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2018 FIFA World Cup opening

The opening ceremony of the 2018 FIFA World Cup took place yesterday at Luzhniki Stadium, which accommodated over 78,000 fans.

The ceremony was beautiful and unforgettable. I would like to give you some facts and figures related to the preparations for this sports festival.

It is still a long way to go to the final match, which will take place on July 15 at that same stadium, but all the world's media are noting the scale and quality and the amazing atmosphere of the event organised by Russia.

The tournament will accommodate matches at 12 stadiums, whose total capacity is some 579,000 seats, in 11 Russian cities: Moscow, St Petersburg, Samara, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Saransk, Volgograd, Kaliningrad, Kazan, Rostov-on-Don and Sochi.

Over 2 million fans from all over the world have come to this sports event. Teams from 32 countries will compete for the title of world champion. The tournament's official mascot is my co-host, Zabivaka the Wolf, and the Telstar 18 official game ball has already visited the International Space Station.

The Organising Committee has reported about the opening of the international police cooperation centre to ensure safety at the tournament. It will comprise 150 police officers from 32 participating countries.

Since most of our guests will stay in Moscow, the city has taken unprecedented measures to provide them with a comfortable stay and, of course, safety. Shuttle buses will service fans on match days. Over 100 large and extra-large buses with special stickers and the tournament logo will operate on 8 routes. Public transit, Aeroexpress and commuter trains will be free for fans. Metro workers and municipal infrastructure staff have taken English classes. Some 1,453 hotels that can accommodate 201,500 people have been categorised; 1.4 million free Moscow guidebooks have been issued. They can be obtained in hotels, airports and railway stations.

A total of 5,700 buses, trams, trolleybuses and metro cars with screens for match broadcasting were purchased for the World Cup. I would like to note that this information is available on the official website of the Organising Committee. So I am talking about them to draw your attention to the committee's information resources. Please visit the website and get all the information firsthand.

I also would like to say that no less than 8,700 volunteers will assist guests in Moscow, the main host city, which will host 12 matches, including the semi-final and final matches. Guests will be offered some 70 events and 20 themed museum exhibitions to choose from. There will be 32 permanent ambulance centres, 55 ambulance crews and 600 medical staff. A large number of doctors will be assisting fans during the matches.

Over 180 medical offices will be established at the World Cup facilities; 16,500 stewards have been selected and trained to serve fans at 64 tournament matches. In all, 200,000 people underwent additional or further training.

In the host cities, 12 airports have been renovated; Rostov-on-Don has received a new airport. Seven new stadiums and 27 hotels have been built.

Over 17,000 volunteers of the Russia 2018 Local Organising Committee are working at the tournament; 7 percent of them are foreigners from 112 countries, and 18,000 city volunteers. In all, the committee received 177,000 volunteer applications. Interestingly, the average age of the volunteers is 24 years, while the oldest volunteer is 80 years old.

728 free trains with a total of 445,000 seats will run between the host cities. Roughly, the distance between Kaliningrad and Yekaterinburg, the westernmost and the easternmost host cities, is 2,489 kilometres. It is a huge distance, especially by European standards; it unites the European and Asian parts of the continent.

The host cities will have 536 cultural events.

The City Press Centres are open in all host cities. The expected television audience of the tournament is 3 billion people. The matches will be broadcast by 196 TV companies in 212 countries. The television audience of the final match in Moscow on July 15 will exceed half of the planet's population.

All host cities have unique venues for the FIFA Fan Fest, which will be open not only on match days, but during the entire tournament. Their total capacity is 217,000 people. They have large screens and offer a huge number of services, from live broadcasts of the matches and FIFA partner stands to food and children's entertainment options. Entry is free and does not require any additional documents.

In conclusion, some economic information. The long-term annual effect of the 2018 World Cup for Russia's GDP will be 150-210 billion roubles over the next five years.

We hope that your coverage will be objective. We are glad that the myths set loose prior to large international events in Moscow are being dispelled. People can see for themselves how this major international sports event is organised.

Once again, welcome!

Reporters arriving in Russia to cover the World Cup 2018

We would like to note high interest shown by the reporters and bloggers in obtaining accreditation with the City Press Centres set up in each host city of the 2018 World Cup. About 10,000 applications have so far been submitted to the City Press Centres operated by Rossiya Segodnya, about 2,500 of which are from foreign countries.

I would like to note that the City Press Centres have been created specifically for media members who do not have official FIFA accreditation, as well as for the independent reporters and bloggers who plan to carry out their professional activities in Russia to cover the World Cup. To reiterate, every host city of the World Cup has such press centres.

City Press Centres accommodate regular press conferences, briefings and video conferences. Reporters can also attend tours and workshops. Presentation areas on local regions featuring the achievements of a particular city or region are an important function of the press centres. There are plans to broadcast matches live.

The accreditation badge of the City Press Centres allows the reporters to carry out their professional activities in 17 Russian regions (in the regions that are home to 11 cities hosting the World Cup, as well as six regions that accommodate the training camps of national teams).

The rules of media accreditation, as well as the addresses and working hours of the press centres are available at <https://www.fifa.com/ru/mediaservices>. Information about press centres is also available on the Foreign Ministry's official website.

In the run-up to the World Cup, there's been a noticeable increase in interest from foreign media wishing to send their special correspondents to Russia. This category of journalists is either not accredited by FIFA and City Press Centres, or wants to be additionally accredited by the Foreign Ministry. To date, over 700 requests for reporter certificates have been filed with our Ministry's press centre, which we are handling and issuing as they become available.

Onsite briefing of the Russian Foreign Ministry's spokesperson

We invite you to visit one of the City Press Centres, where you can also attend a briefing by a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

The next briefing will be held on June 20 in one of the cities hosting the World Cup. In the near future, we will post relevant information about the accreditation rules so that you can attend our briefing.

The city will be determined later, so keep an eye out for further information.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres's visit to Russia

On June 20-21, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres will visit Russia at the invitation of President Putin.

During the visit, he will meet with President Putin and have talks with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Plans are in place for the UN Secretary General to meet with the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

Kirill. In addition, Guterres will speak at the Valdai International Discussion Club and attend a World Cup match. One can say that he had already visited it virtually at a fan zone specially organised at the request of the Russian Federation at the UN headquarters in New York. You saw photos and videos yesterday showing the member countries and their permanent representatives, delegations, the UN Secretary General and the staff of the Secretariat celebrating the World Cup opening. To my knowledge, nothing like that has ever taken place at the UN Secretariat. You can safely say that this was the first time ever. Yesterday, representatives of the UN Security Council member countries held a meeting wearing official jerseys of their national teams. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres also donned a sports outfit for the occasion. This is another powerful signal to the world that politics should help sport rather than interfere with it. The issue is about how we really can and should unite for the events that are truly important for the world, our planet and our peoples.

The agenda of the talks at the Foreign Ministry includes a discussion of the current state of international relations, including the crisis of "multilateralism" in international diplomacy, the role of the UN Security Council in resolving the most pressing international and regional problems, including Syria, as well as other issues of Russia's relations with the United Nations, including in the context of the 70th anniversary of UN activities in Russia.

Developments in Syria

On the whole, the situation in Syria remains complicated. To enhance the ceasefire, Russian service members continue to support local reconciliation and wage a resolute struggle against terrorism. In cooperation with the Syrian Government, they are carrying out measures of post-conflict settlement in the provinces of Hama and Homs. Military police are maintaining security, law and order on the liberated territories in the provinces of Damascus, Hama and Homs. Engineer-sapper units trained by Russian specialists are lifting mines in Eastern Ghouta.

Russian military experts consider the situation in the de-escalation zones to be stable.

The Syrian authorities are consistently working to normalise the humanitarian situation and overcome the consequences of hostilities in those places where they were waged. Thus, in Arbil in Eastern Ghouta, the people receive regular medical aid, retail trade has been resumed and several schools have opened their doors to pupils. Local government agencies and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have jointly organised the delivery of food and drinking water to the needy. Energy experts are replacing a high voltage transmission line in Homs Province.

Restoration of the destroyed socio-economic infrastructure and peaceful life are motivating thousands of people to return home.

Politically, efforts are continued to establish a Constitutional Committee under UN aegis and to launch the work on Syria's Fundamental Law in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and with account of the results of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi.

Military successes by the Syrian Government in the anti-terrorist struggle and promotion of the political settlement of the Syrian crisis are compelling the involved external forces to reconsider their policy. We are receiving signals that some countries that earlier demanded the replacement of the Bashar Al-Assad "regime" have now alleviated their positions.

Meanwhile, illegitimate foreign military presence still exists in Syria. Attempts to set up parallel government bodies are still being made in the regions controlled by outside forces. The US-led "coalition" is still prone to dividing terrorists into "bad guys" and "not so bad guys."

As we have noted more than once, such approaches do not help reach a political solution and stabilisation. They are threatening Syria's territorial integrity, preserving the potential for conflict and creating prerequisites for the emergence of new threats to regional and global security.

We would like to emphasise again that a peaceful settlement in Syria should be making progress. Stagnation in this process is extremely dangerous because it can reduce to nothing the substantial achievements in the struggle against the terrorists in the past few months. This should not be allowed to happen.

Situation with regard to Syria's chairmanship at the Conference on Disarmament

The situation at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva causes us grave concern.

In our view, the USA and Israel have taken an absolutely destructive stance by actually announcing a boycott of the CD and its auxiliary bodies in order to obstruct the normal work of the forum during Syria's chairmanship (May 28 to June 24). In particular, they have minimised their attendance of CD plenary meetings, totally refused to attend unofficial events on the sidelines of the Conference and hold bilateral contacts with the Syrian delegation. Alongside with their allies (Australia, Bulgaria, the UK, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Turkey, France, South Korea, Japan) they are intentionally trying to politicise CD's work. Allegations are constantly voiced of "numerous facts" of the use of chemical weapons by Damascus against their own population and that they are violating their obligations under the CWC as well as NPT (including the Agreement with the IAEA on guarantees), while absolutely irresponsible statements are made on Syria's "lacking" the "moral right" and "political legitimacy" to hold the chairmanship. This looks like a novelty in international law. For example, Syria is entitled to be a UN member and its Permanent Representative may speak at the UNSC meetings, but Syria may not chair the CD. Who made this up?

All that occurs within the Geneva platform at the CD and is accompanied by massive propaganda. Unfortunately, international and Swiss media are also engaged in this. We understand it to be the sabotaging of CD's activities over an entire month, much to the detriment of the efforts taken – including with direct involvement of Russia and Syria – on finding a mutually acceptable consensus on the CD's work Programme for bringing the activities of this forum back to meaningful activity.

We would like to stress the unacceptability of such engineered stonewalling of Syria by the western nations. It is possible that our US colleagues are now trying to blame someone else again for the failures of the Conference's work. Unfortunately, we see Washington choosing to increasingly apply such manipulations, including on the platforms of international organisations. For example, they do not even conceal at the CD how disarmament issues are politicised and that the very work of this body is boycotted. It may be not so apparent on other platforms, but we see all that at the OPCW.

OPCW Mission's report on establishing facts of the use of chemical weapons in Ltamenah, Syria, on March 24 and 25, 2017

We have noted the report issued by the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) released by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on chemical incidents in Ltamenah, Hama province, Syria, on March 24 and 25, 2017. Following a remote study of the data – which, unfortunately, has become a tradition – obtained from some NGOs, from open sources of "limited medical reports" and by questioning some sort of "witnesses", the FFM came to the conclusion that sarin and chlorine were "very likely" used as a chemical weapon in Ltamenah. "Very likely" has become an indecent phrase, which is nowadays used to cloak everything unfolding in international relations.

Even upon the first reading it becomes obvious that the Mission's work methods are still far from what is required of them on sampling and analysing data on the presumed use of chemical agents, as is

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proscribed in the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the OPCW. The report claims that the FFM was unable to go to Ltamenah, which was back then controlled by the opposition and thus could not take samples and interview witnesses. It was not stated whether any talks were held at all, and if they were, with whom, and why the FFM was denied access to the chemical incident site in violation of Clause 6 of UNSC Resolution 2209.

The FFM's investigation was once again based on "physical evidence" provided by anonymous NGOs operating in the militant-controlled territory. This is a gross violation of the OPCW's basic principle, which is designed to ensure the chain of custody of evidence.

A question arises why the report was released a year after the chemical attacks "were registered" and what the value of sample analysis is after such a long time.

I would like to remind to you that a report on another case of "alleged" use of chemical weapons in Ltamenah on March 30, 2017 was "cooked up" right on time for the November meeting of the UNCS, which was to consider the extending the FFM mandate, and in doing so has completely discredited itself. Our western colleagues back then, on a tip from the OPCW Technical Secretariat, insisted on releasing another document with over 60 alleged incidents, which have presumably been known since December 2015. It is natural that nothing surfaced and could not have surfaced. As to the current piece which unequivocally points at the presumably Syrian origin of the sarin used on March 24 of last year, it was tailored to emerge exactly ahead of the special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the CWC (The Hague, June 26-18). It is a classical scheme whereby materials prepared for events scheduled to discuss such issues are customised. These attempts at crude and propagandistic alignment – not at conducting an investigation and a clear process for finding the truth – have instead become the forceful alignment of materials to coincide with scheduled events. All that occurs is the fabrication of some misinformation and compilation of facts and fakes. It is the exact document needed by those western countries attempting to implement their initiative on granting the OPCW attributive function.

It will be totally unsurprising that ahead of the Conference a respective report will emerge on the chemical incident in Douma which will contradict the reliable information obtained by the Russian military on the staged character of the incident. It is evident for us that Washington, in particular, was trying in every possible way to justify its aggression against Syria on the night of April 14. Our stand on that issue is well known.

The Russian Federation's approach remains unchanged – the real perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons must be identified and brought to account. To do that, full-fledged investigations in full compliance with CWC standards are needed rather than their politicised imitation, or even worse – tailoring the results of the investigation to reflect conclusions already made in Washington, London or Paris. Guided by these considerations, the Russian side insists on improving FFM's performance and bringing it in conformity with CWC standards. We also urge our western partners to adopt the draft UNSC Resolution on establishing a truly impartial and highly professional investigative body. Unfortunately, all our initiatives are regularly blocked by the Western Three of the UNSC permanent members.

Voting on the Palestinian Resolution at the UN General Assembly

On June 13, the special session resumed by the UN General Assembly accepted a draft resolution on the situation around the Gaza Strip and international protection of the Palestinian population put forward by a group of Arab and Muslim countries. It was supported by 120 states, including the Russian Federation. Only eight states, including the United States, voted against it. Earlier, on June 1, the UN Security Council considered a similar draft. However, it was not adopted because the US delegation used its veto and alone voted against it.

According to the adopted resolution, the UN Secretary General should within 60 days submit a report to the UN General Assembly with suggestions on providing the civilian population's security on Palestinian territories, including recommendations on the international protection mechanism.

When this issue was considered, the amendment suggested by Washington did not receive sufficient support. This amendment shifted the focus of the draft to denouncing Hamas activities and in essence changed the whole concept of the document. Procedural manipulations undertaken by the US failed as well. This is how we can characterise the US delegation's activities at the UN, proceeding from what we saw during the debate and its representatives' conduct at the UN General Assembly.

I would like to point out that the special session and voting which took place became a kind of international referendum on the US policy concerning the Middle East. Certainly, a special signal was sent to the US delegation about how to conceive of UN activities in general and how to pursue its policy, based of course on national interests but with respect for international law and other countries and nations.

It is evident that an overwhelming majority of states does not accept the US delegation's unilateral and presumptuous position which ignores the international legal background of the Palestinian settlement, which has accumulated over many years. Equally objectionable are the US delegation's unceremonious attempts to break the UN General Assembly procedural rules and to challenge its Chair's clear decisions, which we could see this time.

I would like to say again that this conduct and these actions did not work.

Developments on the Korean Peninsula

Russia welcomed the establishment of the US-North Korean and inter-Korean dialogue and the agreements reached to resolve problems on the Korean Peninsula, including the nuclear problem. I can reaffirm this position of Russia. This positive headway dovetails with the Russian-Chinese roadmap developed over a year ago, which provides a comprehensive approach to this settlement and phasing and timing of the partners' steps.

We are convinced that one of the major components in the normalisation process in the region can and should be modification the UN Security Council sanctions regime against North Korea, particularly given that respective sanction resolutions have repeatedly reaffirmed the Security Council's commitment to this kind of adjustment, taking into account progress in the situation. The trend line is clear. This could become a serious support in the political and diplomatic settlement in North-East Asia.

As for "autonomous" sanctions imposed on North Korea by several countries sidestepping the UN Security Council sanctions and "on top" of them, our attitude is well known. I will repeat that it is negative. We are for the speedy lifting of all such unilateral restrictions, especially the so-called "secondary sanctions" that are applied extraterritorially.

Ministerial meeting on the "blue economy" in the Black Sea region

On May 31, political representatives of the countries of the Black Sea region – Russia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldavia, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine – responsible for maritime issues met in Bulgarian Burgas on the sidelines of the European Maritime Day international conference at the initiative of European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu Vella and Bulgarian Minister of Transport Ivaylo Moskovski. Senior officials of the European Commission and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation were also present.

The participants discussed the harmonious development of the Black Sea region and harnessing the maritime economy's potential through international cooperation. They adopted a joint Declaration Towards a Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, which outlines the areas in which member-states should develop joint strategies, including the development of freight and passenger transport links, maritime and coastal tourism, promoting marine research and special professional training, supporting investment, raising the environmental protection level and monitoring the state of the sea. The plan is to adopt these strategies in 2019.

We can note a positive mood, commitment to a respectful dialogue and mutually advantageous cooperation, which on the whole characterised the communication of the member-states that are partners in EU structures and regional organisations in the run-up to and during events in Burgas, including the work on the Declaration. We hope that this progress will continue and not only in the Black Sea region.

Swearing in of new government in Italy

We received a large number of questions from Italian, international and Russian media seeking a comment on the swearing in of the new government in Italy. We answered all these questions individually, considering that there really were a lot of them, but I would like to voice our position in general.

Russia traditionally considers events in the political life of other countries exclusively as an internal matter of these states and believes that it is unacceptable to offer any comments on this matter that are evaluative in nature.

At the same time, we took note that on June 1, in Italy, a new coalition government was sworn in, formed following the March 4 political elections. On the same day, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin congratulated Giuseppe Conte on taking office as head of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic. In turn, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent a congratulatory message to the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, Enzo Moavero Milanesi, in which he expressed hope for the continuation of joint efforts to strengthen multifaceted Russian-Italian cooperation and search for mutually acceptable solutions to current international problems.

George Soros's remarks on the alleged "close links" between Italy's Northern League and the Russian authorities

Regrettably, we are forced to respond to questions and to requests for comments, in part, on George Soros's allegations about the "close links" between Italy's Northern League and the Russian authorities. We do not hold a single briefing without responding to a question or commenting on yet another false story about Russia's interference into someone's affairs.

Responding to the media questions and these remarks, I would like to note that this theme was launched, as usual recently, by the forces outside the Apennine Peninsula, notably, US financier, billionaire and founder of a network of "charity organisations" George Soros. His name has long been associated with international scandals and provocations. This is yet more slander. Apparently, its aim was to scare Europe once again with the myth of "Moscow's long arm" (I will not repeat these clichés because you know them), undermine the friendly atmosphere of Russian-Italian relations, and cast aspersions on the new coalition government formed in Italy as a result of the June 4 democratic parliamentary elections.

Meanwhile, it is common knowledge that there is a long-standing nationwide consensus on the priority and importance of the development of Russian-Italian cooperation. Representatives from the broadest business and public circles in both countries are objectively interested in it. It is by this reality that Moscow will be guided in developing its dialogue with Rome.

Developments around Konstantin Yaroshenko

We continue closely following the developments around Konstantin Yaroshenko, a Russian citizen abducted by US secret services in Liberia in 2010. As you know, he is serving a 20 year term under a verdict issued not for a specific crime but based on some dubious assertions by undercover agents.

There is information about the plan to move Yaroshenko to another penal institution. This was explained by "the care for personal security" of our compatriot who was recently attacked by another inmate.

Neither Russian consular workers in the US, nor Yaroshenko himself have yet been told where he will be transferred. He has already been moved to a transit detention centre in New York. Our diplomats remain in contact with him.

As soon as we know his new whereabouts, our consular workers will contact him. They will visit him to make sure that his rights are strictly observed and that he is kept in reasonable conditions. As always, some questions will concern his health. Let me recall that it was seriously undermined when he was cruelly beaten during the abduction.

We will continue working for Yaroshenko's return to Russia, in part, on the basis of the Council of Europe 1983 Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons. For now, the US is turning down our requests, but we will not let up in our efforts to get him back.

Norway's consent to beef up US military presence in the country

We have noted the Norwegian Defence Ministry's June 12 press releases expressing Oslo's consent to double the US Marine Corps' contingent from 330 to 700 service personnel, to extend their rotational tour of duty to five years, to redeploy them further north and closer to the border with Russia and to establish an infrastructure for deploying warplanes at US expense and under the European initiative that aims to contain Russia.

We believe that such decisions virtually annul Norway's traditional policy aiming to prevent the permanent peacetime deployment of foreign military bases in the country. Obviously, the actions of the incumbent Norwegian leaders undermine trust and predictability in bilateral relations, run counter to previous assurances about renouncing an aggressive policy and allotting bases to foreign armed forces on Norwegian territory, unless Norway is attacked or threatened with attack. But what attack is it possible to talk about today? As is known, top-level Norwegian officials have repeatedly noted that Russia presents no threat. Considering the fact that US Marines are deployed in Norway, perhaps it is the United States that has attacked this country?

Arguments that US forces are rotated, rather than permanently deployed, should mislead no one because service personnel will, nevertheless, be permanently stationed on a rotation basis. This should be clearly understood.

We are urging the Norwegian side to hear our assessment of the current developments, so as to be able to resolve the situation and not to wreck the atmosphere of good neighbourly relations that has evolved over many years in the region where the borders of our countries merge.

The situation around the so-called "Skripal case"

And now, we would like to discuss a subject that has become tragicomic, namely, the situation around the so-called "Skripal case." Last week, we noted new attempts to internationalise the "Skripal case" and to use it as the incumbent Home Office's anti-Russia action platform during the G7 summit in Canada.

We have also noted reports about the Home Office's bill on protecting the United Kingdom from the activities of hostile states that has been submitted to the British Parliament. The bill has been drafted in execution of unjustified anti-Russia measures, made public by Prime Minister Theresa May in the context of the Salisbury incident. We can see that British law-making activity now hinges on these groundless accusations.

Last week, the London Metropolitan Police issued their statement for the media and asked the people of Salisbury to contact the authorities if they had any information about the case. This statement comes several months after the incident. It appears that the situation is very bad if people are being urged to get in touch with the British police. This might seem funny if this was not so sad. This is yet another evidence of politically motivated findings at a time when the investigation has failed to make any headway and when any evidence is lacking.

Indicatively, Deputy Assistant London Metropolitan Police Commissioner Dean Haydon has noted that the investigation is proceeding along several lines that cannot be discussed at this stage. It turns out that not only is it possible to discuss the poisoning of the Skripals by the Novichok agent, but that an opinion and a verdict have already been passed on this entire matter; moreover, the sentence has already been executed. This is all extremely absurd!

All these circumstances merely confirm provocative motives of British authorities in their obvious striving to use the "Skripal case" that has been inspired by them for their shady anti-Russia goals, as well as the possible complicity of the British official establishment, including secret services, in this provocation in Salisbury.

British Russophobia

Last week we read British Ambassador Laurie Bristow's interview with a Russian media outlet. This is a good tradition. We can even have a special heading for Mr Bristow's statements. Specifically, he addressed the problem of Russophobia in Britain, saying that he did not know "a single Russophobe in the UK." What can I say? Either this is a patent, pardon the expression, "untruth," stated publicly or, if he was telling the truth, it is really a sign of his lack of awareness, including historical awareness. There are many articles, published not only in the Russian Federation but also in other countries, including the UK itself, France, Switzerland, Italy, etc., on how a Russophobic lobby has formed in Europe, the United States and elsewhere. Actually, this is a good idea! Maybe we will publish a list of these books. Why should we quote from them, if you can read them yourselves. These books were published in countries other than Russia, including the UK.

Looking back, I can familiarise Mr Bristow with the problem of Russophobia in a segment of the British political establishment in a historical context with just a few phrases. Most historians – and I have read numerous studies on this subject – believe that the starting point in the emergence of the phenomenon of Russophobia in the British political establishment and, most importantly, the attempts to use it for political purposes was the defeat of Napoleon I by the Russian Emperor Alexander I. To reiterate: I am quoting historical studies; this is not an official position. But since we hear these statements from British diplomats and today's leaders, we would like to reintroduce them to this historiography. So, one of the reasons behind the attempts to impose these prejudices with regard to our country was likely Europe's realisation that if the Russians, after liberating themselves, triumphantly entered Paris on March 30, 1814, then nothing would prevent them from doing the same to other countries that might wish to step into Napoleon's boots. In fact, the British political establishment feared, not for their European borders (I don't think this was the reason) but mostly for their spheres of influence in other regions, such as Asia and India. It was in this period that the propagandists made use of one of the most absurd historical falsifications known as the Will of Peter the Great. (Interesting how this resembles today's developments, just one for one!). This document was used as a bogey and a pretense to invade Europe. This alleged document, which was not only mentioned but also quoted in the British media and Parliament, was based on a fake imperial executive order that said that Russia had a divine mission to establish its dominance in Europe and the world as a whole. Incidentally, Napoleon was the first to use this untruth to justify his conquests, but it was Britain that started to exploit it and make a world-level affair out of it. Years later, it was proven fraudulent. But the example itself is very important and shows how propaganda and its methods can justify, as the British did with much success, any absurd political action, including internationally.

We will not go deeper into detail. Let me give you just another couple of examples. In 1830, Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston was appointed Foreign Secretary. Historians believe that it was Temple who made Russophobia an ideology for use by a segment of the British establishment. Palmerston was the inspiration behind the Crimean War with Russia (1853-1856). This brings to memory an 1854 poem by author Vasily Alferjev published in the Severnaya Pchela (Northern Bee) newspaper:

Seized with bellicose fervour,

Palmerston the ancient warrior,

Stabs Russia on the map

With his invincible forefinger.

For centuries, and today too, the British use the same word stock as during the Crimean War, and we see this today in the British press. Look into the archives! You will be surprised.

There were many British journalists, academics and MPs, who exploited made-to-order Russophobia. It was made to order, regrettably. A case in point is the Scottish journalist, diplomat and politician David Urquhart, who systematically published exaggerated stories about Russia. You can find all this in historical archives.

I will not even speak in detail about the early 20th century. Another glaring example, along with the Peter the Great Will, is the use of outright fraud like the famous "Zinoviev letter." On October 25, 1924, the Daily Mail published a document signed by Communist International head, Grigory Zinoviev, his deputy Otto Kuusinen, and Arthur MacManus of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), which hinted that the CPGB was preparing for an armed uprising with active help from abroad. Just the same practices, the same story! It caused a major diplomatic scandal. But the British knew full well that it was a fake, an invention. These are not myths. I am referring to history, to archives. In the 1990s, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook ordered the declassification of some archives. The world learned that the so-called "letter" was a conscious provocation intended to fan anti-Soviet hysteria and bring the Tories to power. Today the UK is using exactly the same tricks as it did over the last two or three centuries. I am referring to historical archival documents that are freely available.

If Mr Bristow thinks that these examples are too remote and that all these Russophobic statements are a thing of the past, while nothing of the kind can happen today, I will give him a couple of quotes from recent history, although just one is enough.

Speaking in Houston, the US, in 1991, ex-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said this: "According to the estimates of the world community, it is economically feasible for only 15 million people to live in

Russia." If someone can say that there was nothing like this statement, we will only be too glad. Regrettably, however, documents prove that she did make this statement. How do you like that? And what should the other 130 million do? How can we fail to call these statements what they are, "Russophobic"? I do not even want to mention the "evil empire" hoax that was actively promoted and used by MPs, politicians and journalists. You all know about this. In 2015, another British PM, David Cameron referred to Russia as the UK's "main national security threat." Mr Bristow, do you know about all these statements? I won't even talk about Russophobic statements by Theresa May and Boris Johnson.

It is always important to refer to what is close to the hearts of the people in a given country. I will quote from a study entitled, "The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain," which was published by Harvard University Press in 1950. The author, John Howes Gleason, writes: "Russophobia is a paradox in the history of Great Britain. Within the United Kingdom there developed early in the nineteenth century an antipathy toward Russia which soon became the most pronounced and enduring element in the national outlook on the world abroad." And this is just one quote. This study is available in English, you can buy the book. More than that, the author asks why Russophobia became a persistent British sentiment.

Gleason was not the only one to ask this question. An analytical website, Global Research, published an article titled "Hating Russia is a Full-Time Job" contributed by ex-CIA officer Philip Giraldi. I do not think that CIA officers are generally inveterate Russophiles. But Giraldi asks the same question: "Who is driving the hostility towards Russia?" His answer is: "There are a number of constituencies that, for one reason or another, need a powerful enemy to justify policies that would otherwise be unsustainable. Defense contractors need a foe to justify their existence while congressmen need the contractors to fund their campaigns. The media needs a good fearmongering story to help sell itself and the public also is accustomed to having a world in which terrible threats lurk just below the horizon, thereby increasing support for government control of everyday life to keep everyone 'safe.'"

Russophobia, in a general sense – and I am talking about other countries, not just Britain– is needed to promote their national policies. As far as Salisbury is concerned, this is what's happening. Apart from other things, they needed this story not only to deal with domestic issues but also to enable Theresa May's government to show that the UK is in the forefront of foreign policy activities. If crises cannot be settled, they should be created. This is a classic example.

I would also like to remind the British ambassador of the practical manifestations of the petty Russophobia that we see, in addition to political statements. There are many. I will mention one that was simply disgusting.

One was a 2016 Penguin ad in the London Tube with quotes from world classics. Of all Russian writings, they chose a quote from Ivan Turgenev's Fathers and Sons. The problem is, the quote, remarks by Yevgeny Bazarov, was taken out of context and distorted: "Aristocratism, liberalism, progress, principles... useless words! The Russian man does not need them." The ad does not explain that the quote was not complete, that Bazarov just pokes fun at borrowed words that have equivalents in Russian, that Bazarov is a nihilist and denies all values accepted by society, and that his life ends tragically... In all evidence, this was to show that Russia is a source of notorious historical threats. Why is this being done?

Mr Bristow, we're waiting for your next statement. We like them.

Deutsche Welle information activity on Twitter

Here is one more subject concerned with propaganda, which has to do with current rather than historical matters. I am referring to the information activity of Deutsche Welle on Twitter. We have heard so much about RT and Sputnik and their alleged interference and paid services. The other day a Facebook user sent me a screenshot of Deutsche Welle material. Both you and I know that media outlets are free to criticise any state, politician or political parties. But this is a different case.

First, I received a screenshot of allegedly advertising material, which do not simply provide facts about Russia, but offer their opinions of the Russian Federation. In other words, they took money to provide absolutely sick and insulting opinions of Russia. Second, we are talking about a government-financed German media outlet. In other words, a media outlet that claims to be independent and that other media outlets are not independent but publish propaganda material in Russia, has taken money – I repeat, money – to publish this material. Third, Russia is being accused of paying its media outlets to publish political advertising, and this allegation is being used to stage a loud political show.

Here are a few facts regarding the case at hand. As I already said, it was not us who found this material. As our British partners say regarding [media watchdog] Ofcom's complaints against RT, we received them from users. I don't know what kind of material Ofcom receives and from what users, but I do know what users send to us. I know and can provide the name of the person who has sent this material to me. This person, whom I don't know personally, has sent me material from his Twitter account. We have conducted a kind of investigation, and today I am ready to tell you about it and even to show you something. The arrows, ticks and brackets are not ours. It is what users have sent to us, asking if it is normal that Deutsche Welle is publicising such opinions formulated as political advertising.

I would like to say that we asked Deutsche Welle to confirm or refute the fact that they take money for the publication of such insulting opinions. We have not received an official reply from Deutsche Welle so far. They have neither confirmed nor refuted this. They have taken time to deal with this matter. This is not fake news. This is what users have sent to us, and we have asked Deutsche Welle about it. I think we will send an official request to them today. We really want an answer.

We tried to track the path of such material, which clearly aim to influence the opinion of Russian speaking audiences. They are not doing this within the framework of journalistic work, which is strange when efforts are taken to form and promote a specific opinion. This is not journalism but propaganda, because this is done for money. Moreover, we are talking about the propaganda strategy and government support of Deutsche Welle.

SMM technologists know very well about the commercial placement of information in the social media, so-called paid targeting. They chose a post or tweet, which the account administrator wants to make known to as many people as possible, determine the country, the sex and the age of target audience, as well as the timeframe for publishing this information. And then they pay up and launch the information.

To tell you the truth, we have known for some time that Deutsche Welle tweets are promoted in this manner on users' accounts. Today we can give you proof. We have received it from users. Another interesting detail is that this tweet is not marked in the Deutsche Welle newswire as "promoted." Therefore, this is a fraud. We expect explanations from Deutsche Welle. By the way, it would be nice if Twitter explained how it happens that one and the same product is labelled as "promoted" and paid for on some sites and not as such other sites.

The Twitter administration claims that all promoted tweets must be clearly labelled as "promoted" when an advertiser is paying for their placement on Twitter. But it turns out that there are ways to avoid this. The promotion campaign can use settings that will prevent users from knowing that this is a promoted tweet. We are indeed waiting for an official response from Deutsche Welle and Twitter regarding this case.

It is an alarming situation, because paid targeting can be used to influence a target audience. We would like to know which audience Deutsche Welle is trying to influence, and who is paying for this. We have asked a direct question. We have nothing to hide. The tweet we are talking about does not have the "promoted" marking.

We would like the parties concerned to explain what they have in mind using the example of this case.

Act of vandalism against the monument to fallen Red Army soldiers

We are extremely concerned about the reports coming from the Czech Republic on the acts of vandalism committed within the month on June 6 and June 11 against the obelisk commemorating the Red Army soldiers who were killed in the May 1945 battles for Prague. The obelisk is located near Prague Castle, which makes these unlawful actions even more demonstrative as well as provocative.

Such a blasphemous attitude to the memory of our fallen soldiers is absolutely outrageous. We hope that the city authorities will take appropriate measures to restore the obelisk and prevent such acts in the future.

We are grateful to Mr Jiri Ovcacek, the Czech President's press secretary, for his personal interference and prompt action to eliminate the consequences of these acts of vandalism and initiate an appropriate investigation. We expect that the perpetrators will be identified and will be properly punished.

Desecration of a monument to Soviet soldiers in Poland

In the village of Sarnice (Wielkopolska), vandals desecrated a monument to Soviet reconnaissance men who sacrificed their lives in 1944 to liberate Poland from Nazi occupation. The vandals destroyed the bas-relief and wrote insulting words on the monument.

This is not the first time that the monument has been attacked. It was previously targeted by vandals in November of last year. Encouraged by the sense of impunity caused by rampant state-sponsored Russophobia in Poland, the hooligans have struck again.

The incident in Sarnice demonstrates that the Polish authorities remain unresponsive to the calls to put an end to this vandalism, which, unfortunately, is spreading across the country. All of this is certainly dealing a severe blow to the very foundation of relations with Russia.

Our demands remain the same. We continue to insist that Warsaw complies with its international obligations and the norms of civilized behaviour and treats with respect the memory of Soviet soldiers. The monument in Sarnice must be restored.

Answers to media questions:

Question: There have been reports that during the G7 summit US President Donald Trump said that the Crimean Peninsula is part of Russia since they speak Russian there. Could this indicate a certain reversal of the global policy regarding Crimea and its belonging to Russia?

María Zakharova: The Russian Federation has repeatedly stated at all levels that the subject of Crimea's status is closed. We hear lots of questions about this. Some of the comments are absolutely anti-Crimean and offensive to the people of Crimea. At the same time, there are comments in line with reality and calling to accept it, including by visiting Crimea to personally see this reality.

I would like to reiterate what has been numerously stated at all levels. The topic of Crimea's status is closed. Once again we would like to draw your attention to the fact that if there are any doubts regarding the status of Crimea, you should refer to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Commenting on what has been said or discussed behind closed doors and through various information leaks is a thankless job.

The US officials have themselves refused to comment on this. There are many reliable and unreliable leaks. We only work with facts. Once again I would like to reiterate that Russia's position on this matter has not changed.

Question: At the meeting between the US president and the leader of North Korea the North Korean side reaffirmed its desire for denuclearisation. In view of these developments, is Russia planning to take part in the disarmament of the Korean Peninsula? If yes, what role will it play?

María Zakharova: We have noted and welcomed the positive dynamics that has been created following the recent summits and meetings on the subjects that you mentioned. With regard to disarmament matters, there are international institutions that are directly responsible for dealing with this issue and they should play the primary role in its resolution.

If Russia's participation, as a member of these international organisations or as a country with extensive experience, is required, Russia, as you know, is open to cooperation on all these matters.

Question: On behalf of all Armenian fans, I would like to congratulate you on the glorious victory of the Russian team at the 2018 FIFA World Cup and express the hope that the team will keep it up. After the Russia-Saudi Arabia match, President of Russia Vladimir Putin held a meeting of CIS heads of state who attended the match, and introduced the newly elected Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, to President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev (Nikol Pashinyan has spoken about this himself). I know that you do not comment on anything that concerns the president, but do you think this can give a fresh impetus to the negotiations within the Minsk Group?

María Zakharova: You should not confuse the formats: communication between presidents, which assumes multilateral and bilateral interaction, and a problem involving a different format for its solution. The creation of a favourable environment, in our opinion, not only facilitates the negotiation process, but is a most important prerequisite for a solution to the problem you have mentioned. However, I would like to point out again, these are different formats.

Question: Is a meeting between President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump under consideration? Are there concrete dates and options for such a meeting?

María Zakharova: Everything related to summits can be commented by the Presidential Executive Office, its press service and other representatives.

Question: President Vladimir Putin personally instructed Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to make arrangements for this meeting.

María Zakharova: Russian and American colleagues are in close communication on a series of issues. As for organisational matters and top level meetings, the Presidential Executive Office can comment on that. That is the custom in Russia.

Question: The Petersburg ferry has been seized in Estonia; 11 out of the 12 crew members do not have Schengen visas. The ferry cannot leave the port and the crew is periodically experiencing power cuts due to non-payment. All of this can lead to deplorable sanitation conditions. Is the Foreign Ministry monitoring the situation regarding the sailors who have been abandoned by their transport company? What assistance will they receive?

María Zakharova: The Russian vessel Petersburg has been in the Tallinn port since April 28, 2018. The vessel was seized for non-payment of repair debts. The sum is big: 350,000 euros. The ship also owes an Estonian company 50,000 euros for water and electricity. There are 12 crew members.

According to the Russian Embassy in Estonia, the sailors have just received their salaries for February 2018. There are plans for a partial change of crew: three people will leave the ship and six new people will arrive. A new captain has arrived in Tallinn to accept the position. Staff at the Embassy will observe the replacement process to find out what the Russian citizens need and what assistance they

require to return to Russia. The Russian Ministry of Transport is also involved in the case. Our Embassy in Estonia is monitoring the situation, so it cannot be said that the sailors are abandoned. All relevant agencies are working on this problem. I can say for sure that diplomats visit the vessel regularly to oversee the situation and they know about the needs of the crew and are doing everything they can to solve the problem.

Question: The government of Afghanistan introduced a truce with the Taliban, which also ceased fire for three days. What is your opinion of this decision? Which direction should the situation take following this?

Maria Zakharova: We believe that any steps and measures that help ease tension, including this case, strengthen stability and are constructive and important for the country and the region as a whole. It is a short comment. I will certainly request additional information and will subsequently provide more details.

Question: Russia has expelled the political department of the US Embassy in Moscow in response to the expulsion of Russian diplomats from the United States. Have both countries renewed their diplomatic corps?

Maria Zakharova: I have no details regarding full replacement. I will request them.

Question: Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin wrote in an article published in the Belgrade newspaper Politika on the occasion of Russia Day that Russia can play a more active role in the matter concerning Kosovo if Serbia requests this. We know that Russia is playing a certain role, which cannot be described as passive, in dealing with the matter of Kosovo at the UN. Is there any practical space for expanding Russia's support?

Maria Zakharova: I did not see that interview, but I believe that some accents have been shifted, as is often the case. It could be an answer to a question regarding the role Russia could additionally play in this matter. I believe that Russia could play such a role if Serbia asked for this. I don't think the ambassador took the initiative to offer this. Of course, everything Russia has been doing towards the settlement of the Kosovo problem, as we have confirmed in our political statements, above all reflects the interests and requests of Serbia as a state and a nation. It is not a matter of forcing Russian interests on the country, but of acting in response to Serbia's request for assistance in the settlement of this very complicated and dramatic question. It is our firm position that these questions are for the Serbs themselves to decide, while Russia is always ready to offer them a helping hand.

Question: I just wanted to say that the ambassador's statements looked pretty straightforward to me as well. The matter can be only addressed in the manner you have outlined today.

Maria Zakharova: Yes, I know that this often happens when accents get shifted around and the most impressive statements are presented out of context. I will read the interview, but I am almost certain that he was answering a question.

Question: The press statement made by the OSCE Minsk Group's co-chairs yesterday mentioned the possibility of a meeting between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the near future. Do you know about the place and the time of this meeting?

Maria Zakharova: I suggest that you ask the parties concerned, that is, the official representatives of Armenia and Azerbaijan. I believe it would be more appropriate if they commented on the possibility of a ministerial meeting.

Question: During the previous briefing, we asked you a question about Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's statement that the talks to settle the Nagorny Karabakh conflict should be held in a trilateral format. Artyom Kozhin said that "bold statements that run counter to the principles laid down by the OSCE, among others, are probably non-constructive." In the transcript published on the Foreign Ministry website, the word "such statements" was replaced by "your statements." We would like to ask you to correct this mistake, because it changes the meaning of the sentence.

Maria Zakharova: Does your pedantic approach concern only this particular question? You know, so many times I have seen my words or the words of my colleagues twisted and you have done this as well, as you remember. You are not usually so pedantic.

I believe that our briefings are aimed at providing answers. But, unfortunately, in the past three years I have repeatedly come upon the situation where questions sound like political statements. And you know about this. Such questions are asked, not with the aim of solving a difficult problem but, among other things, to pursue a different goal.

I am addressing everyone now: we are ready to give you answers, facts and assessments. But I do not think that it is right to ask provocative questions especially related to the most complex issues that affect the peoples of two countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

You have not called me once in the past two weeks; I did not receive any calls from the Trend news agency. It is very weird because, in my opinion, if you were concerned about it as a journalist or as an agency, you would have called me, which you did not. So why did you wait two weeks and then raise this question again in a public arena? Do you want to make this situation provocative? Why are you doing this?

Our country is doing its best to settle the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Why? You know perfectly well. First, we want the two peoples to finally settle this problem of bloodshed, and second, we want to develop relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan and we also want these two countries to develop bilateral relations. It seems to me that our objective is to accelerate the settlement, not postpone it.

Once again, I would like to say that I have permitted myself such a long monologue for one reason: you have not called me in two weeks. At the same time, I can say that I received many calls from Azerbaijan. And many of those present here today also called me and received answers to their questions. Your agency did not call.

I suggest we work constructively and use the opportunity to ask and answer questions not for provocative purposes, but in order to solve the main problem which is to settle the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Don't you agree?

Question: First of all, let me congratulate you and all Russians on the grand opening of the World Cup and winning the game yesterday. My question concerns the United States' military biological activity near the Russian border. Minister Lavrov raised the matter recently. My colleague and I visited Georgia just before this briefing where we collected some evidence, facts and documents that will be presented in a documentary. Is it possible that Russia could introduce sanctions against individuals and American companies involved in this activity since it is funded by the US Department of Defence? We have proof of experiments, including on humans, which pose great danger not only to Russia but to the entire world.

Maria Zakharova: Thank you. If possible, please hand over this information to me after the briefing. We will review it and issue a comment.

Question: Russian Commissioner for Human Rights Tatiana Moskalkova accused Ukrainian human right ombudsman Lyudmila Denisova of violating Russian law due to her intention to meet with convicted Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov. Is the Foreign Ministry aware of any violation by Ms Denisova? What measures may be taken against her?

Maria Zakharova: I have no information on this matter. I know that the telephone conversation between the Russian and the Ukrainian presidents on June 9 resulted in an agreement that human rights commissioners of the two countries will visit the incarcerated Russian and Ukrainian nationals. I know that the work has begun. I do not have any more details but I can find out. Of course, we are expecting details directly from the original sources, the human rights commissioners of the two countries.

Question: As you spoke about Norway, I thought about the 2015 Swedish-Norwegian television serial, Occupied, in which Russia occupies Norway. Don't you think that they have watched too much television serials and just got scared of a possible threat?

Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, June 15, 2018

Category: Briefings Friday, 15 June 2018 12:33 Written by Vladimir I Poluektov Hits: 445

Maria Zakharova: There is a whole range of measures involved. We regularly comment on this propaganda. Let me repeat once again, I will try to make a list of historical monographs, books, research and archives on Russophobia and its application. I have already quoted some very interesting sources today.

Please follow updates on the Foreign Ministry website where we will publish an announcement and invitation to one of the World Cup host cities where we are holding the next regular briefing next Wednesday. I myself am really looking forward to seeing the City Press Centres and the host stadium. If anyone cannot go there, please send your questions in advance and we will try to answer them.

Thank you for the greetings on the occasion of the World Cup opening and for praising our team.