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## **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions during a news conference on the performance of Russian diplomacy in 2024**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to wish everyone present a happy New Year and a Merry Christmas to all those who celebrate this holiday. I would also like to wish everyone who have a sense of humour a happy New Year Old Style, which we celebrated yesterday and which certainly added a few positive notes to everyday routine, which is a fact of life and which we will be mostly talking about today.

The fundamental assessments of the international situation in the past few years, our actions, policy and goals on the international stage have been presented in detail during President Vladimir Putin's annual news conference on December 19, 2024. Before it, he regularly spoke about international issues in his other statements, including at a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club and at other events. I will not focus on the international events that constituted the essence of our operation and initiatives.

However, I would like to remind you, as we pointed out on many occasions, that we are living in a historical period, or possibly a historical era or confrontation between those who uphold the fundamental principles of international law (and the world order that developed after Victory over Nazism and Japanese militarism in the Second World War), which have been formulated, set out and put forth in the most important international document – the UN Charter – and those who are not satisfied with that document and who decided after the end of the Cold War that the deed is done and that their main opponent – the Soviet Union – and the accompanying socialist camp have been finally suppressed. They decided that from that time on they could not live in accordance with the UN Charter but with the wishes of the “political West,” which includes the US's Asian allies (Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea). We regard them as “political” or “collective West.” Regarding themselves as victors in the Cold War, they decided

that they no longer needed to coordinate their actions with a strong opponent such as the Soviet Union, and that they would decide all issues independently, issuing instructions from the top down, just as it was done in the Soviet Union's party system (the Politburo, the Central Committee, regional party committees, district party committees, etc.).

At that time, the PRC had not yet achieved the kind of tremendous economic success and political influence that we see today, so the West did not encounter any serious resistance. President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly spoken about this, convincingly and at length, explaining the true root causes of the conflict that left us no other choice. We had to begin the special military operation in Ukraine to repel an attack, a war waged against us by the collective West with the main goal of suppressing competition when Russia re-emerged as its strong rival on the international arena. I will not list these reasons in detail. Their main goal was to weaken our country geopolitically, creating direct military threats to us – not somewhere across the ocean, but right on our borders, on Russia's native territories toiled by Russians and developed by Russian tsars and their associates, in an attempt to slash our strategic potential and devalue it as much as possible. The second reason also has to do with the history of the region, only it was more about the people who have lived on that land for centuries, developed it from scratch, built cities, factories and ports, than about the land itself. These people were labelled 'terrorists' by the current Ukrainian regime, which came to power through an illegal anti-constitutional coup. And when they refused to accept it, that regime launched an all-out offensive against all things Russian, which provided a centuries-old framework for the region where people refused to obey the new Nazis.

Now we are witnessing the height of this battle. I am sure that there will be questions about it, so I will not go into detail right now. However, I would like to reiterate the main conflict of the current historical period – something that professors always pointed out in Soviet history courses. The main conflict is between those who support a multipolar world, the UN Charter and the sovereign equality of states, which requires all those who ratified it not to impose their will on others, but to rationalise their point of view and seek a balance of interests, to negotiate, and who support all the other principles of the UN Charter, on the one hand [– and those who don't, on the other]. These principles constitute the international legal framework for the equitable international system that is

commonly referred to as the Yalta-Potsdam system. Many people, including our political scientists, speak of it now as a bygone era. I do not quite agree with this assessment. From the international law perspective, the Yalta-Potsdam system does not require any 'repair' - it is in the UN Charter. Everyone should simply comply with it, and not selectively, like ordering a la carte - I'd like fish today and something stronger tomorrow - but in its entirety. Moreover, all the interrelations between the principles of the UN Charter have long been defined in the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. It was adopted unanimously, with no one objecting.

Let me reiterate that those who oppose multipolarity and efforts to achieve it today believe that with the Cold War over, they are above the law and that they can follow their own rules. They call this Western-style set of rules a rules-based order - although no one has ever seen these rules - and are pushing them across the board on all nations.

After the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's dissolution, they have been persisting, as if driven by inertia, with their desire to cast themselves as masters of destinies. This is something that surprises me, while also making me anxious. In fact, every reasonable politician must understand that the situation has radically changed compared to what it was 30 or 35 years ago. There has been a revival in efforts to oppose the Western diktat, with emerging economies and new centres of financial power in China, India, ASEAN, the Arab world, and CELAC replacing the USSR in this role. This group also includes a resurgent Russia together with its allies from the EAEU, the CIS, and CSTO. This also includes the SCO and BRICS, and many other emerging and rapidly developing associations across the world, in the countries of the Global South, or to use a better designation - within the Global Majority. A new reality has already emerged along with strong competitors who want to engage in fair economic, financial and sports competition. However, the West, or at least its present-day elites, proved to be unable to stop following the path of seeking to ensure their total dominance and perorating about what they refer to as the end of history. They are heading down a slippery slope in their attempts to stop their competitors in their tracks, including in terms of economic competition. Today, the United States announced a new sanctions package dealing with AI microchips, which includes banning their imports to NATO and EU countries. I have a strong feeling that the United States does not

want to have any competitors anywhere, starting with the energy sector. In this sector, the US has given the green light to terrorist attacks designed to undermine EU's wellbeing in terms of energy supplies. Now, they are encouraging their Ukrainian clients to put the TurkStream out of operation, just as they did with the Nord Stream pipelines. The United States and its allies have placed sanctions policies at the core of what they do on the international stage, including regarding Russia, but also in other respects. This demonstrates their refusal to engage in fair economic competition and their commitment to using unfair, aggressive practices for suppressing their opponents. They imposed a plethora of sanctions on China, too. As I have already said, they do not hesitate sanctioning their allies whenever there is even a slight threat that these allies can make something cheaper or be more effective on international markets compared to US manufacturers.

In sports, we witnessed fair competitions evolve into efforts to serve the vested national interests of a country which aspires to dominate everything.

If Mr Donald Trump seeks to make America greater once he assumes office, we will have to keep a close eye on the methods President Donald Trump uses to achieve this goal.

This was my take on the main contradictions we face today. I am at your disposal to hear and answer your questions.

**Question:** My question follows up on what you said earlier regarding the Yalta-Potsdam system, specifically the fact that it still exists and that its main tenets must be respected. What about the fact that the global players who announced a rules-based order have effectively openly admitted that they no longer consider this system relevant? What does Russia plan to do to keep them within that system?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The Yalta-Potsdam system, I will say it again, did not go anywhere. Some say it has run its course. Political scientists suggest looking elsewhere, sitting down again with three, four, or five parties and drafting new agreements, with the existing balance of power in mind.

The Yalta-Potsdam system was originally discussed, conceived, and created through the drafting of the UN Charter by the Allies that fought against Nazism, namely, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom. After the fundamental principles of the post-war order had been agreed upon, the French joined them. Later, after the revolution in China, the People's Republic of China also became a permanent member of the UN Security Council. I am deeply convinced that the UN Charter does not need to be improved in terms of its

principles. The principles of equality and self-determination of peoples, sovereign equality of countries, and territorial integrity of countries whose governments behave decently, respect the rights of all ethnicities residing in that particular country, and, therefore, represent the entire population living within the borders of that country are timeless. No one can say this about the Nazi regime in Kiev, which came to power as a result of a coup 11 years ago and did not represent the residents of Crimea, Donbass, or Novorossiia from its earliest days.

All these principles are fair. We support the UN reform as well. However, some are claiming that permanent membership of certain countries in the Security Council with the right of veto is the greatest injustice out there. We have repeatedly made it clear that this is a special mechanism. International associations that the international community tried to create earlier lacked this mechanism. No entity granted special rights to any country. The Security Council permanent member mechanism was the result of lessons learned from the League of Nations with its “one country, one vote” principle. This approach not only failed to provide great powers with privileges, but also prevented larger, more influential nations from exercising their particular responsibilities. They did not feel accountable for the fate of the systems being created, including the League of Nations.

Everything else in the Charter represents absolutely fair principles that must be applied consistently rather than selectively.

Indeed, the UN Security Council reform is needed. Not all countries that bear special responsibility in the global economy, finance, politics, and military affairs are represented in the UN Security Council. It has been pointed out repeatedly that countries such as India and Brazil have long earned permanent Security Council membership on all counts, as has Africa.

On the other hand, the West is again trying to derail this process, using any means to ensure its preferential stance. Even now, of the 15 members, the West has six seats. The Americans name Germany and Japan, which have no independent voice in international politics, as their “key” candidates for permanent Security Council membership. These two countries blindly and obediently follow in the wake of the US politics. Whenever Washington directly infringes upon their interests, they do not dare to utter a word to uphold their interests. This fully applies to Chancellor Olaf Scholz after the Nord Stream pipelines had been blown up. All he did was bashfully look away without saying a word.

The same applies to Japan, which is entirely dependent on the United States. This is unfair. The West already has six out of 15 seats. That's enough. The developing countries must enjoy a wider representation.

After the reform, during it, and in the context of it, or in parallel with the Security Council reform, we will have the West understand that it is no longer capable of imposing its rules on the rest of the world as it did for centuries during the colonial times, extracting wealth from African, Asian, and Latin American countries, and living off the back of others, and that we must seek a balance of interests, and we have a solid foundation for doing so in the form of an international legal framework represented by the Yalta-Potsdam world order, the UN Charter. All we need to do is follow it. And this calls for a realisation that ruling the world the way they did before is no longer an option.

**Question:** President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić has recently made certain statements that some experts interpret as a de facto alignment with the United States. How do such statements tally with the special nature of relations between Russia and Serbia?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Our primary concern is that our relations with Serbia are grounded solely in the interests of the Serbian and Russian peoples, as well as our respective states. Our interests align on the vast majority of issues. These relations are rich with specific agreements and projects, including those in the energy sector, approved by our heads of state, governments, and companies. There are joint ventures, such as Naftna Industrija Srbije. According to its articles, nationalisation is not an option under any circumstances. The American political scene, particularly among the Democrats, often exhibits a tendency to leave a “mess” for the incoming administration. This was evident when Barack Obama, three weeks prior to Donald Trump's first inauguration, expelled 120 Russian diplomats and their families and seized, under arrest, two pieces of diplomatically inviolable real estate, which we are still barred from accessing. This forced us to respond and certainly did not facilitate the US-Russia relationship during the new Trump administration.

Similarly, there seems to be an attempt to “throw a spanner in the works,” as we say it, for both the Serbs and the Trump administration. A deputy assistant for energy arrived there, attended a joint news conference with President Aleksandar Vučić, and moralised, insisting that Russian capital should be excluded from Naftna Industrija Srbije and the Serbian energy sector in general. Otherwise, he threatened

to block all market access for Serbian goods. It was quite a brazen performance, yet this is the “trademark” of the outgoing American administration.

When you have not been re-elected, and your team perceives America in a way that was not supported by the majority of Americans, ethically speaking – beyond politics, out of basic human decency – you should simply await the conclusion of the three months between the election and inauguration, understanding that the people desire a different policy. But no, they insist on “slamming the door,” ensuring they leave a significant impact.

I reiterate that we share a rich history with Serbia in our joint struggle against Nazism and for the respect of peoples’ right to self-determination. We support each other politically and within international organisations. Of course, we observe that Serbia is being “twisted.” When President Vučić has long stated that Serbia remains on course for EU membership, and year after year he hears that they are welcome, but only if they first recognise Kosovo’s independence – essentially inviting the Serbian people and their president to self-abasement – and secondly, of course, the Serbs must join all EU sanctions against the Russian Federation. In parallel with this invitation to self-abasement, there is a demand to betray their ally. President Vučić has repeatedly stated that this is an unacceptable policy pushed by the Europeans, clearly encouraged by the United States.

The situation, even from a legal standpoint, demands courageous decisions. They say you have an agreement with someone that does not concern us, but it does concern our desire to punish your partner. They add, “sorry, but you’ll also be hit tangentially, and quite painfully.”

The decision rests with the Serbian leadership. Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin, who represented Serbia at the BRICS summit in Kazan, made a clear statement on this matter. So, we will see.

We remain in contact with our Serbian friends. We have requested urgent consultations and hope to receive a response at the earliest opportunity.

**Question:** In Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, the lawfully elected president, was inaugurated a few days ago. Nevertheless, his electoral opponent, Edmundo González, continues to proclaim himself the victor. Washington, alongside several Latin American nations, particularly Argentina and Uruguay, where he has been recognised as the elected president, share this view. How do you evaluate the situation? Does it remind you of the scenario with Juan Guaidó following the previous elections? What is Washington aiming to achieve?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The West is intoxicated by its perceived “greatness,” its impunity, and its self-endowed authority to dictate the destinies of peoples worldwide. This behaviour is evident not only in Latin America, not solely in Venezuela, not exclusively with Juan Guaidó, nor just with Edmundo González. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya is similarly labelled by certain countries as a “legitimate representative” of Belarus. Under this guise, she is embraced by the Council of Europe and other Western-centric organisations.

This reflects arrogance and a disdainful attitude towards the rest of the world. It is yet another brazen assertion that when we speak of “democracy,” it signifies merely one thing – “we do as we please.” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (whom I have quoted before) remarked that those who do not heed their call will not have a seat at the democratic table, but rather, will find themselves on the “menu.” This is a direct manifestation of their policy. They believe they possess the authority to render verdicts on election outcomes. Indeed, a nation has the right, not the obligation, to do so. Within the OSCE framework, countries hold the right to invite international observers. This does not necessarily have to be the ODIHR. These can be parliamentary associations from any nation and various organisations.

I will not even delve into their reaction to the elections in Moldova, how arrangements were made to prevent half a million Moldovan citizens residing in Russia from voting, and how everything was orchestrated so that slightly fewer Moldovans working in the West were able to effortlessly “cast” their votes for the designated candidate – “president” Maia Sandu.

Observe how the Georgian people are being ridiculed. They accused us of “orchestrating” something. The OSCE observers found no significant violations. Such a verdict implies that everything was conducted properly and legitimately. Yet, they are dissatisfied.

Romania. It is disgraceful. Perhaps “president” Edmundo González, like “president” Juan Guaidó, will follow the lead of former Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili? Two days before the inauguration of the new president, she insisted she would not leave and, as the sole legitimate authority in Georgia, would remain in the palace to “issue” commands. Yet, come morning, she left and secured a position in a political science “think tank.”

Commenting on this matter is challenging. It is sheer hypocrisy, dictatorial behaviour, disrespect for the populace, and a gross overestimation of one’s



intellectual and other capabilities. This will eventually pass. However, these individuals must be taught a lesson.

**Question:** Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated not long ago that, under the strategic guidance provided by the two heads of state, China-Russia relations were becoming increasingly mature, stable, independent, and strong every day, and served as a model of friendly interactions between major powers and neighbouring countries. What do you have to say about this? What do you think is the secret to the steady expansion of bilateral relations? What are your expectations regarding bilateral cooperation this year?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I fully share the assessments of Russia-China relations provided by my good and long-time friend Wang Yi. We meet several times a year, and these meetings are quite useful, helping us reach concrete agreements to implement foreign policy goals agreed upon by President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping, and coordinate our steps on the international stage.

Without a doubt, Russia-China partnership is among the key factors stabilising modern international life and the ongoing processes that are used, among other things, to escalate confrontation and hostility in international affairs, which is what our neighbours from NATO engage in under US guidance. The United States is seeking to drive wedges and sow discord, be it in Europe, the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, or as they say, the Indo-Pacific region, be it the Middle East or Africa.

With its hundreds of military bases worldwide, the United States has no problem wreaking havoc here and there. However, these see-through schemes do not mislead anyone. They seek to create destabilising confrontations anywhere they need to, causing nations that push for regional influence to waste their resources, focus, and time on resolving crises rather than to use them for development purposes. Meanwhile, Washington is reaping increasing benefits from it. They did this during World War I and World War II. This time, they have shifted the main burden of the war they are waging against Russia through Ukraine onto the European Union. Most of the EU, including leaders of France, Germany, and Italy, remain largely silent. Some are voicing discontent, but these voices are coming mostly from the opposition, such as the Alternative for Germany, Sahra Wagenknecht's Union, and the National Front in France.

The opposition wonders why so much money is being spent elsewhere while poverty is rising, deindustrialisation is underway, and the manufacturing industry is

fleeing to the United States, where energy costs are four times lower, and taxes are lower as well.

They have “burned” almost all of California, causing damage estimated at \$250 billion, which is more than what they have spent on Ukraine, even though the figures are comparable. At various international events, such as APEC in San Francisco, we have seen that the United States is facing numerous problems. Poverty is rife. All you need to do to see it is go off the main roads.

So, when China and Russia advocate for equal and honest dialogue with Washington, it primarily means upholding the principles of international communication that are enshrined in the UN Charter.

After World War II ended with the defeat of German Nazism in Europe and Japanese militarism in the Far East, our leaders agreed to jointly celebrate these two outstanding events which are the 80th anniversary of Victory in World War II in Europe and the 80th anniversary of Victory in World War II in the Far East.

I’m confident these will be outstanding events. They are crucial to reminding everyone, especially the younger generation, of the price paid for peace and to continue firmly countering the attempts to rewrite history, equating Nazis with those who liberated Europe from them and the Far East from Japanese militarism.

This is an essential component that cements the comprehensive Russia-China partnership and strategic cooperation. I believe the secret of success lies in our shared history. We do not reject this history. Unlike the West, neither Russia nor China has ever dialed back on their commitments, including those codified in the UN Charter. The West, while not formally renouncing them as commitments, does everything in practice to avoid following them, instead pursuing its selfish designs.

The entities relying on Russia-China partnership and joint initiatives belong to a new type of association, without leaders or followers, or masters or subordinates.

These entities include the SCO, which is expanding its ties with the EAEU. The Eurasian Economic Union is harmonising its integration plans closely with China’s Belt and Road Initiative. BRICS has gained even more strength after the Kazan Summit. Indonesia, which we strongly supported during Russia’s chairmanship, became a full member. Eight more countries have become partner states, and the SCO and ASEAN, as well as many other associations, maintain close cooperation. All of that is based on consensus. The Russia-China tandem can move these processes forward with the support of other participants. The international

importance of our cooperation, partnership, and future plans is immense. I'm confident these plans will be realised. We do not seek to oppose anyone. The only thing we want is to see all countries on our planet, including the US-led collective West, interact based on respect for the interests of all their partners. This position is shared by Moscow and Beijing.

**Question:** We all see that Armenia is being led down a fallacious and destructive path. I would go as far as to suggest that this is posing an existential threat to the country. This serves exclusively to benefit the West, to the detriment of the centuries-old Russian-Armenian ties.

We all know that Armenia has suspended its participation in the CSTO. We know that the Armenian government is boycotting a number of events hosted by Russia. At the same time, recently, the authorities in Yerevan began dragging the country into the European Union. They are reportedly planning to hold a referendum on EU accession. Today we also found out that Armenia is going to sign a strategic partnership document with the United States. All this is happening against the backdrop of very real threats from our neighbours, which are increasing the chances of a new war. What is Moscow's approach to the situation in Armenia? How do you see further developments?

My second question is about the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory, which you have mentioned. It is our common victory. We know how much the Soviet people, including the Armenian people, contributed to that victory. They made a truly great and valuable contribution. Do you agree that the memory of this victory should remain one of the pillars of the further strategic alliance between Armenia and Russia?

I am a member of the Council of Eurasia. This autonomous non-profit organisation has been active across the Eurasian continent for the last seven months. We have been advocating the preservation of historical memory and defending traditional values. I can say for sure that this advocacy effort is getting a wide response from our young people. In October 2024, we held a large mass event in Yerevan, which was attended by over 1,000 Armenian students. We not only celebrated Yerevan Day, but also paid tribute to the Victory in the Great Patriotic War by laying flowers at the Eternal Flame.

**Sergey Lavrov:** In response to your second question – this issue is sacred for all nations, above all for the Soviet Union. It is sacred for everyone who survived attempted genocide by Hitler's armies and who fought for justice and truth, as part

of their countries' regular armies or partisan groups and resistance movements, repelling the Nazis and the large number of European countries that the German Nazis made join the battle on their side. Spanish and French soldiers took part in the siege of Leningrad and in many other criminal acts committed by the Nazi regime.

We have not forgotten this. What we see today keeps bringing those events back, and one cannot help noticing similarities. Napoleon invaded Europe and made everyone join his army to defeat the Russian Empire. It wasn't just the French we had to repel. Hitler's Germany later did the same. Dozens of countries occupied by the Germans sent their soldiers to destroy and annihilate the USSR.

President Joe Biden, who delivered his final speech on the US foreign policy yesterday, said that they had made NATO stronger and more capable, with 50 nations ready "to help Ukraine" – in fact, to fight against Russia using Ukraine as proxy.

History repeats itself, and each iteration includes someone having a sense of superiority and promoting a version of what is now called 'Bonapartism'. With Hitler, that devolved to Nazism. Today, new Nazis are providing their banners to anyone wishing to march under them in a new attempt to destroy our country. Therefore, these anniversaries are sacred.

I believe everything that is being done by civil society, including your organisation, on top of what is being done by states and governments, deserves the highest praise.

I'm aware of your accomplishments in Armenia, not just in Yerevan, but in other cities and villages as well. Our embassy maintains strong collaboration with you on matters where we can join our efforts, such as organising the Immortal Regiment march, or initiatives like Memory Garden and Victory Dictation. These efforts are crucial if we want to introduce young people to these truly eternal values.

Our diplomats meet with Armenian veterans, take care of burial sites, and maintain memorials in good condition. There is no doubt that Russians and Armenians are friendly and fraternal peoples, and mutual relations will ultimately be grounded in friendship.

Regarding current official relations, they are not without difficulties. You mentioned certain facts that we have commented on earlier.

For example, when it was announced that the Armenian government had decided to begin the process of joining the European Union, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk, a seasoned professional in charge of the EAEU affairs, openly stated that this initiative ran counter to the existing state of affairs. These are two different free trade areas with different systems for cutting (or eliminating) tariffs and duties. They are incompatible, plain and simple.

As you may be aware, back in 2013, after several reminders that we issued, then-President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich noted that the negotiations with the EU regarding Ukraine's association agreement, which had been underway for many years by that time, were about to reach terms that would be directly at odds with Ukraine's obligations under the CIS free trade area. Ukraine was part of it and benefitted from it, as it was almost free from internal tariffs. Ukraine strived to obtain the same zero tariffs arrangement with the EU, with which, for obvious reasons, Russia and other CIS members had fairly high protective barriers.

When Russia was in the process of joining the World Trade Organisation, it took us 17 years of negotiations to secure strong protection for many sectors of our economy and services. If Ukraine, with its zero tariffs for Russia, were to obtain similar arrangements with the EU, European goods, which were subjected to substantial tariffs under our agreement with Brussels, would have flooded our market tariff-free. We made that clear to the Ukrainians.

Yanukovich's government agreed with that. They realised that if they did nothing, we would simply block Ukrainian imports into Russia which would affect Ukraine, since the bulk of Ukraine's trade was with the CIS, not Europe. Ukraine asked the EU to postpone the signing of the association agreement for several months in order to reassess the situation.

We proposed that Russia, Ukraine, and the European Commission sit down and find a way for Ukraine to gain extra benefits from the EU association agreement without losing the advantages provided by the CIS free trade area.

Then-European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, a rather presumptuous individual, dismissed this suggestion in a similarly presumptuous manner, saying it was none of our business, comparing it to the EU not interfering in Russia's relations with Canada. Thus, the decision of Armenia's legitimate government to start a process to access an international entity that welcomes it is a sovereign decision. However, weighing all pros and cons is also part of the responsibility of Armenia's government and Armenian economic policymakers.

You mentioned that Armenia has blocked its participation in the CSTO. While they do not participate in its events, they have officially stated that this does not mean they block decision-making requiring consensus.

The organisation continues to function as usual. In the autumn of 2022, we agreed to send a CSTO observer mission that was properly equipped to play a deterrent role along the border. However, our Armenian friends, despite everything being agreed upon and ready to go, ultimately declined, citing difficulties stemming from the September 2022 three-day skirmishes on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and claiming the CSTO “failed to defend the territory of its ally.”

President Vladimir Putin has revisited this issue on multiple occasions. There was no delineated border, and certainly no demarcation. None and never. It was a couple of kilometres one way, and a couple of kilometres the other way. Indeed, there was an exchange of fire. However, turning down a CSTO mission, which would have been quite effective, was also a sovereign decision. At the same time, they invited a two-month EU mission, and later unilaterally extended it indefinitely without consulting Azerbaijan. Subsequently, Canada joined the mission, introducing an element of NATO presence. According to our information, these personnel are addressing issues that are of interest not only to Armenia, but to various Western alliances as well.

Yesterday, I heard the news that Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan signed a strategic partnership agreement with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken which is a sovereign decision between two states. The main point is not what was signed or the name of the document that was signed, but the implications.

We, too, have used the term “strategic partnership” in numerous agreements with Western countries. However, those agreements, albeit strategic, never required the participants to act against third countries.

We have never, in times of peace, (World War II and the Great Patriotic War are a separate matter) put in writing in any document that we are strategic partners with someone and must, therefore, join some sanctions, as is the case with Serbia. They will ask Armenia to do the same.

Our dialogue continues, though. Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan has been invited to visit the Russian Federation and has accepted the invitation. We look forward to having him here soon.

**Question (retranslated from English):** Donald Trump’s return to office has revived talks about the Ukraine deal. Is it realistic for him to strike a deal like that

and to achieve peace? How far is Russia willing to go to reach an agreement?

What's your take on Donald Trump's recent refusal to rule out the use of military force to get Greenland? What are you going to do if Mr Trump goes ahead with his plan?

**Sergey Lavrov:** As far as I understand, specific initiatives are already in place which will go live the next day after Donald Trump's inauguration. At least, what I saw indicates initiatives to start talks with Denmark about purchasing Greenland.

At the same time, we are hearing Greenland's Prime Minister Múte Bourup Egede say that Greenlanders have special relations with Copenhagen. They do not want to be either Danish or American, but prefer to remain Greenlandic. I believe listening to what the Greenlanders have to say is the way forward.

This approach aligns with how we, as neighbours to other islands, peninsulas, and territories, listened to what residents of Crimea, Donbass, and Novorossiia had to say to find out what they think about the regime that came to power by way of an unconstitutional coup, which the residents of Crimea, Novorossiia, and Donbass refused to accept.

This is entirely consistent with the principle I mentioned early on in my remarks which is the right of nations to self-determination. In cases where a nation, as part of a larger state, feels uncomfortable in that state and seeks self-determination in accordance with the UN Charter, the larger state is obligated not to oppose or obstruct this process. It's not what the Spanish did to Catalonia, or the British to Scotland. If a nation within a state expresses such a desire, it is entitled to exercise its right.

International law is enshrined in the UN Charter and the Declaration of the General Assembly, which states that everyone must respect the territorial integrity of a state whose government represents all people living within its borders. If Greenland feels that Copenhagen does not represent its interests or those of its people, the right to self-determination may come into play.

The same right to self-determination formed the international legal basis for the decolonisation process in the 1960s and 1970s. Back then, indigenous African peoples realised that their colonial rulers did not represent their interests. This was the first large-scale exercise of the right to self-determination under the UN Charter, even though the process remains incomplete. Today, there are 17 non-self-governing territories around the world. The UN Special Committee on Decolonisation meets annually to reaffirm the importance of completing this

process. Numerous resolutions address cases such as Mayotte Island, which France refuses to return to Comoros despite UN resolutions, as well as the decolonisation of Mauritius and other regions.

Nonetheless, the right to self-determination exists. It has been implemented as part of decolonisation and constitutes the legal basis for completing that process (I'm talking about 17 non-self-governing territories.)

The right to self-determination underpins the decisions made by residents of Crimea in 2014 and by residents of Novorossiya and Donbass in 2022. Just as African peoples did not see their colonial rulers as representing their interests, the residents of Crimea, Donbass, and Novorossiya did not see the Nazi regime, which grabbed power in 2014 through a coup, as representing their interests. These Nazis grabbed power and immediately declared their plan to eliminate the status of the Russian language in Ukraine, and proceeded to carry it out. They enacted a law banning the Russian language long before the special military operation started. The West, which is consumed with the issue of human rights, hasn't lifted a finger or said a word with regard to the developments in Ukraine.

Incidentally, human rights are also part of the UN Charter. Article 1 states that everyone must respect human rights regardless of race, gender, language, or religion. Yet the Russian language has been totally outlawed, as has been the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. No one seems to care about these gross violations of the UN Charter, even though the West uses any reason or no reason at all to champion human rights in matters that are totally unrelated to the well-being of people. However, in the case of Ukraine, it has remained silent at a time when people's daily lives have been disrupted, and attempts are being made to wipe out their history and traditions.

As soon as Donald Trump assumes the presidency and articulates his final stance on Ukrainian matters, we will examine it. Presently, the discourse is largely preparatory, leading up to his inauguration and the commencement of substantive work. As Donald Trump himself remarked, these discussions are part of his preparation to take office. He recognises the importance of moving into the Oval Office first.

The conversations over the past year encompass multiple facets. Notably, the increasing reference to the realities "on the ground" is a development likely to be welcomed. Michael Waltz, who I understand is expected to become the National Security Adviser, alongside President Trump in a wide-ranging interview,



highlighted the root causes of the conflict. They alluded to the Kiev regime's induction into NATO, contravening agreements made through Soviet and subsequently Russian-American dialogues, as well as within the OSCE. These agreements, reached by consensus at the highest level and endorsed by presidents, including President Barack Obama in 2010, stipulated that no nation or organisation within the OSCE should seek dominance, nor should any nation bolster its security at the expense of others. Yet, NATO has pursued precisely what it vowed not to do, as Donald Trump has pointed out.

This marks the first occasion an American and indeed any Western leader has openly acknowledged that NATO was disingenuous when it signed numerous accords with our country and within the OSCE. These agreements served merely as a facade, a piece of paper, while in practice, NATO has advanced towards our borders, infringing upon the terms under which East Germany integrated into the Federal Republic. This includes advancing military infrastructure nearer to our borders and planning military bases, including naval bases in Crimea and on the Sea of Azov. These facts are well-documented.

The fact that this root cause is finally being incorporated into the American narrative after months, if not years, of our reminders, is indeed positive. However, the narrative and the discourse at large have yet to address the rights of Russians, whose language, culture, education, media, and canonical religion have been legally prohibited in Ukraine. Meaningful discussions cannot occur if the West continues to feign normalcy regarding this issue.

When the outgoing administration, represented by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, express their confidence that the new White House will persist in its policy of supporting Ukraine, what does that imply? A desire to persist in eradicating all things Russian? This is not a trivial matter; it is profoundly perilous. It suggests that Nazism is being utilised as a tool of foreign policy. Alternatively, it points to the fostering of Nazis as a strategy to implement foreign policy against a nation the United States aims to restrain and prevent from gaining a competitive edge.

We await specific initiatives. President Vladimir Putin has consistently expressed his willingness to meet; yet, no proposals have emerged thus far. Subsequently, President Donald Trump stated that Vladimir Putin is keen to meet [with him]. I concur that a meeting is essential, but first, it is imperative to take office.

**Question:** Europe has been facing quite a paradox. I am certain that an overwhelming majority of people across Europe and in certain countries like mine, i.e., Greece, and Cyprus and elsewhere, do not agree with the policies of our governments. This is to say that people adamantly oppose anyone's efforts to bring about military escalation. Unfortunately – and this is a paradox for our democracies – these governments do not view coordinating their foreign policy with their own people as an imperative. Moreover, some governments have been telling us that there are other kinds of commitments and obligations that define their foreign policy. But Russia, after all, is part of our shared European continent. What would be your forecast in this regard? Will we ever succeed in bringing the relations on our shared continent back to normal?

You are probably one of the world's most experienced and seasoned diplomats, and you have worked on the Cyprus issue and were involved in trying to bring about a resolution. There is a new round in the complex negotiating process on Cyprus taking place these days. Do you have any expectations or possibly any advice for those who are working on this matter?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Let me begin with your second question. Indeed, I worked on the Cyprus settlement while in New York. The President of Cyprus attended the UN General Assembly every year, and during his visits he invited the P5 ambassadors to discuss ways of implementing the principles as per the UN Security Council resolutions. Of course, we also talked about the failures, shortcomings and challenges in resolving the Cyprus issue.

The last meaningful attempt in this regard dates back to Kofi Annan's 2004 plan. At the time, my good old friend Kofi Annan, may he rest in peace, and who was a great Secretary-General, had the courage to follow the advice of his aides and put forward a plan to fine-tune Security Council resolutions for the sake of somewhat limiting the reach of the central government of what was eventually to become a unified state. This meant that the Cypriot Greeks would have less authority.

There was a referendum and people rejected this plan. Since then, we have not seen any meaningful initiatives. I do know, however, that our Turkish neighbours have been openly saying that there are now two equal states and that it cannot work any other way which means that they will have to meet each other halfway. We do not have and cannot offer, let alone impose, any magical solution. Respecting the interests of both nations is a must. There was a time when countries

represented in the UN Security Council were viewed as the guarantors of this process. But as far as I understand, the P5 has not held any meetings on this matter lately, which is due, among other things, to Nicosia's position. I have reasons to believe that the Cypriot leadership has been working on this issue with the United States.

All we want is for the people of Cyprus both in the north and in the south to live the way they want to live. There are many Russian nationals there, mostly in the south, of course, but there are also over 10,000 Russians in the north too. We offer them consular services, even if we do not have a consular mission there, unlike certain other countries like the UK. Still, we have been able to offer consular support there. We want the people of Cyprus to determine the way they want to live their lives.

I know that present-day Cypriot leaders have been partnering with those who do not only want the people of Cyprus to make their choice as soon as possible but seek to impose their vision on Cyprus, which includes joining NATO and amending domestic laws in order to cause nuisances to Russians who transferred their money to this country's banks. In other words, just like with Serbia, they are saying that EU membership comes at a cost. This is what they have been telling Cyprus: go ahead and join NATO and this way all the problems will be solved since all the parties will become allies and everything will be fine and dandy with the north. However, you must do this in a way that there are fewer Russians around so that you forget your shared past. That said, Russia does not interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries.

I know that the matter we are discussing right now has a lot of importance for Cyprus. However, the first part of your question is even more important from a geopolitical perspective. You asked whether we will ever bring the relations on our shared continent back to normal. The very notion of a shared continent has a lot of meaning to it in this context. This shared continent is called Eurasia – the biggest, most populated and probably the richest continent of them all. In terms of its natural resources, it can probably compete with Africa and Greenland.

However, this continent lacks a common transcontinental framework. Latin America has CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Africa has the African Union. There are all kinds of subregional associations in both Africa and Latin America, but at the same time they also have their pancontinental structures. As for Eurasia, it only has subregional frameworks while

lacking a single umbrella organisation that would bring all of them together. Trying to create one would probably be a good idea.

You asked whether we could bring the relations back to normal. Of course, there are several organisations in the Western part of our shared continent, including the OSCE, NATO, the Council of Europe and the European Union. The first two – the OSCE and NATO – are rooted in the Euro-Atlantic security concept which includes North America. Europeans created the European Union for themselves. However, the EU has recently signed an agreement with NATO. Under this document, if a war happens – God forbid – the EU will do what NATO tells it to do in terms of military action. This goes beyond the EU. They have already told Switzerland to go ahead and join the military Schengen. If NATO needs to cross its territory on its way to the Russian Federation, Switzerland would have to ensure that NATO does not need to seek any approvals or authorisations. There is also the Council of Europe. Understandably, the United States is not part of it, since Americans are not Europeans. The US has an observer status there. Still, what the Council of Europe now does, including by setting up all these illegal tribunals and compiling all these registries and coming up with a certain offset mechanism to punish Russia – the United States has been behind all these initiatives.

The OSCE, NATO, and also the EU, the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council of Ministers, where all countries are now NATO members, are not Euro-Asian but Euro-Atlantic organisations. Those who want to keep a rein on Europe are probably interested in maintaining that Euro-Atlantic structure and its dominance.

They have recently become aware that the central and eastern parts of Eurasia are much more attractive economically and in terms of infrastructure, and that the logistics infrastructure projects underway there have global significance. What do NATO and Washington want now? They want above all for the Eurasian continent to become part of the Euro-Atlantic structure. Former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said shortly before retiring that the security of Euro-Atlantic and “Indo-Pacific” is indivisible. In other words, they have turned the principle of indivisible security, which was formulated at the OSCE in 1999, on its head. This principle stipulated that no country’s security should be strengthened at the expense of other countries. Today, they want the military-political development of Eurasia to proceed within Euro-Atlantic parameters.

The “Indo-Pacific” region now includes AUKUS, the Indo-Pacific Four (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea), and the Quad group (Australia, Japan, the United States and India). The Americans aim to add a military-political dimension to it, which our Indian friends understand. Taiwan is being armed, and not only efforts but open actions are being taken to divert the Philippines from ASEAN and involve it in these narrow American structures.

Regarding the Taiwan Strait, the Americans, Europeans and the British claim to respect the formula under which there is only one Chinese state – the People’s Republic of China. However, they also add that nobody must change the status quo, which implies an “independent Taiwan.” This is obvious. The PRC has repeatedly pointed out to the American visitors to Taiwan that this is unacceptable, just as it is unacceptable to receive Taiwanese delegations that travel all over the world and are welcomed as state officials.

President Vladimir Putin spoke in this room about Russia’s stance on the Ukraine settlement on June 14, 2024, under which the issue of [Ukraine’s accession to] NATO must be taken off the table, and the Russian speakers’ language, religious and other rights, which Zelensky’s Nazi regime has outlawed, must be restored. In this room, he also spoke about the importance of creating a Eurasian architecture, which, just like the African Union and CELAC, should be open to all countries on the continent. The discussion of these ideas has been ongoing for about 10 years, since Vladimir Putin advanced the Greater Eurasian Partnership initiative at the first Russia-ASEAN summit. Relevant agreements have been signed between the SCO, the EAEU and ASEAN. We are now coordinating the issue with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

When we say that this economic, transport and logistics partnership must be open to all countries on the continent (making use of the God-given and geographic comparative advantages), we also include the western part of the continent in. Some West European countries have indicated their interest in this initiative. We are promoting the idea of the Greater Eurasian Partnership through the development of ties and the alignment of the existing integration associations’ programmes. This process is underway.

Relations are developing in the same vein within the framework of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, the North-South international transport corridor, the Northern Sea Route, the Gulf-Chittagong route, and the highly promising

Bangladesh-Mumbai-Far East project. This is what we see as the Greater Eurasian Partnership.

As this partnership gathers momentum (there is every indication of that), it will include the creation of competitive and more effective ways of economic exchange and a material foundation for the Eurasian security architecture. A dialogue on this is already underway.

The 2nd Minsk International Conference on Eurasian Security was held in October 2024. It was attended by government members from Serbia and Hungary (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto participated in both conferences), who indicated their interest in that concept. Belarus, as the host country that initiated the conference, is now working to make it a regular event. In fact, the relevant decision has been made. We have supported the idea of drafting a Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the 21st Century for the next conference.

I believe that we should also discuss ways to promote Eurasia's development based on the interests of its countries, as well as its history and geography, rather than from the Atlantic, Pacific or any other perspective. We will do this. I would like to reiterate that this process is open to all countries of the Eurasian continent without exception. Cyprus is an island, but we invite it to join in.

**Question:** You have already talked about a possible meeting between President Putin and President Trump. What part can you see for the European Union and countries like Germany in possible negotiations about the Ukraine conflict?

**Sergey Lavrov:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande told us that they are the guarantors of the Minsk Agreements between Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France. The agreements were developed in the Belarusian capital, where I also had the honour of being present, taking almost 20 hours. The Germans and the French said that it was a peace agreement between Moscow and Kiev, and that they were the guarantors. We had a different interpretation of the participants' statuses, but that was the stance that Germany and France adhered to. Their view was that they had seated us at the table, we reached an agreement, and they played the role of guarantors.

We, the Russian side, took this document to the UN Security Council, which unanimously approved it and requested that the agreements be fulfilled. I will not list the hundreds and thousands of violations by the Kiev regime, including

bombings of civilian facilities and the total blockade of the territory that refused to recognise the state coup. Those violations have been regularly reported to the UN and the OSCE. We have told the guarantors: let's stop this outrage. They would claim that Russia was allegedly firing too, helping the militia.

In December 2022, already in retirement, Angela Merkel said that nobody had intended to fulfil the agreements, neither Germany, nor France, nor then-President of Ukraine Petr Poroshenko who had signed the documents. Apparently, they only needed to win a few years to prepare Ukraine for war.

This matter pertains to the nature of the Yalta-Potsdam system enshrined in the UN Charter. Article 25 states that resolutions of the UN Security Council are mandatory for all members of the organisation. Former Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel said that Article 25 was not an obligatory rule to follow – although she herself was a party to this document, which was also supplemented by a declaration of four countries (Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France) that once again included a statement about a shared space from Lisbon to Vladivostok that we would be building, a statement that France and Germany would help Donbass to set up mobile banking and that they would help remove the blockade and organise talks to resolve gas transportation issues, essentially helping Russia and Ukraine in this respect. None of this was fulfilled.

With all respect for the history of the German people, I believe that it has already made its “contribution” through the administration of the former Chancellor of Germany. President Vladimir Putin has never rejected proposals to establish contacts. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has called him a couple of times. They spoke recently. Olaf Scholz was proud of his own act of courage. But there have also been conversations with other representatives of the European Union. I hope that the President will not be upset with me for revealing secrets but during that conversation, Olaf Scholz said nothing that he does not say publicly every other day: Russia must leave Ukraine. Nothing was said about the origin of the crisis, not a word about the Russian language and the rights of Russians which Zelensky wants to appropriate.

In fact, back in 2021, long before the special military operation, Vladimir Zelensky said that if one feels Russian in Ukraine, one should hit the road and go to Russia for the sake of their children. Just recently, he used Russian obscenities to talk about his attitude towards the peacekeepers who do not want to push Russians to the borders of 1991. This man's sanity is a different matter.

Many have offered their services. Türkiye was a place where an agreement was reached and initialled. Former Prime Minister of Great Britain Boris Johnson (who is now writing some books) prohibited the signing of the agreement that was based on the principles approved in Istanbul. There was a series of meetings in Belarus. President Alexander Lukashenko once again confirmed that, as a neighbour of Russia and Ukraine, he believes that Belarus' interests must be taken into account. We value this approach.

Overall, understanding is growing. This is why there is significant interest in the discussion about a telephone conversation and a meeting between the Presidents of Russia and the United States. Everybody realised (they have known it for a long time but refused to admit it) that it is not about Ukraine but about the fact that Ukraine is being used to weaken Russia in the context of our place in the system of Eurasian security.

There are two aspects of security. The threats at our Western borders, which are one of the biggest original causes of the conflict, must be eliminated. This can only be achieved in the context of broader agreements. We are ready to discuss security guarantees for a country that is now called Ukraine, or for the part of this country that remains undecided in terms of self-determination – unlike Crimea, Donbass and Novorossiya. As important as this aspect is, the Eurasian context will dominate because the Western part of the continent cannot shut itself off from giants like China, India, Russia, the Persian Gulf and the entire South Asia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Hundreds of millions of people populate this region. We must develop the continent to ensure that the issues of its central part, the Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Far East, the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea are handled by the countries of the region rather than by former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who said that NATO would operate there because the alliance's security depends on the Indo-Pacific Region.

How exactly does it depend on this region? He was asked if NATO was still a defence alliance. He said yes. They defend the territory of their members, but in modern conditions, the security of their territory depends on the security in the Indo-Pacific Region. And that is why they will be building NATO infrastructure there, among other things. Alliances will be created there. The United States and South Korea have already created a military alliance with a nuclear component. They confirmed it recently.



This is an interesting aspect for political analysts to consider. How can these things be integrated? I assure you, the Euro-Atlantic approach to Eurasia is an illusion.

**Question:** Could you please provide more information about the Iran-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership treaty? What messages does the treaty convey and are there any concerns from third parties about it?

**Sergey Lavrov:** On January 17, President of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian will visit Russia. This visit has been announced, and our presidents will sign this treaty.

As for whether someone likes it or not, this question is usually posed by our Western colleagues, who consistently seek to find some topic that will suggest that Russia – along with Iran, China and the DPRK – is plotting something against someone round the clock. This treaty, like the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, is not directed against any third country. It is constructive and aims to enable both Russia and Iran, as well as our friends in various parts of the world, to better develop their economies, address social issues, and ensure reliable defence capabilities.

**Question:** We know that Russia is consistently advocating for a multipolar world. After Russia’s withdrawal from the Middle East, a US-led unipolar world seems to be emerging in that region. What steps could be expected from Russia in that region? The local population respects Russia and is expecting it to play a role.

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is indicative of your particular approach to journalism. You begin by making two claims: “Russia has withdrawn from the Middle East” (this is no longer a topic of discussion) and “The United States is running the show as a result.” And then you ask: what should be done?

I disagree with both assertions. We are not leaving the Middle East. Certain events have occurred in Syria, and President Vladimir Putin as well as other Russian representatives have commented on these developments. In many respects, these events occurred because progress in the political process was stalled over the past ten years after Russia deployed its military contingent to Syria at the request of the then President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Bashar al-Assad, and after Russia, Türkiye and Iran established the Astana Format involving a number of Arab countries. There was a temptation to change nothing.

We believed that this approach was wrong. We were urging the Syrian leaders in every possible way to resume the work of the Syrian Constitutional

Committee. The SCC was created at Russia's initiative during the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi in 2018, but its efforts faded away after the first two or three meetings. However, the leaders in Damascus were not eager for it to operate and reach an agreement. After all, this agreement could only imply the sharing of power with opposition groups (other than terrorist factions, of course). There were delays accompanied by escalating social problems. The outrageous US sanctions were stifling Syria's economy. The oil-rich and fertile eastern region of Syria is still occupied by the Americans. The locally produced resources are being used to finance separatist trends in northeastern Syria.

We offered assistance in building bridges with the central authorities to our colleagues from Kurdish organisations. They were rather reluctant, believing that the Americans were there for the long term and that they would be creating a quasi-state of their own. We tried to convince them that neither Türkiye nor Iraq would ever allow the establishment of a Kurdish state. The Kurdish issue has the potential to destabilise the entire region. We were in favour of holding a special discussion on how to reliably ensure Kurdish rights in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Türkiye.

On the one hand, Damascus was not particularly enthusiastic about holding talks. Neither were the Kurds, on the other. There were also few contacts between different platforms (Moscow, Cairo, Istanbul) mentioned by the UN Security Council as direct participants in the settlement process. All of this led to a vacuum, in which an explosion occurred. Reality must be accepted for what it is.

The Russian Embassy has not left Damascus. It is maintaining regular contacts. We want to be useful in the context of efforts to normalise the situation, something that requires an inclusive national dialogue in Syria with the participation of all political, ethnic and religious forces, as well as all external players.

I have had discussions with our colleagues from Türkiye and Gulf countries. They have held a second meeting (after Jordan) in Saudi Arabia, which was attended by Arab countries, Türkiye, and certain Western states. They proceed from the premise that the process should necessarily involve Russia, China, and Iran, if they genuinely want to initiate a reliable process aimed at achieving a stable outcome, rather than get embroiled in settling scores with their rivals in Syria. We are open to this dialogue. The Astana Format can also play a significant role,

especially since Türkiye, Russia and Iran are cooperating with the Three (Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq). Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar are also showing interest.

During my meeting with UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen in Doha on December 7, 2024, Mr Pedersen said that it was urgent to convene an international conference with the participation of all Syrians and external stakeholders. We are waiting for this to happen.

**Question:** The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States will take place next Monday. What are your expectations of the incoming team in the context of Russian-US relations?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We are waiting for the new team to formulate their approach to international affairs. I am aware of President Trump's wishes. He has spoken about them. We are also aware of his great responsibility for the state of affairs in his own country, considering his "inheritance," including in Los Angeles, California. The situation of people there is horrible. President Trump has also announced that his other priority will be to restore order in the field of migration. Practical measures have been put forth.

As he said, he needs to occupy the office first. At this stage, all the explanations, initiatives and deliberations are having no practical value. We need to wait until the new administration formulates their official stance. The Americans are waiting for this, considering the numerous problems Joe Biden has left behind, just as those who would like the United States to play a constructive role in crisis situations on the international stage.

**Question:** The Russian Maritime Doctrine regards the Indian Ocean as an area of its strategic interests. How could Pakistan use its relations with SCO and BRICS countries within that doctrine to promote safe and mutually beneficial cooperation? What can you say about current Russia-Pakistan relations?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Our relations are developing progressively. The current period is the most positive one in many decades. There are also projects aimed at restoring the facilities that were created in the Pakistani economy during the Soviet period.

There is a mutual interest in practical interaction in fighting terrorism. Pakistan is suffering from it as well. The fight against terrorism also calls for joining efforts with your Afghan neighbours, India and all SCO countries, because evil people are using Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan for planning and implementing their criminal projects.

The SCO has an anti-terrorist structure. It is working well. We are exchanging information. Since terrorism financing is closely connected with drug trafficking as a form of organised crime, we have been promoting in the past years the idea of creating a common centre for combating new threats such as terrorism, drug trafficking, organised crime, and human trafficking. We will start implementing this idea this year.

I would like to emphasise that all organisational measures are important, but it is even more important to strengthen trust within the SCO in the format that is currently working on Afghanistan (Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran). We believe that it would be beneficial to involve India in it. The SCO and the formats focused on Afghanistan, such as the Moscow Format of Consultations on Afghanistan, are an additional platform where Pakistan, India and China would be able to interact more closely, trying to promote mutual understanding, asking questions of concern to them, and receiving and analysing the answers. We are ready to help promote this process. It will be in the interests of your countries, our region and the SCO.

**Question:** Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin is currently in Hanoi on an official visit. It is focused on Russia's participation in the construction of the Ninh Thuan 1 nuclear power plant. How would a positive settlement of this issue change Russia-Vietnam relations?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The main change in our bilateral relations would be a positive decision on the nuclear power plant project. One more joint project would be added to our bilateral relations. We have many joint projects with Vietnam, for example, the Tropical Centre, which is being modernised and will work more effectively. There are also joint projects in the hydrocarbons market (Rusvietpetro and Vietsovpetro are working in each other's territories) and in the sphere of nuclear power generation. These projects involve high technologies. President Putin pointed out on many occasions that we do not just build power plants and subsequently use them but also create a new industry in the countries where we do this, including train personnel for them.

Such agreements can include various commercial aspects. For example, Russia will own the power plant we are building in Türkiye. We will supply electricity and pay taxes there. Other projects stipulate parity ownership with the home country. There can be different formats, but it is a fact that our relations will be enriched with one more high-tech project.

We have talked about Ukraine today. Vietnam has announced its readiness to host negotiations. We are grateful for this. We appreciate this position of our Vietnamese friends. I cannot comment on this now because no practical proposals have been made, and the tasks we are tackling must be carried through.

**Question:** In your opinion, is there a possibility of further deterioration in Russian-Japanese relations after Donald Trump's inauguration, considering his intention to strengthen the US-Japanese alliance? Is this cause for concern for Russia? Which areas of Russian-Japanese relations are likely to deteriorate during Trump's presidency?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The question is whether it is possible to sink even lower and deeper.

I cannot respond to it because all the downward movement was initiated by our Japanese neighbours: the destruction of almost everything, including regular, respectful political dialogue at the highest and high levels. Russia has made no moves in this direction.

We have long lost hope that Western countries will fulfil their promises and obligations, including NATO's non-expansion to the east, refraining from luring Ukraine into NATO, and preventing Nazism, which began to eradicate all things Russian in Ukraine. Everyone is keeping silent on this issue despite our persistent reminders. Despite the Minsk agreements, they bombed these people, who should have been granted a special status in accordance with the UN Security Council's resolutions. After years of explaining this and encountering not just a lack of understanding but deafness, simply an unwillingness to listen, we ultimately launched the special military operation to protect our security interests and the interests of the Russian people in Ukraine. In response, Japan was immediately ordered to join the sanctions. It complied. That's the reality.

Occasionally, we receive signals that they are willing to resume dialogue on a peace treaty, along with requests to allow their citizens to visit the islands for cultural reasons. But it's all handled in such an unserious manner, like someone just showing up and saying, "Oh, by the way, we were asked to pass this along." There's no "Dear so-and-so." It's not there. It's just, "Here you go; now work on it."

Japan has always stood out for its delicate approach to life, from its cuisine to various rituals. This subtlety in its relationship with us seems to have vanished. However, there are some exceptions. At least we have never made culture, sport or

joint educational projects a victim of politics. Never. We appreciate that, despite everything, Japan hosts tours involving Russian performers called the Days of Russian Culture in Japan every autumn. Not every country shows such courage.

If this particular quality – and I mean this in regard to your employers and their government, not you personally – could be applied to demonstrate a sense of dignity, I believe it would be in the best interests of the Japanese people.

**Question:** You and your colleagues from the Government have compiled a list of unfriendly countries and territories, which includes the island of Taiwan. I understand that this decision reflects the de facto situation, but on paper it appears that a piece of friendly China has been designated as unfriendly. Has the Chinese side commented on this? What can you say about this?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The Moscow-Taipei Coordination Commission for Economic and Cultural Cooperation in Taipei functions similarly to our embassies in countries that have imposed sanctions on us. Taiwan has imposed sanctions on us as well. That is the criterion we were guided by.

It may sound a bit cumbersome, but we consider the governments of the countries that have joined the sanctions unfriendly. There is no such thing as unfriendly countries or peoples for us.

Our Chinese friends are fully aware of this state of affairs.

**Question (retranslated from English):** As you are aware, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is trying to establish a special relationship with Donald Trump. If Mr Trump initiates a new policy implying a dialogue with Russia and puts forward new initiatives, what role could Italy play in this scenario? Could the Italian government be the first to adopt a new approach towards Russia?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We cannot tell sovereign governments what to do, all the more so as these sovereign governments keep telling us what to do.

Your question reflects a deeply rooted assumption that with Donald Trump in the White House everyone will need to choose sides and decide whether they are for Trump or against Trump. President Trump will assume office, tell you what to do and, perhaps, Italy's role in the ongoing developments surrounding Ukraine and European affairs will become clear.

**Question:** How can you describe 2024 in the context of Russian-Azerbaijani relations? What can you say about 2025? What are your plans and prospects?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I assess Russian-Azerbaijani relations very highly. They are based on trust. President Vladimir Putin and President Ilham Aliyev maintain

regular communication, and there is no such thing as off-limits topics in our relations.

The two presidents encourage their respective governments to seek new mutually beneficial projects. This includes the international North-South transport corridor and other transport projects in the Caucasus and nearby, which includes the Caspian Sea's shallowing. We are creating a bilateral working group and plan to expand it to include all five Caspian littoral states.

We cooperate closely in the international arena. We maintain a dialogue and undertake practical steps to expand our capabilities in matters of security and combatting terrorism and organised crime. Our respective armed forces and intelligence agencies interact as well. This structured relationship allows us to promptly address any and all issues based on a thorough examination of all facts, as in incidents such as the accidental downing of our helicopter during the Second Karabakh War, or the plane crash in Aktau involving an Azerbaijani airplane. We appreciated the fact that our Azerbaijani friends immediately supported Russia's participation in the investigations, considering all factors. A special meeting took place in Brazil, during which black boxes were opened. Their contents have provided meaningful information, reaffirming the importance of a full investigation rather than fueling media speculation based on information that is not confirmed by the black box recordings.

I have a close working relationship with my counterpart and friend, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov. Our respective foreign ministries maintain regular contacts on all foreign policy matters from the UN and OSCE to theme-based issues like climate change, especially given Baku's hosting of the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Our relations are fulfilling and rely on mutual trust. We expect them to expand even more across all areas in 2025.

**Question:** How might convergence between Armenia and the United States and the EU affect security and the overall situation in the South Caucasus?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Inevitably, the resolution of regional issues will involve neighbouring states, which is what Russia, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Iran have been saying all along.

I mentioned that we share a common continent with distinct regions, such as Central Asia, the Caucasus, the South Caucasus, Siberia, South Asia, and the Far East. When far-flung countries that live according to their own traditions and see

history only in its colonial dimension claim they will “help” everyone, I see no issue here dialogue-wise. However, I find it hard to understand their claims that an EU mission will ensure security in the Syunik region.

That is why President Erdogan of Türkiye and Russia strongly supported President Aliyev’s initiative to establish a 3+3 format that includes three South Caucasus countries, namely, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, and their three neighbours, Russia, Türkiye, and Iran. The parties have had their initial meetings. Our Georgian neighbours have yet to take their seat at the table, where we plan to discuss problems haunting that region. I believe this is a more productive format.

I heard that Azerbaijan and Armenia are close to agreeing on a peace treaty. Of course, two remaining issues can hardly remain unresolved and need to be answered in the affirmative or in the negative. The EU has right away stated its willingness to assist.

Ultimately, it is up to Azerbaijan and Armenia to decide where to sign the document once it is finalised. The efforts of Brussels and Washington to take credit for that only highlight their desire to let everyone know who the boss is.

**Question:** I would like to express my gratitude to you and the ministry for your help in organising the Dialogue on Fakes forum, which was held in November 2024. At the forum, we announced the creation of the International Fact-Checking Association.

It is our view that the official opinion of the Western governments does not necessarily coincide with what the people from these countries believe. This has actually been confirmed here. Therefore, embracing a policy of maximum openness, we were very pleased to invite representatives of Western countries and experts from unfriendly EU countries and the United States to participate in the forum and to join our association. Do you think this is a reasonable strategy, or should we focus on friendly countries for greater efficiency?

**Sergey Lavrov:** No, I would not fence off anyone. This is what makes our information and awareness work different – Maria Zakharova is here to keep me honest.

When this hysteria was just beginning (even before the special military operation), French President Emmanuel Macron visited Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Macron, and both held informal dinners with an almost homely ambiance. Back then, we asked the French why Sputnik and RT were not accredited at the Elysee Palace. We were told that those were not media outlets;



those were propaganda tools. I am not kidding. They were never accredited there, were they?

**Maria Zakharova:** They were not allowed to attend events. They were invited but not allowed in.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Here is an example we have been citing. This was in the 1990s, when the initial euphoria had slightly subsided, but still showed in foreign relations. In the autumn of 1990, an OSCE conference was held in Paris. The participants adopted numerous documents, including the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and a document on access to information, which France and other EU members, Western countries were strongly pushing for. That document said that all governments had an obligation to enable their people to access all information, whether created domestically or coming from abroad. They wanted to support our perestroika, which was smashing all barriers, etc. Now, suddenly, they are blocking our channels, imposing bans on them (as advanced users say). We asked the French, how is this possible? You have the OSCE, and the documents you helped write. They never listened and they are refusing to listen now.

We also have certain restrictions, but they are clearly regulated. They deal with socially dangerous content, primarily concerning children and our traditional values. The West, however, is trying to suppress any information that is critical of their authorities – but this goes beyond criticism and includes information which is based on facts.

As for fact-checking, I realise that many Anglicisms are difficult to replace. They are expressive and concise. But ‘fact-checking’ does not seem like a difficult combination to pronounce.

I believe that there is no need to be afraid. Let them come and see, and listen. Several foreign correspondents are present here, while elsewhere journalists are denied access. Am I right, Ms Zakharova?

**Maria Zakharova:** We are open to everyone.

**Sergey Lavrov:** I mean, some were not allowed to attend by their editorial boards.

**Maria Zakharova:** This is true. Certain publications do not allow their correspondents to attend. German reporters told us that they were not permitted.

**Sergey Lavrov:** What are they doing in Russia then?

**Maria Zakharova:** They are “working.”

I see that Komsomolskaya Pravda is present. France has just recently denied accreditation to another Komsomolskaya Pravda correspondent, by the way.

**Question:** Recently, we received a letter from Miroslava, a 12-year-old student from Malta. Despite her young age, she holds an active civic stance and a deep admiration for Russia, of which she is proud. She has asked me to pose a question to you that she deems significant: “At school, I occasionally encounter biased attitudes towards Russia from my teachers. I believe other children in Europe may often hear misinformation about Russia. Could you please advise how to address such situations?”

**Sergey Lavrov:** We no longer live in the era of paper.

The internet, social networks, and websites, including those of our Ministry, Russian museums, the Russian State Library, and our other substantial library organisations, all have their own websites. It is unlikely they will be censored there.

I would simply inquire if she has access to such resources. If not, perhaps we could provide her with a computer through the Wish Tree programme and send it to her as a gift.

**Question:** The year 2024 saw the continued strengthening of the most uncompromising far-right, verging on Nazi, political forces in various parts of the world, especially in Europe. These entities completely dismiss rationality and reject principles of multilateralism, peaceful coexistence, state sovereignty, and peoples’ self-determination. How does Russia perceive these new socio-political trends, and what are the practical possibilities for altering this situation?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I would like to clarify. You mentioned “right-wing radical forces that categorically reject equal rights and the principle of peoples’ self-determination?” Where exactly is this occurring? Are you referring to the West?

**Question:** Yes, in the West, specifically in Western Europe, Germany, and France. These right-wing radical forces have become more active.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Are you referring to the Alternative for Germany and the National Rally?

**Question:** Among others, yes.

**Sergey Lavrov:** The Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance?

**Question:** No.

**Sergey Lavrov:** The Alternative for Germany and the National Rally are mainstream parliamentary parties. People vote for them, and the percentage of their support is increasing.

I have engaged with representatives from both the AfD and the National Rally. Frankly, I cannot accuse them of opposing the right of peoples to self-determination. Quite the opposite, I believe. Both the AfD, the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, and the National Rally in France seek to restore national self-determination and self-awareness among the Germans and the French. They argue that much of this has been usurped by Brussels bureaucracy. It is challenging for me to speculate in that context.

Moreover, I would not say they are proposing destructive programmes. If you provide some examples, I can offer more detailed comments.

Members of the Alternative for Germany sometimes participate in political talk shows on television, articulating thoughts primarily aimed at resolving issues in Russian-German relations. They discuss well-known facts that for decades, if not centuries, have illustrated the Anglo-Saxon intent to prevent the synergy of Russian and German potentials.

I find a lot of rationality in their statements. Therefore, if there are specific instances that lead you to such conclusions, I would be willing to comment on them.

**Question:** What are Russia's main projects and priorities in Latin America for the coming year?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We regard Latin America as one of the significant poles of the emerging multipolar world order. Our relationships with nearly all countries in the region are diverse.

This includes our Brazilian friends, who collaborate with us not only bilaterally but also within the BRICS framework. Brazil has now assumed the chairmanship of this group from us, marking a promising avenue. We have a bilateral agenda with Brazil encompassing economic, military, and technical spheres, among others.

Our embassy in Argentina is actively engaged, and we are currently establishing relations with President Javier Milei and his new administration to explore new opportunities.

Our principal partners, friends, and allies include Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua.

We are closely monitoring developments in Bolivia concerning the election campaign, noting that the United States is once again attempting to interfere and create divisions among progressive forces in the country. This is of little surprise.

We actively support CELAC, particularly after President Lula da Silva's leadership invigorated the organisation, with Brazil not only participating but also seeking to take the initiative. This includes President Lula da Silva's proposal to develop alternative payment platforms to reduce dependence on the dollar's dominant position. These are pragmatic considerations. We maintain relationships with MERCOSUR, UNASUR, the Central American Integration System, ALBA, and many others.

Russia was represented at the inauguration of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, where productive discussions took place between our State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin and the President.

I anticipate a fruitful year in our bilateral relations.

**Question:** On the initiative of the Movement of the First, children have spearheaded an idea to create an international association of children's organisations. How important are these organisations? How can children contribute to international politics? What advice can you give us on how to interact effectively?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We have many children's organisations that are reviving, expanding, and adapting our past experiences (such as the Little Octobrist, Pioneer, and Komsomol movements) to modern-day realities. I believe this is a useful initiative.

I have fond memories of my Pioneer and Komsomol years. My warmest memories - perhaps this will be helpful - include practical activities such as potato harvesting, hikes, concerts, and skits which were great activities for team building. Alongside serious work (lectures are, of course, indispensable), there was what is now called "talks of what matters" at schools which is mandatory as well. However, it should be interspersed with fun activities.

I haven't heard about the Movement of the First's initiative to create a network of youth and children's organisations. Send us information about your plans so that we can understand what this is about, we will do whatever we can. For example, we could help organise interactions with young people of similar age and interests, including introducing them to foreign policy basics.

**Question:** Researchers from St Petersburg asked us to raise a question about Russian-Moroccan relations. Morocco sees itself as the gateway to Africa. We'd like to hear your perspective on Russia-Morocco relations.

**Sergey Lavrov:** Morocco is a friendly country. In December 2023, we held a session of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum in Marrakech, Morocco. The event was organised brilliantly, and there was a reception with the Prime Minister. We have good plans. We assist Morocco in addressing issues within the purview of the Foreign Ministry, primarily the Western Sahara issue which must be dealt with based on UN Security Council resolutions.

The topic of self-determination has come up several times today. About 40 years ago, the UN Security Council decided that the issue of Western Sahara's status should be resolved through self-determination of the Sahrawi people. At that time, I was working in New York. There was a UN Secretary-General special envoy tasked with organising a referendum, James Baker, the former US Secretary of State. He drafted detailed procedures on how votes should be counted and how tribal elders should select participants for the referendum. Everything appeared to be on track. Yet, things haven't budged in 40 years. This is a challenge for Morocco.

During Donald Trump's first term in office, his administration unilaterally declared Western Sahara part of Morocco. Now, we face similar situation with Greenland and the Panama Canal. These issues can be resolved only through bilateral efforts. Any other approach will just sow the seeds of tempest.

It is critical to seek mutually acceptable arrangements. We know how important this issue is for Morocco and will make every effort to assist it. However, the matter can only be resolved through mutual consent without imposing anything on either side.

**Question:** And the second question. Our Foreign Ministry is seen as a guardian of international security on Earth. We hold your work in high regard. However, the issue of global environmental security comes to the fore, as Russia is perceived as a donor to Earth's environment, while the United States is viewed as an anti-environmental "vampire," depleting natural resources for its own gain. With regard to planetary pollution, there are now approximately 170 million pieces of space debris in near-Earth orbit. Regardless of Elon Musk's efforts, in 20 years, none of the space-faring nations will be able to launch satellites or rockets into space.

Would it be appropriate for our Foreign Ministry, you personally, Mr Lavrov, and President Vladimir Putin, to propose an initiative to the new US administration,

President Trump, and all space-faring nations to undertake a joint environmental effort to find solutions to clean up near-Earth space?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The matter of space debris has been under discussion for quite some time. There is a Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and this is one of the subjects they are working on. For obvious reasons, I am not an expert in this area. I am aware that debris is detrimental, but scientists and experts are engaged in discussions about specific practical solutions to this issue. I am confident that such information is readily accessible online.

**Question:** I still have a German SIM card in my phone. The restrictions you mentioned, which were enforced in Germany regarding Russian resources, remain in place. These are rigidly linked to the phone number.

However, we are not solely discussing restrictions but also the challenges faced by Russian journalists working in Western countries. Could you please elucidate what exactly is causing discomfort or irritation among the Western authorities' representatives there, and what instigates such challenges? Is there any correlation between these issues and the trajectory of the special military operation, specifically the achievements of the Russian armed forces?

**Sergey Lavrov:** It is fortunate that you have raised this point. One of the initial questions was also about journalists. As I have mentioned previously, unlike Western authorities, we have never sought to restrict the work of journalists. Maria Zakharova can attest to my honesty in this regard. Long before the special military operation, our journalists faced harassment and some were even expelled or accused of espionage. For more than a year, we did not retaliate. Is that correct?

**Maria Zakharova:** Yes. In 2017, the FARA law was applied to Russia Today.

**Sergey Lavrov:** When asked why our response was so restrained, we explained that we did not wish to adopt the saying "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

We began responding after a year and a half or two years when it became absolutely untenable to ignore this persistent irritation, as you described it, regarding the prohibition of our correspondents' work.

It is difficult to state anything beyond the obvious: they do not wish to acknowledge the truth or allow their populations to deviate from the narrative crafted about Russian "aggression," "atrocities," and "the Holy Innocents killed by Russian soldiers." This is likely an effort to preserve those myths, would you not agree? There is little more to add.

**Question:** The second question concerns gas. The operator of Nord Stream 2 in Switzerland is reportedly facing bankruptcy this spring and may be auctioned off. Western media suggest that American investors are likely to acquire it. Could you comment on this peculiar situation, particularly in light of the explosions and the evasive behaviour of Scholz & Co?

**Sergey Lavrov:** Regarding the second question, I did not read in Western media that following bankruptcy – which is expected to occur according to the established procedures – it would be sold to Americans. It was, in fact, President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic who made such a prediction on New Year’s Eve.

Historically, exploitation has been a method by which Western countries have sustained themselves at the expense of others since colonial times and the era of slavery.



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