.

Maybe, I am old-fashioned but in principle "soft power" is not a technology. Even if social media are brought to boiling temperatures, the best influence on people is exerted through personal communication. This is true of cases when you have to persuade someone and bring them over to your side or dissuade someone from a step that you consider wrong. Sometimes you simply need to win someone over for yourself or your country so as to continue cooperation. Let us not forget, of course, that all this should rely on the steady development of the state – its economy and social sphere, on how well people feel in their own country.

In this really difficult period resulting from the West's response to its own mistakes and inability to ensure equal and indivisible security in Europe and equitable economic cooperation, with the West trying to take its mistakes out on us, you can see the attention President Putin and the Government are paying to the need to alleviate negative consequences and use the current situation to the utmost in order to take the lead in a number of areas. First of all, we see results in agriculture and several areas of industrial policy where innovative technology and production are expanding very fast.

"Soft power" offers practically limitless opportunities. But it's mainly about contact between people.

**Question:** What alternative do you see to the Minsk format in a situation where Ukraine has failed to implement the majority of agreements?

**Sergey Lavrov:** To be honest, I don't see any alternative to the Minsk Agreements. Attempts are being made to convince us that the person who signed these agreements would like to implement them but is unable to do so for objective reasons. These excuses are not reflecting well on either the Ukrainian leaders, who coordinated the Minsk Agreements, or those who were in Minsk and initialled the agreements. I mean President François Hollande of France and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. They were doing this following an arduous negotiating marathon that had lasted for 17 hours and been attended by President Petr Poroshenko of Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. No one can say that anyone was deceived because a formula was "slipped in" and approved without them realising the consequences. Each formula was literally mulled over, adjusted ten times over, and specified again and again. What was written there was done with an absolutely cool head by each of the participants. I saw this personally.

Immediately after his return to Kiev from Minsk, the Ukrainian President should have presented these agreements to the Verkhovna Rada and said that this was his presidential decision and a fair agreement and that he had been elected as a president of peace, not war. He should have presented this peace to them and suggested that the Verkhovna Rada approve promptly what was required of them and what was written in the agreements, while urging the partners to influence Donetsk and Lugansk. They should come to agreement with Kiev on early elections in those territories, on an amnesty, on the special status law and on how to permanently incorporate this law in the Ukrainian Constitution. Instead of all this, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavel Klimkin, when verbally attacked in the Verkhovna Rada and urged to provide explanations, said that they had assumed no commitments – neither the obligation to talk directly to Donetsk and Lugansk nor the promise to amnesty all those involved in the events. That's outrageous! Instead of seizing this opportunity to lead their country out of the crisis and secure full support from the Verkhovna Rada, those authorised by the Kiev government to participate in drafting the Minsk Agreements, as they faced the radicals' criticism, tried to pacify them on their radical terms and posed as greater enemies of the Minsk Agreements than those who had been totally uninvolved in their drafting.

Nevertheless, the presidents of Russia, France and Ukraine, and the German Chancellor held a meeting in Paris, France, on October 2, 2015, reaffirming again what was written in the Minsk Agreements. They also confirmed that all issues recorded therein should be addressed directly with Donetsk and Lugansk.

There is also the Normandy Format; we accepted it primarily because we saw France and Germany willing to take these decisions through all stages of the Ukrainian governmental process, primarily through the Verkhovna Rada. I can say that our French and German partners still realise this necessity, although they are behaving in a somewhat odd way, what with the German Chancellor and the French President saying that the implementation of the Minsk Agreements will make it possible to lift the sanctions against the Russian Federation.

The agreements don't mention Russia at all, not even once. But they do mention the Kiev government a lot of times, which should have done a number of things within concrete, not abstract, timeframes. None of these have even come under way. For example, the discussion of the election law between Kiev and Donbass should have begun in April 2015. Nothing has been done up till now. We are attempting to find out how the Ukrainian government is seeing this law, which must be handed over to the Contact Group and coordinated with Donetsk and Lugansk. The same refers to the law on amnesty and many other things.

It's a good thing that no one is calling into question the Minsk Agreements. And it would be difficult to do that because immediately after their signing we obtained their approval by the UN Security Council. It's a good thing that no one is trying to rewrite the agreements. There are things in there that can be specified in tactical terms, but this must be done directly with the delegations sent by the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic. Importantly, the United States is showing an interest in helping settle the crisis on the basis of the Minsk Agreements. It doesn't call into question this text either; it just wants to use its weight to help the implementation [of the Minsk Agreements]. The United States has contacts only with the Kiev authorities and therefore its entire weight should be felt by the Kiev leadership. Hopefully, this work will not be conducted pro forma and will be aimed at the actual implementation of what has been agreed on. It was always this way with us: once you strike a bargain, you should make it good.

Ukraine's negotiability is a separate issue. The Kiev authorities often say that they would like to bring back the Geneva format involving Russia, the United States, the EU and Ukraine. France and Germany represented the EU, with some Brussels bureaucrats filling in for them now, plus the United States. A meeting in this format was first convened on April 17, 2014 in Geneva, and was attended by US Secretary of State John Kerry, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton (UK), your humble servant, and Ukraine's Acting Foreign Minister Andrey Deshchysya. During the talks, we approved a document that was not as extensive, detailed and comprehensive as the Minsk Agreements – just one page – but it was approved all the same. This document had a phrase on the need for an immediate start of constitutional reform consultations with all Ukrainian regions. Let me remind you that this document was approved on April 17, 2014. A month later we asked the Americans and the EU people what steps they had taken to compel the new authorities to commence a national constitutional reform with the participation of all regions. They bashfully averted their gaze. This is just one example. If we give credence to calls to revive the Geneva format, we will certainly start urging the implementation of this document and we will insist on a Ukrainian nationwide constitutional reform, because the Ukrainian authorities have put their signature under this.

**Question:** What played the main role in your life in shaping your personality as a Foreign Minister?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I never gave thought to this. To quote Vladimir Vysotsky, "Isn't it better just to be a decent man in your life?" This will fit any profession. Of course, my mother, my

friends and my University – not just as an educational institution but as a school of life – had much influence. It can't be said that to become a diplomat you should behave this way and to become someone else – in a different fashion.

I wish you success, enjoy your university years, study hard and play as hard as we did.

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*Source:* [http://www.mid.ru/ru/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/-/asset\\_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2417731?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_7OvQR5KJWVmR&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_7OvQR5KJWVmR\\_languageId=en\\_GB](http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2417731?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_7OvQR5KJWVmR&_101_INSTANCE_7OvQR5KJWVmR_languageId=en_GB)