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### Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the Terra Scientia on Klyazma River National Educational Youth Forum

From June 27 to August 12, the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs is holding the regular, fourth Terra Scientia National Educational Youth Forum on Klyazma River under the auspices of the Presidential Executive Office.

The forum is a large event devoted to modern Russia's youth issues with the broad participation of domestic socio-political and youth circles. Youth organisations from a number of foreign countries are also represented at the forum. The forum enjoys much popularity and attracts the attention of both the Russian and foreign public.

This year the main theme is "Russia, the land of opportunity."

By tradition, the first persons of our country, prominent domestic public and political leaders take part in the forum. As in previous years, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov plans to attend the forum and make a speech there on July 30.

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### Developments in Syria

The situation in Syria remains complicated. Yesterday we published a comment, on the Foreign Ministry website, on the tragic events in As-Suwayda. According to updated information from the Syrian media, the number of dead in a series of terrorist attacks in the province has already exceeded 200 people and the same number has been wounded. We express our deep condolences to the families and friends of the dead and wish early recovery to the injured. Needless to say, such atrocities deserve the strongest condemnation.

Nevertheless, the developments in the country as a whole are improving. The elimination of the dangerous hotbed of terrorism in the southwest of Syria, in the provinces of Daraa and Quneitra, is about to be completed. At present, the Syrian army, supported by the Russian Aerospace Forces, is intensifying its onslaught on the positions of the Khalid ibn al-Walid army that swore allegiance to ISIS. This army is trying to make up for its losses by mobilising the resources of its demoralised rivals from among local illegal armed units.

The implementation of the agreements for "local truces" concluded with Russia's mediation continues in the liberated areas of Daraa and Quneitra. In the process, a third group of "irreconcilable" members of the armed opposition are headed for the north of Syria, following in the footsteps of 2,800 militants from Jabhat al-Nusra and their family members who left for the north earlier.

The Council of Ministers of Syria established a special commission a few days ago that is headed by the Minister of the Economy and Foreign Trade Mohammad Samer al-Khalil, which will deal with the restoration of the territories freed from illegal formations.

Gradual stabilisation and improvement of the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Government-controlled territories are objectively facilitating the active return of refugees and internally displaced persons. For example, over 400 Syrians returned home from neighbouring Jordan and Lebanon yesterday, July 25.

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### The 10th international high-level meeting on Syria

The 10<sup>th</sup> international meeting on Syria in the Astana format will take place in Sochi on July 30-31 and bring together deputy foreign ministers representing Russia, Iran and Turkey as the Astana process guarantor countries assisting the Syrian settlement process, delegations of the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition, as well as UN and Jordanian observers. An invitation was sent to the United States as well.

The participants will review the developments in and around Syria, exchange views on progress in establishing intra-Syrian talks based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and with account taken of the decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, continue to discuss further steps in order to secure the speedy launch of the Constitutional Committee as an important element of promoting the political settlement of the Syrian crisis. The humanitarian situation in Syria will come under special focus.

The 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the working group on releasing detainees/hostages, transferring remains and searching for missing persons created by the three guarantor countries of the Astana Process is planned to be held on the sidelines of the Sochi meeting.



#### **Report by the Bundestag Scientific Service on the legitimacy of Russia's participation in the Syrian conflict**

Our Western partners have on many occasions accused Russia's Aerospace Forces of being in Syria illegally. Symptomatically, these accusations came from those who, for decades and in violation of existing international legal norms and state sovereignty, have been intervening in internal affairs of other states, including Syria.

Russia's position on this matter is known and was made public on several occasions. It was confirmed by the legitimate Syrian government. However, ignoring common sense, some countries have continued to rely on questionable reasoning in an attempt to achieve their ends. The issue of legitimate presence in Syria also caught the attention of international law experts in the West. In this regard, we would like to point to a report compiled by the Bundestag Scientific Service released on June 28 on the international legal assessment of the participation of a number of countries in the Syrian conflict. Its findings are quite telling.

The report's authors analyse the role and scope of Russia's participation in the Syrian events. Reportedly, Russia's military presence on Syria's sovereign territory and relevant Russian military operations are being conducted with the exclusive permission of the Syrian government. Thus, we are talking about an "intervention by invitation." According to the prevailing view in international law, such intervention is initially permissible and does not contradict the prohibition of the use of force outlined in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. This, in particular, is what the International Criminal Court and the UN International Law Commission are guided by. Territorial sovereignty allows a state to deploy foreign troops on its sovereign territory. There's no issue about violating the ban on the use of force in this particular case, since Russia's military operations are not directed against Syria's legitimate authorities. In this regard, Russia's presence in Syria from the standpoint of international law is considered permissible.

However, according to the German experts, things are not as straightforward with regard to the United States. Their assessments can be found in this report.



#### **Discrimination against Romani people in Ukraine and UN Human Rights Council statements on the issue**

We are following developments in Ukraine with concern. Numerous acts of violence against ethnic minorities and representatives of certain ethnic groups, particularly Romani, have not gone unnoticed. We have repeatedly drawn the international community's attention to the frenzy of nationalism and neo-fascist ideology in Ukraine. Acts of violence against religious people, violating the language rights of residents, restricting freedom of speech, the murder and intimidation of journalists, and assaults on representatives of ethnic minorities have long become the norm in that country. The most cynical thing is that all these actions are performed with the connivance of the official authorities in Kiev, who either cannot or do not want to curb violent radicalism. In fact, what we are witnessing now is attempts to divide citizens into Ukrainians and other second-rate people. We know from history what such a policy can lead to.

International monitoring mechanisms for human rights cannot be blind to this outrage occurring in Ukraine. Experts from the United Nations Human Rights Council have made a rather strong statement in connection with another assault on a Romani community that resulted in one of its members being murdered. In his twitter account, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Daniel Holtgen also condemned this crime. We are pleased that the international community is beginning to see the human rights situation in Ukraine clearly. We expect the international community to respond to other crimes committed by Ukrainian radicals, as well as to the Ukrainian authorities' discriminatory treatment of all ethnic minorities, and we expect the guilty to be held accountable.



#### **Investigation into the incidents in Salisbury and Amesbury**

We continue to watch the developments related to the investigation into the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents. We see that in spite of the lack of meaningful official statements, the British media are actively spreading unverified leaks regarding the investigation process.

The details being published only underscore the British authorities' general policy of classifying information that could shed light on what actually happened in Salisbury and Amesbury. For example, we find the details of Charlie Rowley's health and confinement conditions, as shared by his brother with journalists, very interesting. It appears that Rowley is not allowed to leave the place where he is kept now under constant surveillance by the police. He is cut off from the outside world and has no access to television, newspapers or other sources of information; he uses a phone given to him by the police and he is not allowed to reveal his location to anyone.

All this is very reminiscent of the case of Sergey and Yulia Skripal, whom the British authorities hid from the British and international public. As a reminder, London, in violation of the relevant provisions of the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the bilateral 1965 Consular Convention, continues to ignore Russia's demands for consular access to our citizens, citing the need to respect Ms Skripal's privacy. This only heightens our suspicions that the Skripals were isolated by the British authorities by force to avoid questions regarding the official version of what happened. That said, we continue to insist on giving us consular access to the Skripals, who are citizens of the Russian Federation.

The British public should pay more attention to the unfounded deprivation of liberty of a British citizen, who became a victim of the crime entirely by accident. It seems that British patients are released from the hospital in Salisbury solely with the aim of preventing them from having free contact with the outside world.

Overall, there is an obvious need for various non-governmental human rights organisations to seriously look into the issue of London's negligence of human rights, including the unmotivated restrictions on people's contacts and movement.



#### **BBC's inquiry into the response to statements addressed to Russia by Hermitage Capital Management CEO William Browder**

We would like to comment on the inquiry by the British Broadcasting Corporation as regards the response to statements addressed to Russia by Hermitage Capital Management CEO William Browder.

On July 19, we received a BBC request for an urgent comment on several strong statements and even accusations addressed to Russian leaders by Hermitage Capital Management CEO William Browder and to respond in writing by 9 am on the following day, July 20. We were promised that the comment would be read without edits in the programme devoted to Browder. Despite a busy schedule, the Foreign Ministry promptly prepared a detailed reply and sent it to the BBC.

The next morning we were surprised to discover that our comment had been extensively compressed, that only about 10 per cent of it was used in the best traditions of the British media. Most of the 20 minute programme was devoted to an interview with Browder, whereas our comment was given only one minute.

This is not the first time the BBC has compressed comments by Russian officials. It is not uncommon for a 45-minute interview with a Foreign Ministry official to be reduced to less than five minutes. A typical example is Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the programme HARDTalk, from which substantial fragments explaining the gist of Russian policy on many issues were cut.

To be honest, we are stunned by the imbalance in reporting information. We consider this unacceptable for a media outlet that positions itself as professional and unbiased.

Since the BBC did not want to quote in detail our commentary we will use this opportunity to do so.

"It is strange to hear words about theft from a person who stole over \$1.5 billion from Russia and was convicted twice in 2013 and 2017. He was sentenced to nine years and given huge fines. Another criminal case against him is under investigation now. He is charged with serious crimes and Russian law enforcement agencies are planning to interview a number of US and British secret services employees and others.

"Since 2004, Russian investigative bodies have recorded 12 crimes by Browder's criminal group. Subsequently, criminal cases (pre-trial proceedings) have been opened against the group for tax evasion, failure to comply with the duties of a tax agent, deliberate bankruptcy, swindling, money laundering and other crimes. The actions by Browder and his accomplices inflicted over 4.5 billion roubles of damage on Russia.

"In February 2018, Russian investigators started another criminal case under Article 210, part 1, of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (forming a criminal organisation with intent to committing systematic, grievous and extremely grievous crimes; the running of the organisation and the coordinating of the criminal actions of its members). The circumstances of Broder's criminal activities are being investigated under this case, including his attempted perjury during the US versus Prevezon hearings in a US Court.

"At present, Browder has been charged with tax evasion, failure to comply with the duties of a tax agent and deliberate bankruptcy. Handicapped people were allegedly included on the payroll of Browder's companies for tax evasion purposes while not actually working there. Tax benefits were granted to these companies based on misinformation.

"In the course of this investigation, unique materials have been collected. Russia believes that these materials would influence the Western attitude towards the Magnitsky Act that allows Browder to avoid international arrest under the pretense of being a victim of political harassment and that allows him to do further damage to Russia's interests."

The full text of a detailed seven-page comment that quotes judicial facts and substantiations was sent to the BBC. If anyone is interested in it, we can provide it upon request.

In general we would like to emphasise that for our part we will continue to provide detailed commentary on important international issues. We hope that journalists for whom professional ethics is not an empty phrase will forward them to their audience to provide an objective view of the state of affairs.

#### **Arrest of Russian citizen Maria Butina in the US**

We continue to closely monitor the fate of Russian citizen Maria Butina, arrested in Washington on July 15. Russian Embassy employees have visited her in prison, and have attended the court sessions where a measure of restraint and other procedural issues were determined, including yesterday. We have sent a resolute protest to the US State Department against the actions taken against her, including the severe psychological pressure she was subjected to.

Butina was subjected to an eight-hour search in the arrest process, as FBI agents armed with automatic firearms burst into her rented apartment, literally breaking furniture, shaking and even tearing up things, opening floors and walls. They found nothing incriminating, but despite the complete lack of evidence, Maria Butina was refused release.

The FBI's thin case against Butina, as anyone can read on the internet, is actually based on decontextualised excerpts from her personal correspondence in social media. They are trying to incriminate her in a violation of the US foreign agents law, although she did not work for any foreign state, but studied at a Washington university and, taking a great interest in weapons, went to National Rifle Association of America events. She did this openly, not hiding her Russian citizenship, not hiding acquaintances or contacts, because there was nothing to hide.

However, certain political forces in the United States, pursuing self-serving interests, invented a story of Russian interference in the US elections, and this mudslinging campaign against Russia actually sent Butina to prison on a framed case – in fact, simply due to her nationality. What is this, if not a witch-hunt? There are fears that any of our compatriots in America might find themselves to be the next targets.

We demand that the US authorities immediately stop this arbitrariness and release Maria Butina. Her arrest is motivated solely by US domestic and foreign politics, and, therefore, she is a political prisoner.

#### **The Crimea Declaration of the US Department of State**

We have certainly taken note of the Crimea Declaration published recently by the US Department of State and have already commented on it. It was obviously timed to coincide with the current US Secretary of State's remarks at the hearings in the US Congress, in which he promised to take a tough line toward our country. It will probably come to be known as the Pompeo Declaration.

However, there is nothing new in this document. Washington officials regularly make statements on Russia and Crimea in particular. Regrettably, US politicians who actively supported the coup d'etat in Ukraine and the subsequent harassment of Russian speakers in Ukraine have been ignoring the UN Charter for more than four years. They are cynically denying the Crimeans the right to self-determination as expressed in the open referendum in 2014.

We have said more than once that this issue is closed for us – Crimea is the territory of the Russian Federation whether the United States or some other country likes it or not. Incidentally, more and more average Americans and citizens of other countries no longer believe the myth of Russian occupation and are eagerly coming to Crimea for business and pleasure despite the dire warnings of their

governments.

Washington's self-serving distortions of international law are doomed to failure. It is clear to everyone that its officials speak about respect for the principle of sovereign equality and territorial integrity only when it is in US interests. But who in the US was thinking about the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia during the bombings of former Yugoslavia and the subsequent proclamation of Kosovo's independence?

The US State Department's moralising against the threat or use of force is sheer hypocrisy. It is enough to look at last October's report of the Congressional Research Service. According to this document, during the Cold War from 1949 to 1991 the Pentagon took part in 46 military campaigns abroad, while in 1992-2017 that number increased four times to reach 188. Secret operations are not counted in this number. So decide for yourself who is really aggressive.

#### **Group to counter Russian cyber threats formed in the United States**

Like any sovereign country, the United States has the right to create any formats to discuss issues that worry its leaders.

Talk of Washington forming a separate group to counter Russian cyber threats has been going on for a long time. We believe this is primarily caused by the domestic political opposition to US President Donald Trump. Such ideas feed the confrontation between our countries and once again add fuel to the flames over Russia's non-existent cyberattacks.

Moscow has repeatedly denied involvement in US internal affairs. We prefer official cooperation with Washington on cyber security to groundless accusations against Russia. We are open to serious, deep dialogue on this subject. The cyber ball is in the US court and now it is up to the Americans whether they will respond at the expert or political level.

There should be no illusions over there that Russia can be intimidated by the formation of different groups to counter far-fetched threats. We are confident and know what we are capable of. We are not going to humble ourselves before anyone. We hope for pragmatic and constructive dialogue with the leading cyber powers in the information space rather than ultimatums and unilateral actions.

#### **Oil products delivery to North Korea**

We have taken note of Western media reports, including some that quote the US Permanent Representative at the UN, about Russia and China allegedly blocking a US request that the UN Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) regarding sanctions against North Korea ban the delivery of oil products there.

This matter needs clarification.

First of all, Clause 5 of UN Security Council Resolution 2397, which was unanimously adopted on December 22, 2017, limits the delivery of refined petroleum products to North Korea to 500,000 barrels in 2018. The UNSC Committee 1718 has been directed to notify all member states when an aggregate amount of refined petroleum products sold, supplied or transferred to North Korea reaches 75 per cent, 90 per cent and 95 per cent of this figure, and only when the amount reached 95 per cent it is obliged to inform them that they must immediately cease the delivery of refined petroleum products to North Korea for the remainder of the year.

Second, according to the regularly updated information on the website of the committee, the aggregate amount of oil product deliveries to North Korea as of late June only reached 25 per cent of the limit. Therefore, there are no formal grounds for suspending the export of refined petroleum products to North Korea, and Washington knows all about this.

However, the Americans, using its favourite tactic of sanctions pressure on Pyongyang and claiming the power to prosecute, informed the committee on July 12 that, according to their estimates, North Korea exceeded the annual limit by obtaining oil products through ship-to-ship transfers, in violation of UNSC Resolutions 2375 and 2397, at least 89 times between January 1 and May 30. In addition to the eight satellite photographs of the alleged ship-to-ship transfers, which were published before, Washington supplemented its request to the committee with four new satellite images of oil tankers in North Korean ports that were allegedly unloading illegal oil supplies they presumably received through ship-to-ship transfers.

This is the "solid" evidence provided by the Americans, whose conclusions are based on the mathematical modelling of the amount of oil products these North Korean ships could carry if filled to 33 per cent, 50 per cent or 90 per cent of their carrying capacity.

It is clear that the UN Security Council's sanctions bodies do not take decisions simply on the spur of the moment. There is an established procedure, as well as a group of experts given the power to consider and even investigate the suspicions of member states. Russia has not evaded the discussion of this matter and recommended the Americans not to be in a hurry, the more so that the information they provided was not thoroughly considered or supplemented with any facts. They did not listen to us or even refused to listen to us. Therefore, their initiative has not been blocked, as some media outlets present the situation, but suspended until our American partners acquire additional information.

We urge our colleagues at the UN Security Council to take a more responsible attitude to the work of the country's auxiliary bodies, not to abuse their competencies but to act in accordance with the established procedure and to not use any expanded interpretation of the relevant provisions of the UN Security Council's resolutions on sanctions.

#### **Anti-Russia statements by Defence Minister of Norway Frank Bakke-Jensen**

We noted that in an interview with Norwegian news channel TV 2 on July 17, Defence Minister of Norway Frank Bakke-Jensen said that Oslo is building up its military potential in the north because of its "increasingly threatening neighbour – Russia" and "will protect the country at the Russian border and further south."

Why is Mr Bakke-Jensen being so dramatic? He has said more than once that Norway does not see a direct military threat from Russia. Other Norwegian officials spoke in the same spirit at top levels. Could Oslo have changed its position and do our Norwegian neighbours now consider us a threat?

We believe that such irresponsible statements undermine confidence and stability in our relations, including those in the Russian and Norwegian border areas, and destroy the atmosphere of neighbourliness and mutual respect created by many generations in our nations.

#### **Confiscation of undeclared satellite phones from some participants of the Japanese visa-free group that visited the southern Kurile Islands on a charter flight**

Under the agreement between the Russian and Japanese leaders following their bilateral summit in May, the Japanese took a successful charter flight from Hokkaido to the southern Kurile Islands of Kunashir and Iturup on July 22-23 of this year. The charter flight was organised so that former Japanese residents of the islands could visit the burial sites of their relatives. The flight was based on the Soviet-Japanese agreement on mutual visa-free visits to the burial sites on the territory of the two countries of July 2, 1986.

During the customs clearance procedure at Mendeleyevo Airport in Yuzhno-Kurilsk, it transpired that the Japanese Foreign Ministry and the Japanese journalists that accompanied the group had six undeclared satellite phones. They were confiscated due to the violation of section one of Article 16.2 (failure to declare goods that are subject to mandatory declaration) and Article 16.3 (failure to comply with a ban and/or restrictions on the admission of goods to the customs territory of the Eurasian Economic Union) of the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offences. The owners of the phones did not have permits from Roskomnadzor (Russia's communications oversight agency) to bring high-frequency devices into Russia.

Importantly, there were no problems with the admission of the television equipment about which the Japanese had notified the Russian customs officials and the admission of which was agreed upon in advance.

Regrettably, the afore-mentioned Japanese visitors did not adopt a constructive attitude and ostentatiously refused to sign protocols on violations.

At present, this case is subject to administrative investigation under Russian law, following which it will be taken to court.

We would like to draw the attention of the Japanese side to the need to strictly abide by Russian law during their visits to the territory of the Russian Federation, including the southern Kurile Islands.



#### **Condolences in connection with forest fires in Greece**

We would like to offer our condolences to the fraternal Greek people in connection with the tragic aftermath of the wild fires that have engulfed the Attica Region encompassing the entire metropolitan area of Athens. According to official statistics, 81 people have perished, and another 60 are being treated in hospitals. No Russian citizens have lost their lives or been injured.

We share the sorrow of the people of Greece in connection with these developments. We would like to offer words of support and sympathy to the families and friends of the deceased, and we wish a speedy recovery to those who incurred injuries.



#### **Signing a memorandum with the UN Volunteers Programme**

On July 26, a memorandum on making a financial contribution to the budget of the UN Volunteers Programme was signed in Moscow. This sum will be spent on a project aimed at involving Russian volunteers in UN activities.

Under the memorandum, Russia undertakes to contribute \$1,004,000 that will be used to finance the involvement of 19 volunteers of the Russian Federation in UN projects and programmes dealing with international development and peacekeeping efforts.

The candidates, due to be selected in September, will work in 16 CIS, African, Asian and Middle East countries.

The signing of this agreement has become an important stage of expanding relations between the UN Volunteers Programme and Russia. This is particularly topical at a time when Russia is holding the Year of Volunteers, and when the volunteer movement continues to develop rapidly.

#### Answers to media questions:

**Question: As-Suwayda has been subjected to a terrorist attack yesterday. It is already obvious that ISIS terrorists were supported from the US Al-Tanf base in Syria. Do you have any information on this? What do you think about this support?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** I have already noted our position regarding the tragic events in As-Suwayda. I can only add that any crimes, primarily terrorist attacks, need to be investigated thoroughly. Let's wait for the results from the investigation, and I do believe that an investigation will be conducted.

**Question: Today, officials from the Russian Tourism Industry Union have made several statements that visa centres might be shut down in this country after the introduction of accreditation. Can the Foreign Ministry comment on this matter?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** We have heard this information, and a comment is forthcoming in the near future.

**Question: Co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh have issued a statement that they are preparing a meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani ministers of foreign affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Elmar Mammadyarov. But nothing is being said about this meeting's time or where it will take place. Do you have any news on this score? Can Russia organise this ministerial meeting?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** We have no details so far. I am ready to specify this matter. We will contact you if we receive any information. On the whole, you know our position regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh peace settlement that has been repeatedly voiced.

**Question: This week, the Russian Embassy in Denmark said on its Twitter account it was pointless to meddle in Danish elections because the Government of Denmark and the opposition are Russophobic. I would simply like to find out whether this is the Foreign Ministry's position. Would it make sense to meddle in the elections if Danish parties voiced any other opinions of Russia? Do you really support this rather undiplomatic style of diplomats using social media networks?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** You know Russia's position regarding so-called election-meddling perfectly well. We have repeatedly said that we don't meddle in the domestic affairs of sovereign states, and that we treat everyone with respect.

Twitter and social media network messages are a special genre. You know that the Foreign Ministry runs numerous official accounts in various social media networks. You probably follow our work in this

field, and you know our style. Understandably, social media networks provide ample communication opportunities. In principle, it is their purpose to ensure mutual communications and to maintain dialogue with the audience. In some cases, it becomes possible to deviate from dull official language somewhat. But, if you closely follow our posts on Facebook, Twitter and other social media networks, then, of course, you have comprehended our style and realise that we never cross certain boundaries. And, even if we are joking sometimes, we are doing this in an extremely well-cultured and refined manner.

**Question: My question is about the visits that Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov paid to Israel, Germany and France. They hinted at certain talks on repatriating Syrians who had left their country. From the Russian side it all looked as if they came, they talked, and they came back home again. Could you please explain in more detail what plan for the repatriation of Syrian refugees and migrants Mr Lavrov and Mr Gerasimov have proposed in Jerusalem, Berlin and Paris?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** The official information on the results of these visits has been posted on the Foreign Ministry website. I am not saying any more for now. Let me add that the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons to Syria is a very important matter. You know our position; our initiatives, including those undertaken by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, have been divulged. The media covered this subject extensively.

**Question: The tenth round of Astana talks is scheduled for late July in Sochi. Do you think its results will be more substantial, particularly against the background of the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump? Will Russia insist on Kurdish involvement in the political process dealing with the Syrian crisis?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** Of course, we have high hopes for a positive outcome of this meeting.

I would like to say that in all likelihood there will be media scrums and a final news conference following the meeting. I think the details will emerge pretty soon.

**Question: Could you specify whether the presence of Iran and Iranian advisers in Syria was discussed during Foreign Minister Lavrov's visits to Israel, France and Germany?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** Even though Iran is a responsible player and a guarantor country, this question should be addressed to the Syrian Government.

As for the above mentioned visits, full information [about them], as I said, is available on the Foreign Ministry's official website.

**Question: Earlier this year, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that Ankara was interested in Russians visiting Turkey using their domestic passports. How far have the sides advanced in implementing the initiative for Russians to travel to Turkey using their domestic passports?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** I will find out more on this and reply to you in due course.

**Question: It was reported today that an important Russian delegation was in Lebanon and later would visit Iraq. Can you comment on the delegation's mission and role?**

**A group of young people assembled today before the Foreign Ministry to campaign for the liberation of Viktor Bout. Do you have anything to say concerning this?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** You know very well our position on the Bout case. It has been published and there is no change. We have spoken about this repeatedly.

As for the visits, I have no information as yet. Follow the Foreign Ministry's website. It will mention everything.

**Question: The Western media reports that the initiative to postpone the next Putin-Trump meeting came not only from the US but also from Russia. Congress may tighten the sanctions for a new meeting. What do you have to say about this?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** You should apply to the Presidential Executive Office for information on presidential events.

**Question: President of Yemen's Supreme Political Council Mahdi al-Mashat has suggested that Russia act as a guarantor of a ceasefire and political settlement in Yemen. This is not the first such appeal from the Houthis. What is the Russian response?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** We will study this matter and reply to you. For now, we have no information about this appeal.

**Question: Saudi Arabia's oil ministry has announced its intention to stop oil exports until the Houthi problem is solved. Could you say something about this?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** Perhaps you should address your question to the Saudi oil ministry.

**Question: The presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia are expected to meet in Moscow in September. We would like to know what you expect from this event. How will it promote bilateral cooperation, given the package of documents prepared for signing at the meeting?**

**Artyom Kozhin:** Colleagues, I have repeatedly urged you to address such questions related to the presidential agenda to the Press Service of the Presidential Executive Office. This is their purview, not ours.

