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FIFA World Cup is over

The FIFA World Cup is over. During the previous month it filled Russia and the rest of the world with an unsurpassed holiday atmosphere. Indeed this was a real holiday. 'Zabivaka the goalscorer' did his best and you saw it. We would like to congratulate all the winners and participants once again.

The World Cup will be remembered by the records and the personal successes of footballers. All of this was noticed by the international media. They wrote about the technical innovations including those used in the final. Thus, CNN described the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) that was used in the World Cup final for the first time. Finally, despite the campaign launched two years before the World Cup, even the BBC recorded an unprecedented number of clicks to watch the final and previous matches on its websites, noting that the World Cup was one of the most memorable in history. As they say, "you are welcome." Better late than never. I think this focus on propaganda will become a good lesson for all of us. Regrettably, many British fans who had been dreaming of coming did not come. This is primarily the fault of the British government and media that intimidated their compatriots with fake stories and conducted an active agitprop campaign through egregious methods. We regret very much that the British fans could not watch the World Cup live. Some of them came here, but many who wanted to come and had dreamt of it regret missing it.

According to Forbes, a record number of people streamed the World Cup in all segments. The Italian Repubblica emphasised Russia's ability to host global competitions while Corriera de la Sera was impressed by "the impeccable organisation, exemplary order and clean streets."

I was deeply impressed by the words of Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic. She said the World Cup has become a model of tolerance and an example of how to host such events for everyone else in the world. These are important words because she spoke about real rather than pretend tolerance, not about some false political correctness but about the true spirit of sports and fraternity among people who forget even about important differences and become united by the common idea of sports that was the foundation for the international development of sports. Regrettably we have seen how a blow against these ideas was dealt on a massive scale.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino described the 2018 World Cup in Russia as "the best ever" at the final news conference at Luzhniki Stadium. We are very pleased about this. We are really grateful to all those who expressed appreciation for our efforts.

I would like to thank all those who made this World Cup so picturesque and unforgettable, a real holiday. This was the work of volunteers (that helped with transport) and efforts to ensure security, including through international cooperation. All this allowed the fans and guests to enjoy the World Cup's atmosphere without being distracted by organisational matters.

I cannot miss this opportunity to thank the Russian team that allowed us to believe in miracles and who did such a surprising job for so many games with unexpected results and a real fight for victory. Thank you very much, guys! This was really unforgettable. This feast will forever remain in the hearts of millions of people all over the world!

We are handing over the World Cup baton to the next host and wish it the same success as in 2018. We are ready to share our experience and offer our ideas, including those in information support. Let me repeat that we are sincerely willing to share any experience that will be of interest and in demand.

9th conference of ambassadors and permanent representatives of the Russian Federation

On July 19/20, a conference of ambassadors and permanent representatives of the Russian Federation will be held in Moscow, which has been a traditional biennial event since 2002. Russian President Vladimir Putin will address the conference.

The event will be attended by 163 heads of the Russian diplomatic missions abroad, representatives of the top executive bodies, ministries and agencies involved in the realisation of Russia's foreign policy, the Russian academic and business communities, and media.

The conference's agenda includes analysing Russian priorities in all major areas of foreign policy activities, identifying further practical steps to implement the foreign policy of the country, and reviewing the key tasks currently facing Russian diplomacy, such as ensuring national security, creating favourable external conditions for the country's development, promoting and protecting the national interests of the Russian Federation on the basis of international law, as well as the principles of justice and equitable, mutually respectful cooperation.

The conference will be organised in the format of thematic plenary sessions and regional sections to discuss current issues of Russia's foreign and foreign economic policy; the country's international military cooperation; informational support for foreign policy; issues related to work with compatriots; countering international terrorism and extremism; humanitarian issues and many other topics.

On the sidelines of the conference the ambassadors and permanent representatives will meet with heads of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, Rosatom State Corporation, Roscosmos State Corporation, and the Russian Export Centre.

The participants will make fact-finding trips to the Russian regions as part of the conference where they will meet with heads of the respective regions, learn about the economy and culture as an additional means of boosting international cooperation.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's participation in a conference of Rossotrudnichestvo representatives abroad

Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov is scheduled to take part in the plenary meeting "The main areas of improving Rossotrudnichestvo's performance" on July 23, which will be held within the framework of the conference of the heads of the offices and representatives of the agency abroad.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Presidential Executive Order No. 1315 of September 6, 2008 On Establishing the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), which succeeded the All-Union Society of Cultural Relations Abroad (VOKS), the Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD) and the Russian Centre for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation under the Government of Russia (Roszarubezhtsentr).

Russia-Japan talks in the two plus two format

The agreement on launching a consultative mechanism of the heads of the foreign and defence ministries of Russia and Japan in the two plus two format was reached during the bilateral summit in Moscow in April 2013.

The first round of talks was held in Tokyo in November 2013. The dialogue was subsequently suspended by the Japanese side. Its resumption was announced following the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Japan in December 2016. The second round was held in Tokyo on March 20, 2017. At the May 26 Russian-Japanese summit in Moscow the leaders agreed to hold the third round in the Russian capital. The date of July 31 has been confirmed.

The issues to be discussed at the meeting include confidence-building measures between Russia and Japan in the area of security, Russia-Japan interaction in fighting new challenges and threats, as well as current international and regional matters including the military-political component.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's participation in the meetings of ASEAN ministers in Singapore

In early August, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will take part in the ASEAN events in Singapore.

The schedule is being compiled now, so we will give you the exact dates and the participation format in the events later.

For now I can tell you that the meeting with foreign ministers of the ASEAN member states will focus on steps to consolidate the dialogue partnership with the association and to give it a strategic character in accordance with the decisions adopted at the Russia-ASEAN summit in Sochi in 2016. There are also plans to discuss a wide range of issues of practical cooperation in matters of counter-terrorism, emergency response, improving transport infrastructure, education, and ICT security. Special priority will be given to joint efforts to support stability in the Asia-Pacific Region and develop mutually

beneficial ties of the ten nations of ASEAN with the EAEU and the SCO.

The meeting in the East Asian Summit format will focus on preparing for the 13th summit in Singapore in November this year. Russia's priority is strengthening a fair, polycentric world order and open multilateral system in the region, developing network diplomacy and further promoting dialogue on creating a comprehensive and reliable architecture for equal and indivisible security on this basis.

We support the development of practical EAS activities in such fields as energy, finance, education, healthcare, emergency response and increasing interconnectivity. In this context, participants of the meeting will discuss the process of implementing the Manila Plan of Action for the EAS (2018?2022).

The next session of the ASEAN Regional Security Forum will be dedicated to multilateral cooperation to counteract existing threats (the proliferation of nuclear and missile technology, terrorism and transnational crime, and challenges in using information and communication technologies).

According to tradition, a number of bilateral meetings with partners are scheduled on the sidelines of these events.

Developments in Syria

Developments in Syria took different forms over the past week, with a few positive elements amid overall tension. The positive elements were mostly due to the successful operations of the Syrian government forces in southwestern regions, where they continue to consistently target militants in the Daraa Province. The terrorists are being driven out of populated areas and strategic heights are being seized without a fight. As of Monday, July 16, the authorities controlled 90 per cent of the province.

Work is underway with the active assistance of Russian officers to restore peace in the remaining rebel-held areas. Three days ago, over 400 militants from illegal paramilitary units and members of their families were evacuated from Daraa, the capital of the Daraa Province, to northern Syria under a settlement agreement.

The humanitarian situation in the Daraa Province has also improved. The refugee crisis along the border with Jordan is almost settled, and nearly all the refugees have returned to their homes. Russian service personnel continue to deliver humanitarian relief aid to those in need, and Russian doctors provide medical assistance to local residents. Several days ago, a joint convoy organised by the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, also delivered humanitarian aid, specifically, food, to Nasib and Umm Al-Mayadin.

Government forces continue to advance steadily in the Quneitra Province, southern Syria, moving towards a line stipulated by the 1974 agreement on disengaging Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights.

The rapid and largely bloodless resolution of the conflict in southern Syria has demoralised the leaders of illegal paramilitary units in the Idlib Province, northern Syria. They are rushing to rally to their ranks and to mobilise sympathisers from among the local population, but their efforts are not always successful. Residents of some communities are taking to the streets to protest the tyranny of the militants.

Illegal paramilitary units also sustain losses due to clashes between them. For example, in Idlib Jabhat al-Nusra announced the execution of an ISIS cell chief who masterminded a series of attacks on this group's leaders. This, in turn, provoked more murders of Jabhat al-Nusra field commanders in this province.

The media reported a general strike in Sarmin, where civilians are trying to persuade members of local illegal paramilitary units to make peace with authorities, to put an end to chaos once and for all and to stop constantly threatening the lives of people, who are often caught in the crossfire.

US plans to evacuate the White Helmets from Syria

There was an interesting development concerning the so-called White Helmets, these would-be humanitarian workers, but actually people who simply sold their souls for money to engage in subversion and provocations in Syria, undermining trust in the humanitarian movement around the world.

The Foreign Ministry has repeatedly sought to shed light on the operations of this organisation. Financed by western sponsors, the White Helmets were behind the most resonant provocations that occurred in the course of the Syrian conflict: staging faked chemical attacks, including the April 7 incident in Douma as the most recent example, producing staged videos of the pretended shelling victims from residential neighbourhoods, and spreading fake reports about hospitals destroyed by Syrian or Russian airstrikes. In fact, for several years now this group has played the unfortunate role of a strike force in the information war not only against Syria, but also against Russia, and has been quite successful at it. To be honest, it has been waging this information warfare against the entire international community, which has long made a choice in its development of democracy, human rights, media freedom, and renounced provocations, or at least opted for heading in this direction.

We have to hand it to the professionalism of those behind the project known as the White Helmets, who are talented, but extremely cynical people. The project has proved to be quite effective in terms of its impact on the public opinion in the West and a number of countries within the region. However, the fact that the people placed at the helm of the White Helmets by outside sponsors turned out to have close ties with terrorists, primarily Jabhat al-Nusra was a major flaw of the entire initiative. As time went by, multiple images of the White Helmets posing with al-Nusra fighters, and showing that some of the civilian activists were directly involved in the killings of imprisoned soldiers from the Syrian Army, spread across the social media.

Last week, a number of outlets reported that considering the situation on the ground some members of the US-led coalition were planning the evacuation of about 1,000 White Helmets from Syria because they could allegedly face vengeance from the authorities as the government gradually restores its control over the entire country.

It is not surprising that this is the way our Western partners view this matter. It appears that this initiative is not about rank-and-file White Helmets who were used as a cover and made the whole project look respectable, but about its leaders and the activists who could be aware of the secret information warfare waged as part of the project. It is for their dirty services that these provocateurs can now get a chance to hop on board of the departing steamboat symbolising Western interference in Syria's sovereign affairs. Who knows, it may be that these experts in provocation and fakes will come in handy in other circumstances and in other places.

We cannot fail to mention that we are talking about Syrian nationals who are expected to be evacuated from Syria despite the amnesty announced by the country's government. The creation of a new group of so-called refugees of at least 1,000 people to be sent to the US and European countries takes place at the moment when prerequisites are being put in place to enable Syrians to return to their homes. Could it lead to a new flow of migrants out of Syria? Are those in charge of this matter sure that there will be no real terrorists on these lists? Where will these people end up in a few months? Whose orders will they take? These are obvious questions relevant not only for the countries where the White Helmets will be taken, but also in terms of global security. We have already seen operations of this kind in the region when people engaging in provocations or crime were transferred from one location to another, while still staying within the region. This time it could be that these people will go to another continent, for example Europe.

We call on our Western partners to ponder all these questions and act in keeping with the international law, respect the sovereignty of the Syrian state and refrain from creating new problems for themselves or others.

As a matter of fact, the problem posed by the evacuations of the White Helmets is much more urgent than it may seem. This is backed by the information that has been provided to international organisation. A convoy of vehicles belonging to the White Helmets has arrived recently to Idlib, carrying protective gear. There were several chemistry experts among the people who arrived with the convoy that also carried missiles and their parts. The convoy moved on. It may well be that the souvenirs delivered to Idlib by the people calling themselves the White Helmets will be used according to their designation. Maybe it will happen once it is announced that these would-be humanitarians have left the region. Nothing can be ruled out in this case, neither a possible large-scale provocation, nor an attempt to shift the blame on local authorities, who are about to take the situation under their control.

I would like to reiterate that the information I highlighted only briefly today without going into details out of security-related concerns has been forwarded to the relevant international organisations with all the details.

Syrian refugees

Strategically-wise, terrorists in Syria have been defeated. Stability is being restored on the larger part of the national territory. Conditions are being created for serious efforts to deal with one of the worst consequences of the Syrian crisis – the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons. According to the UN, there are some 7 million Syrian refugees outside Syria. The largest groups are in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, as well as Europe.

On July 3, the Syrian Government issued an official address to Syrian citizens who fled the country because of the war and the terrorist aggression to return home against security and non-discrimination guarantees.

However, the Syrians will return home voluntarily and in a dignified manner if they see that the vital economic and social infrastructure has been rebuilt and new jobs created. It will be a big job to clear all the mines as well.

The Syrian Government will obviously find it difficult to deal with these matters single-handed. International support is now necessary more than ever before. Collective efforts to assist millions of Syrians to return to their homes can become a new stage in the early and lasting settlement in Syria. Damascus is taking practical steps towards this in coordination with Jordan. The lists of those who want to return home are being compiled, and the first few groups of them have crossed the Lebanese-Syrian border.

We view consolidated work to bring refugees back and launch the socioeconomic rehabilitation of Syria as part of the efforts to eliminate ISIS in Syria and to eradicate the reasons for the spread of terrorism and extremism.

We welcome any international initiatives aimed at providing practical assistance to Syria and the Syrian people and at promoting an early settlement of the crisis based on international law, primarily UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

Refugees are in the focus of our attention as we are preparing for the 10th meeting on a settlement in Syria, which will be held in the Astana format in Sochi on July 30 and 31. We have sent an invitation to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. At the same time, Russian servicemen are working on the ground to provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, including internally displaced persons, who are returning to the regions that have been liberated from the terrorists, and to sweep the liberated areas for explosive devices.

The priority condition for settling the problem of the Syrian refugees is the restoration of normal economic activity in Syria. A settlement in the southwestern regions has created conditions for reopening international roads connecting Damascus with Amman and Baghdad.

We call on the international community to lift the financial and economic sanctions on Syria, which are preventing the delivery of food and medicine to the country. These countermeasures are having a negative impact on the Syrian people. They are hindering the socioeconomic rehabilitation of Syria and, consequently, the return of refugees to their homes.

Situation around Gaza Strip

Moscow welcomes the agreements on resuming the ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian groups in Gaza, reached with Egypt's mediation, after the military escalation in Gaza on July 14 when, during a massive interchange of strikes, two Palestinian teenagers were killed and over 30 Palestinians were injured. Four residents of Sderot suffered on the Israeli side.

As always, we urge the Palestinians and Israelis to exercise restraint and take action to prevent a new wave of violence that could lead to unpredictable consequences. In this respect, We note that it is important to ensure that Palestinian protests in Gaza are entirely peaceful and that it is unacceptable for Israel to use military force against civilians.

At the same time, along with a trend towards stabilisation of the situation, it is vital to establish a political process between the Palestinians and Israelis based on the existing international legal framework, without which it is impossible to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East, including long-term solutions for the Gaza Strip.

Arrest of Russian national Maria Butina in the United States

We are dismayed by the reported arrest of Russian citizen Maria Butina in the US on July 15. According to a statement on the website of the US Justice Department, she is charged with conspiracy to act as a foreign agent without registration.

These unsubstantiated claims against our fellow national seem odd, to say the least. As we know, Maria Butina has been in the United States for a long time as a student at a university in Washington and she has not been hiding from anybody.

It appears that instead of dealing with its core responsibilities in fighting crime, the Federal Bureau of Investigation is carrying out a blatant political order. As we understand it, the order came from those who continue to stir up Russophobic hysteria, for which purpose they regularly plant more fictional sensations about Russia's alleged interference in the internal affairs of the United States.

On July 13, twelve Russians, who are currently outside the United States, were charged, as we have already mentioned. Now these ridiculous claims are made against Maria Butina – and she has even been arrested.

We could go on and on analysing this situation. We have the impression that the arrest, as a restrictive measure, was selected specifically to show the seriousness of the issue to the US public and to allies

outside the country. The media immediately started referring to Butina as a spy and looked for connections with the security services, to build up tension without any substantial facts.

All this is happened right before the bilateral summit in Helsinki, with the obvious purpose of minimising the positive effect of the meeting and doing this as soon as possible. It appears that somebody took a watch, a calculator and timed when the decision on Maria Butina's arrest should be taken in order to do as much as possible to sabotage the results of the summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump. This is how good the timing was.

It is possible to elaborate on the subject in the following way. If you have complaints against a person (and it is not a national security issue) you can always bring it to Russia's attention. And more importantly, the matter could have been discussed, for example, in preparation for the summit. The US could have provided the details to its Russian counterparts and, also for example, discussed it on the margins of the summit or somehow touched base on the issue during the summit. Not a single word was said about it. The entire problem was concocted right after the summit. Given that Russia is a permanent topic of discussion in the US, that all the media are pumping up the hysteria, the bomb eventually detonated.

For our part, we are taking all possible measures to protect the rights and legal interests of the Russian national. The Russian Embassy in Washington contacted the US authorities and is pressing for an urgent consular meeting with Ms Butina, and this consular meeting is mandatory.

Immediately, allegations and rumours spread via social media. Users started to search for pictures of Maria Butina taking part in Russia-US meetings over the past two years.

Developments in connection with the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents

Covering developments related to the incidents in Salisbury and Amesbury has become a habit for these briefings like traditional five o'clock tea served at some of the best homes in London. From week to week, the interest in this subject has been whipped up by media plants, leaks and fakes rather than the discovery of new facts and data, publication of versions, or the search for criminals. The aim is obviously to create a semblance of work and intense activities directed at solving these crimes. In reality, however, all of this is being done to distract attention of the media and the public.

I think no other case has generated so much absurdity and so many media fakes. Moreover, the media plants are being palmed off as leaks from the British law enforcement authorities. Incidentally, we do not know whether these leaks are from the law enforcers or from the authority specialising in fake news. Everyone is offering hypotheses and forecasts. We could make a hit parade of the absurd out of what we read in the British media. Regrettably, these publications influence the readers, shape public perceptions of what has happened, and are part of the propaganda campaign that kicked off after Prime Minister Theresa May's notorious speech which she made in Parliament, where she lined up a number of ungrounded accusations and insults directed at our country. This is why we cannot disregard them. We have noticed that the "hit parade" is being joined by US media. For example, we can reserve a special place in this "hit parade" for a New York Times article published shortly before the Russia-US summit. It is clear why The New York Times commented on the Skripal case, on Salisbury and Amesbury, right before the summit. Just recall what precisely Mrs May said on the eve of the summit. She urged the US to include the subject on the agenda of the bilateral talks. As if on cue, The New York Times draws US public attention to this topic but does this in an absolutely absurd way. For example, the author of this article – I have to say that this is an article, although, let me repeat it, it is an exercise in absurdity – declares that the GRU is implicated. The publication is alleging that the Russian military intelligence, which is accused of hacking the US elections in 2016, is the same organisation that is likely involved in the Salisbury poisoning. We are no longer surprised by these accusations worded in the best traditions of Western journalism (I am putting it this way because there is not a single fact, just estimates and speculations).

The information that the suspect is the GRU or what the article calls its privatized branches is presented with reference – importantly! – to an unnamed Briton and two Americans, one of them a retired US official familiar with the investigation. This means the British leak information on a sensitive issue of state and international importance – the investigation – firstly, to foreign secret services, and, secondly, to private individuals, if we are speaking about a former official. I mean that this is not an exchange of intelligence but leaks that resulted from certain intelligence breaches. Please note that all of this occurred shortly before the Russia-US summit. That's the way they work!

The NYT devoted barely two paragraphs to the new investigation, but even these lack any serious stuff or analysis. Let me once again reply to the question: Why do they need this? It will be recalled that Theresa May wanted to include the Salisbury/Amesbury topic in the bilateral agenda. In some way or other, this was done through the US media, because it began circulating in the media right during the summit.

The NYT was obviously aware that it was publishing unverified data. To be on the safe side, it said that the poisoning could be the doing of other Russian secret services or even of non-state agents.

This is yet another absurdity and, most importantly, this article, which was planted and based on references, hearsay and pre-summit leaks, is part of a big provocative game. Everyone keeps silent about real facts. Let me remind you of some of these. You may remember that at one of the past briefings we advised, for example, to check the Porton Down Laboratory's financial reports. It was a rhetoric suggestion, but it brought some response. Let us analyse real facts. I do not know in what connection it was, I have no right to draw any conclusions, I just see the facts and want to make them public.

So, certain members of the British media community, social media together with microblogs decided to take precisely this path. I do not know why. The annual audit report on Porton Down for 2016-2017 (a very interesting document was published in the media) contains facts about its unstable financial state and several incidents that happened during the reporting period. Let me repeat it: 2016-2017! According to the document, the laboratory's financial losses amounted to 37 million pounds and its turnover dropped from 612 to 587 million pounds.

Then follow some even more depressing financial indices that could not but affect the financial wellbeing of 3,700 Porton Down rank-and-file. What an interesting laboratory! It is mentioned that the corporate spirit and loyalty index had been falling throughout the previous 5 years (the level is calculated in percentage points and the reference can be found here: [\[redacted\]](#)). It is asserted that the lapse of loyalty among the rank-and-file was due to their declining pay and accompanied by an increased personnel turnover and the hiring of temporary workers (an interesting piece of information!). These are facts. If this is not so, please, we are expecting a denial from Porton Down. The cases in point are numerical indices and the hiring of temporary workers. What could not but add to the rank-and-file workers' irritation was the fact that their salaries were lower than those of their superiors (this is also mentioned in the document). Some other conclusions are drawn as well.

If we address security matters, the document also says that the Porton Down security service recorded 61 incidents during the 2016-2017 reporting period alone. I suggest that you inquire on your own what was meant precisely.

Days after the Salisbury poisoning, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson announced the decision to invest 48 million pounds (\$67 million) in Porton Down to counter the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threat.

Everything that happened at Porton Down historically (we provided the historical background) and everything that is taking place there now could be used for the plots of thrillers and crime stories and films. Why isn't the media and the public taking an interest in this? I can understand why the public is not interested, but the media simply pretends not to notice anything.

We have told you about the strange deaths, to put it mildly, of several lab employees over the past 20 years. We told you about the strange deaths of Soviet microbiologist, former director of the Leningrad Institute of Highly Pure Biopreparations Vladimir Pasechnik, biological warfare expert David Kelly and Paul Norman, who succeeded David Kelly at the Porton Down Laboratory. We told you about the death of leading scientist Richard Holmes as well. We have found intriguing facts about Mr Holmes' death in open sources, such as a BBC article of October 9, 2013 ([\[redacted\]](#)).

Few people take an interest in this material. People refuse to see facts. I suggest that you read that BBC article of October 9, 2013. According to investigators, Mr Holmes resigned from the Porton Down Laboratory ahead of a planned disciplinary hearing for bullying the staff. He planned to sue the lab. Take note of the following information: after resigning from the lab, Mr Holmes' application for a cleaning job at Salisbury District Hospital had been turned down. It is the very same hospital where the Skripals were taken after their alleged poisoning. It is getting curioiser and curioiser, but attempts are being

made to divert us from this track. As soon as we start talking about the facts we found in the print media, which nobody has disproved, they denounce this as Russian propaganda and that we have planted 25 more versions of the incident. But we have not proposed a single version, because we have no right to do this. We only quote from the material that was published in the UK long before the 2018 poisoning case. Why did a leading lab employee, a highly paid and promising expert apply for a cleaning job at Salisbury District Hospital? This is a great mystery. Anyway, according to police reports, Mr Holmes had died from drinking anti-freeze, although, according to the media, he told his wife before doing that: "Don't worry, I'm not going to do anything silly."

Journalists have written a great deal about the strange circumstances of the death of Holmes and Kelly. I'm saying this because we have been urged to stick to facts. For some strange reason, Sergey Skripal, who was perfectly sane when he settled in Britain, chose a house in Salisbury barely a few kilometres from the Porton Down Laboratory. I know many wonderful places in the UK where it is good to live and they are not all situated right next door to this notorious lab.

Russian section of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's annual Human Rights and Democracy Report

The annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, recently published by the Russian section of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has the same flaws as previous documents. The report voices selective and stereotyped assessments, ignores realities and applies the double standards that are so favoured by London and a number of other Western capitals.

To be honest, this document is so biased and politicised, and, in our opinion, it is also tailored to fit the scale of Russophobia, now running rampant inside the official British establishment, that it does not require any detailed comments, although we have been asked to provide this.

Another thing is important. While continuing to tutor other states on how they should build a democratic system, the British authorities hush up the unfavourable human rights situation in their own country. The United Kingdom faces numerous problems. At the same time, attempts to identify causes and to evaluate numerous human rights violations are often drowned out by political manipulations.

We wholeheartedly advise our British colleagues to be more self-critical and, at long last, to note the need for effectively countering the neo-Nazism that continues to pick up momentum in Ukraine and the European Union and is growing stronger, while being nourished by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance towards immigrants, dissent, Islamophobia and the encroachment on the rights of national and ethnic minorities.

Security situation in Pakistan in the run-up to the national general election

We are noting with concern the growth of terrorist activity in Pakistan. Obviously, the actions of extremists are aimed at destabilising the national situation in the run-up to the July 25 general election. On July 10, a suicide bomber killed 22 people, including Haroon Bilour, a candidate from the Pashtun Awami National Party, in Peshawar. On July 13, a high-explosive bomb went off in Bannu; the blast targeted the convoy of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal clerical bloc's candidate Akram Durrani. That same day, a terrorist attack was perpetrated at a meeting of supporters of the Balochistan Awami Party in Mastung District, killing about 130 people, including the party's candidate Nawab Siraj Raisani.

We resolutely condemn the bloody terrorist outrages that have nothing to do with Islamic values and cannot be justified. We support the efforts of the Pakistani authorities to boost security, including a decision to post service personnel at polling stations and to involve them in protecting election campaign events.

Strategic Actions to Respond to the Global Threats of Opiates

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has unveiled its document called Strategic Actions to respond to the Global Threats of Opiates which aims to consolidate the efforts of all states and organisations in the context of an unprecedented increase in drug cultivation and opiate production in Afghanistan and to become a universal foundation for international cooperation.

This strategy seeks to strengthen the capability of law enforcement, to reduce the demand for drugs, to conduct analytical activity, to facilitate alternative development and to persuade donors to once again start financing anti-drug projects in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.

Russia is particularly concerned about the drug threat emanating from Afghanistan and its increasingly closer links with terrorism. Afghanistan remains the largest producer of drugs in the world. In 2017, the area devoted to opium poppy plantations soared by 63 percent, with opium production skyrocketing by 87 percent. There are almost twice as many people involved in the drug economy in Afghanistan than in the country's law enforcement agencies.

We hope that the UNODC's new strategic actions will reinstate the issue of Afghan narcotics on the international agenda. The entire international community needs to pool its efforts, and the Afghan authorities should adopt a responsible approach towards combating the cultivation and production of opiates. In turn, we confirm our readiness to help train drug enforcement police officers for Afghanistan and other countries in the region.

Statement by Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev

We are perplexed by Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev's statement who claims that some business people sympathising with Russia are allegedly funding the anti-government protest movement in the Republic of Macedonia as a result of the Prespa Agreement between Greece and Macedonia to rename the latter the Republic of North Macedonia.

These are new unsubstantiated accusations against Moscow that pursue the goal of building up anti-Russian sentiments. Obviously, no evidence to support Prime Minister Zaev's words will be presented, as it usually goes, otherwise it would have already been done. Meanwhile, Western countries are openly interfering with Macedonia's domestic matters and apparently believe it is normal.

Instead of observing Macedonian and international law, the ruling coalition in Skopje is traditionally resorting to playing the anti-Russia card as a method of political infighting and, unfortunately, intimidating its own citizens.

The Russian Federation has always supported the achievement of a mutually acceptable agreement on the state name without any external pressure and artificially imposed deadlines, an agreement that would actually reflect the will of both peoples and be based on the general consensus as well as impeccable constitutional and legal grounds. This did not happen. The Prespa Agreement caused a serious discord in Greece and the Republic of Macedonia. It is obvious that the agreement is far from the claimed interests of strengthening peace and security in the Balkans and serves solely as a tool to accelerate the Republic of Macedonia's involvement with NATO.

Stern magazine employees' violation of Russian law

There have been increased cases of Russian law violations by foreign journalists. Believe me, there have been plenty of them. We are not making any big deal out of all this and trying to resolve it in due course either with journalists themselves or by handing over the information to the respective embassies. Unfortunately, there are general trends that I have to mention.

I would like to point out the importance of obtaining mandatory permits for drone journalism in Russia. This is not our own invention but a common international practice. Each country has its own regulations regarding the use of drones. The same is true for Russia.

One of the recent cases involves employees of Stern magazine (Germany) using a drone to film a panorama of the areas surrounding Mordovia Arena in Saransk. Unfortunately, without the permit, their expensive equipment was seized and they were issued a protocol on administrative violation.

We fully understand journalists' ambition to create a beautiful picture, a brilliant story and a quality image of Russian landmarks and signature sports facilities. However, to avoid any such incidents in the future, we urge you all to strictly comply with Russian law.

I would like to point out that this is not only a problem for foreign correspondents in Russia. Unfortunately, Russian journalists abroad face the same issues if they break the law of the country where they work. We are to the same extent involved in the exchange of notes and correspondence with the officials of the countries where Russian journalists use drones without authorisation.

Once again, please pay the utmost attention to the regulations. If you need us to clarify the details, we are ready to comment one-on-one, to groups and through Foreign Correspondents' Association. I think we will send out an additional newsletter on this matter.

Ukrainian militants receive medical treatment in Germany

We have taken note of a video released by the Deutsche Welle Russian service about how injured Ukrainian servicemen receive medical treatment in Germany. At the 50-second mark of this video, one can clearly see one of these so-called servicemen putting out his arm in a Nazi salute. Russian users, for whom these things are unacceptable, drew our attention to this. We received a great number of letters and messages about this via e-mail and social networks.

We were surprised that in its comment attached to the posted video, Deutsche Welle points out that "allegations that there is a Nazi salute in this video do not correspond to reality." We would like to know if any review was carried out. What is this comment based on? Were the people that took part in the filming interviewed? What drove the Deutsche Welle Russian service to publish this comment that triggered a wave of indignation?

We constantly speak about a surge of neo-Nazi sentiments in Ukraine. This has become obvious even to those who unconditionally back everything that happens there. During one of our recent briefings, we spoke about an article published on the Atlantic Council's website in late June. It was headlined "Ukraine's Got a Real Problem with Far Right Violence." I advise Deutsche Welle to take a look at this article. Denying the obvious is something that does not work out even with the US political science centre that is handsomely paid for promoting the Atlantic agenda.

Yet, it looks like this works out well with Deutsche Welle. Who are you trying to deceive? You are trying to deceive those people who saw it with their own eyes. Nothing is working out with you.

We have repeatedly called on international organisations to treat seriously our concerns over a rise in far right and anti-Semitic sentiments in Ukraine and urged Kiev to focus on investigating nationalist-motivated crimes. There is concrete factual evidence. Let us work with this. The task is not to constantly vilify Ukraine and its people. No, the point is that this very people will be hostage to neo-Nazis, and things might get even worse.

Suffice it to recall numerous attacks on the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Kiev. Who committed them: humanitarians, human rights campaigners, journalists? No. They were committed by nationalists. Most of them can be regarded as neo-Nazis. Remember the statements, comments and posters that were brought to Russian diplomatic missions in Ukraine (in Odessa and Lvov). Remember the attempts to set the Hungarian cultural centre in Uzhgorod on fire.

Again, I would like to draw your attention to the surge of nationalist sentiments in Ukraine, to rampages by nationalists in that country. Let me again call on relevant international organisations to come up with a proper legal assessment of this situation. History shows that turning a blind eye to a rise of these occurrences is unacceptable and extremely dangerous.

Preliminary investigation launched by Australia's Federal Police against RT

We keep a close eye on the recent developments surrounding the opening by Australia's Federal Police of a preliminary investigation against RT, a Russian television network, as a possible foreign agent.

I am referring to an article in The Australian, whereby Australia's Federal Police is conducting a preliminary investigation regarding persons and organisations who could fall within the scope of the law on fighting foreign interference. According to the newspaper, the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) serves as a starting point in the investigation.

We are closely following the developments and are waiting for information from experts. A detailed commentary to this effect will be issued soon. If the media reports are confirmed, this would be yet another example of so-called solidarity. Unfortunately, this has become all too common with Australia following in the footsteps of the US and Great Britain in trying to push the Russian media out of the international media space. All initiatives to this effect follow the same pattern. We understand all too well where decisions to launch campaigns of this kind come from, and how they are carried out on the ground. I would like to remind all those who are behind these decisions that Moscow reserves the right to take retaliatory measures whenever the rights of Russian journalists are being infringed upon, no matter where it happens. We have an unwavering and coordinated approach to this matter. I would like to reiterate that we have always supported the freedom of expression, and responded to criticism not through bans and expulsions, but by sharing more information and being open. In this case, I want everyone to understand that we will immediately come up with a tit-for-tat response.

Italian delegation at a commemorative ceremony for Hero of Russia Alexander Prokhorenko

Foreign nationals continue to express solidarity with the Russian people and support for the operations of the Russian armed forces against terrorists in Syria. Let me remind you that in August 2017 local authorities in Vagli Sotto, a municipality in Tuscany, Italy, erected a two-metre high marble monument to honour the memory of Senior Lieutenant, Hero of Russia Alexander Prokhorenko, who sacrificed his life in March 2016 when, surrounded by ISIS fighters near Syria's Palmyra, he ordered an airstrike on his own location.

This undertaking by Italian citizens was supported by Italy's Armed Forces, including by Italy's National Paratrooper Association, whose leadership decided in 2016 to name a paratrooper training class after Alexander Prokhorenko in memory of his courage and professionalism. This was the first time a class was named after a foreign national.

As a sign of respect for the act of bravery by the Russian officer, Vagli Sotto's municipal authorities, in cooperation with the country's veteran associations, proposed holding a special ceremony this year to transfer a copy of the monument to the Russian authorities along with a badge created in honour of the Russian officer by Italy's National Paratrooper Association. This ceremony was held today, on July 18, at the Patriot Military-Patriotic Park of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, and was attended by State Secretary, Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Pankov, as well as an Italian delegation headed by Vagli Sotto's Mayor Mario Puglia and the head of the Rome section of the Italian National Paratrooper Association Adriano Tocchi.

Russia highly values the initiative of the Italian side. It is often said around the world that all countries must combine their forces in fighting terrorism. The ceremony was an act of solidarity of our nations, and a contribution to fighting this global scourge.

Answers to media questions:

Question: Recently, access to a number of the USA Really social media accounts has been blocked. Launched in early June, USA Really is a new information agency. Access to its social media accounts on YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and other social networks has been blocked.

Maria Zakharova: What country does this media outlet come from?

Question: USA Really is a project of the Federal News Agency. What is the position of the Foreign Ministry regarding this situation, and what can it do to help resolve the issue?

Maria Zakharova: Who blocked the access?

Question: Presumably, American authorities could do this.

Maria Zakharova: Do you have any official explanation, letters that you have exchanged, appeals or answers that you have been given to clarify the situation?

Question: Yes, we do, we have [our] appeals. Lawsuits are being prepared right now...

Maria Zakharova: Please, forward the appeal you've sent to those who are responsible for these acts to us, as well as information about where exactly access to the accounts was blocked. If you have answers, we, by all means, will bring up this issue with the American party and, of course, with international organisations. What is important are the motives and the explanation of what has been done: the grounds on which access was blocked, whether there is a court decision to this effect and if security issues are involved in the situation, in short, what it is all about. Please, forward all these materials to us, so that we can examine them and then respond.

Question: Has the Consulate of the Russian Embassy in the United States been granted access to Maria Butina?

Maria Zakharova: Given the time difference – it's morning in the United States right now – I can tell you how things stood yesterday, and my answer is "No". We'll keep in contact with our embassy in Washington and keep you updated. If access [to Butina] has already been authorised, we'll promptly inform you. I'd like to repeat, according to information we had yesterday, there was no authorisation yet.

Question: A question from CNN. We've already heard Sergey Lavrov's assessment of the outcome of the Russia-US summit. Are there more impressions or discussions on this subject?

Maria Zakharova: On behalf of the Russian side, President Vladimir Putin offered his analysis [of the outcome of the summit] at the joint news conference and later in a lengthy interview to Fox TV channel – unfortunately, not CNN. A more in-depth analysis is even hard to imagine. Work has started on many things of which Vladimir Putin spoke, with appropriate instructions having been issued, and diplomats, based on the outcome of the summit, are starting to work on the issues that were outlined during the joint news conference.

Question: At the news conference, Donald Trump said that the United States was grateful to Russia for its help in fighting ISIS and terrorism. Would you please comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: You understand perfectly well that the fight against terrorism cannot go on in the form of an online broadcast 24 hours a day. This information is classified. However, some things that can be made public are revealed following successful joint operations or exchange of information. First, you remember the US intelligence services sharing information with their Russian colleagues, which was crucial for preventing a terrorist attack. Several years ago, Russia took similar actions, giving leads and very important facts to our American counterparts. Not always did they take advantage of them, but as for Russia, it has something more than just examples – it is a great desire to make this work full-fledged. Definitely, we are always against suspending this type of contact.

Second, there is Syria, where the fighting is going on to eradicate terrorists, and, in particular, ISIS. The presidents of both countries spoke about this. This is a different but high-profile example of cooperation in fighting international terrorism, in particular, ISIS. Although it is not all that straightforward, not the way we, in theory, would like it [the cooperation] to develop and not something that one could dream of, but still it is being maintained one way or another.

Question: What might change in the Syrian conflict following the Russia-US summit?

Maria Zakharova: All possible changes were identified by the two parties, in terms of what is already being done and what more could be done. First of all, this involves an intensification of anti-terrorist activities and coordination of efforts. As I said earlier, all of this is being done, but, certainly, more could be done in the area of combined efforts, exchange of information, and, of course, political coordination. All of these goals and objectives have been identified. We will move in the direction that the two presidents talked about, in particular, President Vladimir Putin.

Question: A year ago today, Rudaw TV Channel interviewed Sergey Lavrov. This was the most important work I ever did and maybe even the most important in the history of Kurdish journalism. I just wanted to thank you again for the interview on behalf of our TV Company. Thank you!

Maria Zakharova: I think it would be more appropriate to thank destiny than us. You know what I mean. We could probably share the details of how this interview was organised on a different occasion. There are no secrets, but not in this setting.

Question: The Korean Central News Agency is reporting that Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov has arrived in Pyongyang. Is this true?

Maria Zakharova: Consultations between the two foreign ministries happen regularly.

Question: Last week, the operation to rescue trapped schoolchildren from the Tham Luang cave in Thailand was successfully completed. Was Russia involved in any way?

Maria Zakharova: We said earlier that our Emergencies Ministry offered assistance to the rescue mission. In the end, our assistance proved to be unnecessary. Still, some Russian-made helicopters were used during the operation. I am talking about the aircraft made by Russian Helicopters. We are happy that we could contribute in this way to the effort to rescue 12 young players and their coach. But I would like to reiterate that direct assistance was also offered.

Question: The World Bank recently gave the Russian economy 11th place for GDP and took the Crimea and Sevastopol data into account. Would you like to comment on this? Could this be an indication that the world is changing its attitude to Crimea's status?

Maria Zakharova: The fact that Crimea's economic indicators were included in the analysis of Russian GDP is a tribute to reality. I think that one is free to have any political preferences but when it comes to statistics and especially economic indicators, the reality must be acknowledged.

For the Russian Federation this matter is final as it has been repeatedly stated and commented upon. Crimea is Russian territory, which was determined by the decision of Crimean residents themselves during the 2014 referendum. Once again, I want to point out that we do understand that there may be different political approaches, to this subject in particular. On our part, we are aiming to bring this topic closer to reality, one way or another, rather than meet somebody's expectations and attempts to bring back the past. The past is the past.

Once again, when it comes to economic indicators, actual data rather than the political climate must be taken into account.

Question: Yesterday Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Kairat Abdrakhmanov announced that the Fifth Caspian Summit of Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran will take place on August 12. What are Russia's expectations for the summit? How does Russia see the Caspian region after the adoption of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea?

Maria Zakharova: We do not comment on summits. It is the responsibility of the presidential press service and the Presidential Executive Office. All I can say is that there is still a meeting of the Foreign Ministers' Council to take place. We will inform you about the schedule of the meetings on the website or during the next briefing.

Question: Many Greek media outlets that write about the current situation in Russian-Greek relations, claim that Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov phoned his Greek counterpart before the latest crisis with the expulsion of Russian diplomats, threatening that Russia would suspend the agreement between Athens and Skopje at the UN Security Council. Did he make that telephone call? This is the first time in decades that such a large-scale anti-Russia campaign has been launched in the Greek media.

It is also said that there is a video showing Russian diplomats offering bribes to Greek deputies to vote against this agreement. What can you say on this score?

Maria Zakharova: As for the first part of your question, where you asked if Sergey Lavrov threatened his Greek colleague, this is absolute nonsense. It is strange that the Greek side has not commented on this, considering that this information was published in the Greek media. This sets us wondering. This is nonsense, absurd or whatever Greek synonyms you would care to offer.

I believe we have proved many times that even in the most complicated situations created by third parties in bilateral relations we never forget that the matter concerns the future of our countries and our people, who must not be made hostage to the dirty games played by certain states.

In this particular case, it was a multi-move game in which Greece has been involved. We know this for sure. I believe that many Greek journalists, let alone Greek politicians, know this as well. We know about the powerful pressure put on Greece. I can assure you that this is so, because I have facts to prove this. Athens probably managed to stand up against the first onslaught. I am referring, in part, to the use of the so-called solidarity to involve Greece in provocations, in particular, those initiated by the UK.

Greece was not the only country to refuse to do others' bidding. We know what instruments have been used against the countries and politicians who refused to bow to British actions and pressure. But pressure was increased, and it did not come just from British politicians but also from their American partners.

As I already said, every country and national leadership must decide for itself how far it can go to resist such pressure. We understand this. It is another matter if people in Greece understand this. Judging by a number of publications, there is clear evidence of such pressure. And we know the person who directed this scenario of pitting Moscow and Athens against each other. It is not my task to speak about this. I believe the journalists can do it themselves.

We believe that Greek people must be able to interact with Russian people and that they must be protected from the dirty provocations in which Athens has been regrettably involved. We are talking about politics, of course. Such things never go unnoticed, and they are never forgotten. Regrettably, they can only sour bilateral relations and have no constructive effect.

As for the video, let's watch it. I cannot comment on what I have not seen. I don't have the faintest idea what it could be.

Question: According to recent reports made in the Greek media, Russia allegedly intends to respond by having the Foreign Ministry issue some kind of guidelines to try to discourage Russian tourists from visiting Greece. Is this possible?

Maria Zakharova: Allow me to share my personal opinion on this matter. Over the past years Russians proved that they can decide on their own where to spend their holidays, considering their financial means, political views, and their desire to be involved in or distance themselves from any political matters, etc. People can decide for themselves whether to visit any specific country or not. It is true that the Foreign Ministry issues advice taking into consideration developments in various countries in terms of security, terrorism threat levels, epidemiological situation, or organised crime. I am saying this for those who go as far as to try to make up a news story out of this. This information is publicly available on the website of the Foreign Ministry or travel associations, etc. People in Russia can make up their own minds where to spend their holidays, and what to do.

Of course, we have to understand that when negative articles are published or political figures from a specific country make offensive statements, this does not make Russians any more sympathetic. People are well-informed, they read a lot and have boundless access to information. Russia's information space is absolutely open. People read all these articles, and see all of this. From the conversations I have had here and there, I can say that people are weary of the groundless attempts to isolate our country, and the endless attempts to engage in sanctions warfare. People see that all this is groundless, unfair, and now simply wild. They are fully aware that the expulsion of diplomats is an organised campaign. I think that people in Greece also understand this. There is no need for any threats or guidelines. This is pure logic.

Question: It was reported that US Senators and Congresspeople called on Washington to hold a hearing with the interpreter who was present at the Helsinki summit in order to learn what US President Donald Trump promised Vladimir Putin. Is it acceptable for talks between two heads of state? How would Russia respond if it happens?

Maria Zakharova: In other situations, it is not uncommon for us to hear summaries of top-level meetings and conversations when what was said by Russian leaders was distorted by politicians and sometimes even by heads of state. We always reply with a single phrase: we do not have any problem releasing authentic data on any meeting. We have already had cases of this kind, and Russia has already had to come forward with these statements, so it is not a problem for us. By the way, there have been attempts to make up contexts that did not exist. I have been asked about meetings on the sidelines of the summit, and there have been suggestions of this kind. This has to do with the political culture in the United States of America. These are challenging times for the US. Let us leave it to them to comment on these decisions and actions. Let me reiterate that this has to do with their political culture.

Question: I wanted to ask a question regarding the meeting between foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Brussels. They discussed steps to promote the negotiations on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. My question is whether this meeting can and will add momentum to the negotiating process?

Maria Zakharova: The Foreign Ministry does not comment on bilateral meetings unless Russia is involved. That being said, taking into consideration that this topic is relevant for Russia as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, among other things, I will say that Russia believes that any constructive contacts between the two sides must contribute to achieving the main goal and aim, which is a full settlement of this conflict.

I would like to reiterate that it is up to the meeting participants to comment on its outcomes, whether it was fruitful, useful or promising. Russia welcomes any developments that the two sides view as a step toward achieving a complete settlement or at least continuing dialogue.

Question: President Vladimir Putin said that it would be good to let foreigners with Fan IDs that attended the FIFA World Cup travel to Russia without a visa before the end of this year. This is an issue for the Foreign Ministry, for its consular service. What is being done in this respect? Maybe, you already know what actions need to be taken by Brazilian or Portuguese fans? Whom should they contact? Will only foreigners with Fan IDs be allowed to enter? What about their relatives?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to correct you. This is not just an issue for the Foreign Ministry or its consular services. It requires interdepartmental coordination considering that it is not about changes in the visa procedures but about this extraordinary situation, that is, the extension of the term of entry permits that are neither a visa nor a document confirming visa-free status.

The Russian Ministry of Sport drafted amendments to Federal Law No. 108 of June 7, 2013 On the Preparations for and Conduct in the Russian Federation of the 2018 FIFA World Cup and the 2017 FIFA Confederations Cup and Amendments to Individual Legal Acts of the Russian Federation, which provides for an extension until the end of 2018 of the multiple visa-free entry permits for foreign fans with a personified Fan ID for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

This is a complicated sentence, but the bottom line is that the amendments to the law that regulated this area have been drafted.

The issues pertaining to visa-free entry for Fan ID holders, verification of the authenticity of a fan's passport and a reduction of the risk of potential illegal migration are within the competence of the Ministry of Communications, the FSB and the Ministry of the Interior of Russia.

There are no plans to extend the visa-free entry to close relatives or families of fans. The introduction of the simplified procedure for the issue of visas for this category of citizens based on the personal applications of Fan ID holders is under consideration. What President Vladimir Putin said is now being reviewed very intensively by various departments. I think not just the details of the change but also specific decisions will be published very soon because it requires a legislative foundation that is now being developed.

Question: Marina Butina's arrest is not the first such case, especially since the news about possible amnesty for the 12 so-called Russian hackers arrested in the United States was published by the media before the meeting of the Russian and US presidents. Has the Foreign Ministry developed real mechanisms for protecting the rights of our citizens abroad?

Maria Zakharova: What do you mean by "real mechanisms"?

Question: Assistance in releasing them from detention.

Maria Zakharova: Assistance is rendered by our consulates through the provision of attorneys for defence, documents and their legalisation if it is necessary. They are upholding the rights of Russian citizens when they are violated. Of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg. I can give you all the information on this.

Since you have once again brought up this issue, I would like you to imagine for a moment a colourful picture of what would happen if an American student were arrested somewhere in Moscow, St Petersburg or Yekaterinburg in Russia, if she had all the documents and was actively studying international relations, if she were a law-abiding person but law enforcement agencies believed she was engaged in the activities requiring a license but she did not give notice of that and did not apply for a license as required. Can you imagine the scale of the global information campaign that would be launched over this if the American student found herself in similar circumstances in Russia? Regrettably, we have an absurd situation where no humanitarian aspects or human rights are even considered, where all that is needed is an excuse for escalating tensions in the domestic political struggle in the United States. Everything is pushed aside – the humanitarian dimension, the students' rights, as well as the fact that, to our knowledge, this girl had no problems with obeying the law and was engaged only in activities related to her studies. This is a little food for thought for you.