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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's talks with Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Cavusoglu

On August 24, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu who will be in Moscow on a short working visit.

This year's sixth meeting of the two ministers is expected to focus on the Syrian settlement process. The officials will discuss issues related to coordinating joint steps taken to counter terrorism in Syria and step up the search for a political solution of the Syrian conflict.

The ministers are also expected to discuss in detail how Russia and Turkey's strategically important projects in the energy, trade and economic spheres are being implemented and exchange views on several issues of mutual interest on the regional agenda.

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The centenary of the Russian Foreign Ministry's diplomatic courier service

As we said during the previous briefing, one hundred years ago, on August 27, 1918 a new chapter began in the history of the Russian diplomatic courier service: "a diplomatic courier desk" was established at the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR to support reliable and confidential communication with Russia's missions abroad.

On August 27, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will take part in the opening of the historical photo exhibition "The Centenary of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Courier Service."

A diplomatic courier's work is important; it not only takes professional acumen and devotion, but also good health, because it involves long and frequent flights and trips, stressful situations and drastic changes in time and climatic zones. Diplomatic couriers also risk their lives.

Everyone knows Theodor Nette and Johann Mahmastal: Soviet diplomatic couriers who became heroes on February 5, 1926, when they were attacked by armed men in a train on its way to Riga.

Their names will never be forgotten, and the day of their heroic deed is still marked as Diplomatic Courier Memorial Day for those who were killed in the line of duty.

Today diplomatic couriers continue to risk their lives delivering correspondence to conflict areas.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's talks with Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia Adel Al-Jubeir

On August 29, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will have talks with Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Adel Al-Jubeir who will be in Moscow on a working visit.

We view the upcoming meeting between the two ministers as an essential part of our regular trust-based political dialogue with our Saudi partners on a wide range of issues of mutual interest.

In this context, the ministers will discuss topical aspects of the further progressive development of the multifaceted Russian-Saudi relations as well as the implementation of the agreements reached during King Salman's state visit to Russia and his talks with President Vladimir Putin in October 2017.

The meeting will focus on bilateral trade, which has shown positive dynamics recently. In the end of 2017, it almost doubled compared with 2016, up to \$915.2 million. During the first four months of 2018, trade between Russia and Saudi Arabia grew by 76.4 percent to \$293.2 million.

The Joint Intergovernmental Russian-Saudi Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation plays an important coordinating role in this process, as well as the specialised working groups created in its framework. The practice of organising various business missions to Saudi Arabia under the auspices of the corresponding Russian agencies has also proven worthwhile.

Cooperation between the Russian Direct Investment Fund and the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia is an important element of cooperation with our Saudi partners. We also note the important stabilising effect that close Russian-Saudi coordination has on the global hydrocarbon market in the context of the well-known multilateral agreements in the OPEC-plus format.

We thank Saudi Arabia for the aid and attention to Russian pilgrims who came to visit Islamic holy places of Mecca and Medina. Another Hajj season is ending in Saudi Arabia right now. Without doubt, the Week of Russian Culture in Saudi Arabia scheduled for this autumn will also promote humanitarian contacts between the two states.

There will also be a detailed discussion of the developments in the Middle East and Northern Africa with an emphasis on the need to find solutions to the ongoing conflicts in this strategically important region by political and diplomatic means, through a mutually respectful dialogue and considering the interests and concerns of all the parties involved. In particular, the ministers will address the situation in Syria, Yemen, Libya and the Gulf area as well as the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Mr Lavrov and Mr Al-Jubeir will also discuss prospects for joint work in the framework of the strategic dialogue between Russia and the Gulf Cooperation Council, whose headquarters is situated in Riyadh.

Syria update

Positive trends are growing stronger in Syria. Importantly, Syrian refugees are starting to return back home. The process is not yet proceeding on a mass scale but conditions are taking shape. A start has been made.

The Syrian government has worked out and is now implementing a set of measures on encouraging repatriation and easing the reintegration process for Syrian citizens returning back home from abroad. The measures include simplified passport and customs control formalities, provision of social and medical services, assistance in continuing education and in employment as well as easy-term loans. The Syrian authorities with support from the Russian military continue demining, clearing debris and restoring social and economic infrastructure. Since the beginning of the month, 14 repaired hospitals have been opened in Eastern Ghouta and Eastern Qalamoun. In the past week, residents of 15 towns and villages got access to qualified medical aid in the Damascus Governorate alone.

Unfortunately, problems persist. After the situation was stabilised in the metropolitan area and around Homs, in Daraa and Quneitra, terrorists concentrated their forces in the north, in Idlib. The militants managed to use the break to reinforce ranks and build up fighting strength. Recently they have been staging more provocations not only against the government forces but also against civilians in the areas adjacent to the Idlib area. Attack drones launched by them on the Russian Hmeimim airbase have become regular. Our air defence units have already downed 45 such devices. In the Idlib de-escalation zone terrorists conduct sweeping arrests on suspicion of campaigning for a truce with Syria's government. There have already been over 500 such cases.

Meanwhile, the northeast of Syria remains under de facto control of the US military who continue to flirt with local armed groups, buying their loyalty with arms deliveries. Thus a process is in full swing in the Trans-Euphrates area of establishing pseudo-government structures which are not legitimate under Syrian law.

Rukban, the largest camp for internally displaced persons, which is located on the border with Jordan, is still inaccessible both to Syrian authorities and UN staff. There are several hundred ISIS and al-Nusra armed militants possessing even heavy weapons among the civilians there who appear to be hostages used as a human shield. All that is known to the US military who control the 55-kilometre area around al-Tanf, their illegal base on Syrian territory.

Last week, the United States announced the end of funding for "Syria stabilisation" programmes, which actually amounted to funding anti-government structures, and shifted the responsibility on their allies. Now using money from the other members of the Washington-led coalition – Europeans and Arabs – the United States embarked on restoring and upgrading oil-producing infrastructure in the northeast of Syria and essentially began plundering Syria's national wealth.

I would like to recall that the United States, as well as all other parties involved in the Syria settlement process one way or another, repeatedly affirmed their commitment to the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, which was formalised in respective UN resolutions, other international documents, joint Russian-US documents on Syria. The United States has not backed out of those documents, at least publicly, despite the recent trend. We would like to understand how that stance corresponds to our partners' practical steps that we are observing on Syrian territory.

"Unidentified" helicopters' missions to support extremists in northern Afghanistan

We again draw attention to flights by "unidentified" helicopters in northern Afghanistan to deliver arms and ammunition to local ISIS militants and the Taliban cooperating with this terrorist group. Specifically, Afghan media and local residents claim that these flights have been recorded in the Sar-e Pol Province.

We note that this is happening in the direct vicinity of Central Asian states' borders and many ISIS militants in Afghanistan hail from these countries. There is no reaction to these events either from Afghan security, defence and law-enforcement agencies or the command of the US/NATO contingent deployed there.

It is legitimate to ask, who is behind these flights? Who is arming the terrorists and secretly creating their bases near the southern borders of the CIS? Why is this happening if NATO command is effectively in control of Afghanistan's airspace?

RUSSIA

Progress of the investigation into the murder of Russian journalists in the Central African Republic

Russian law enforcement agencies together with their Central African colleagues continue to investigate the murder of Russian journalists in the Central African Republic on July 30. The Russian Investigative Committee has prepared a request for legal assistance according to the norms of international law, which is necessary to provide Russian investigators with access to witnesses, evidence and materials of the investigation carried out by the Central African Republic. On August 23, diplomats of the Russian embassy in Bangui forwarded this document to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of the Central African Republic.

As of today, the main task of the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Russian embassy in Bangui is to provide diplomatic assistance to the Russian and Central African law enforcement agencies that have to clarify all the circumstances of the murder of Russian journalists.

RUSSIA

Update on Maria Butina's detention in the United States

Concerns are growing about Russian citizen Maria Butina who was arrested in the US on July 15 on preposterous charges of acting as a foreign agent.

On August 17, Maria Butina was transferred to a new jail without any advance notification and placed in solitary confinement which is reserved for dangerous repeat offenders. Before this, the Russian citizen had to submit to a humiliating search. All her personal belongings, including clothes, food and hygienic items were taken away from her. She was held in a quarantine cell for 12 hours without food. Her requests for urgent medical assistance were ignored. As a result, her health has deteriorated.

The strip-searches and night checks have finally stopped only due to Russian diplomats' efforts, including a harshly worded protest delivered to the Department of State and the US Embassy in Moscow, and Maria Butina's conditions have somewhat improved. She was transferred to a solitary cell with a window and adequate temperature. The administration of the jail has promised to allow her to call her family soon.

Once again, we demand that Maria Butina immediately be given full medical assistance and that her politically motivated criminal proceedings be ceased. We hope that the international community will take note of the degrading and arbitrary treatment of Maria Butina by US law enforcement. We will continue to defend her rights and lawful interests.

RUSSIA

Update on Konstantin Yaroshenko

We are closely monitoring the situation around Russian citizen Konstantin Yaroshenko, who was illegally abducted by US secret services in Liberia in 2010.

On August 21, Russian diplomats visited Yaroshenko in the federal penitentiary institution in Danbury, Connecticut. It appears he is suffering from the effects of certain illnesses, of which he has notified the prison authorities. At this point, however, he has received no medical aid.

We, for our part, have agreed with the prison administration on a comprehensive physical examination for Yaroshenko. We will duplicate our formal request to the corresponding authority soon.

Simultaneously, officials at the Russian Consulate General in New York are providing every possible assistance to Yaroshenko's wife and daughter, who have arrived in the United States and who have not seen him for years. An agreement has been reached to ensure that they will see him regularly.

We will continue pressing for our citizen's legal rights and interests to be observed and for his speediest return to his homeland.

RUSSIA

The investigation into Glushkov's murder

Five months after the death of Nikolay Glushkov, Scotland Yard has finally published a report on how this case is being investigated. It contains, among other things, some video footage and a call on possible eye-witnesses to help the investigation, as well as a brief account of the witness testimony and evidence. I hesitate to criticise or make any assessment of the work of law enforcement agencies. Five months have passed since this death on British territory. Surveillance video footage and a call for potential eye-witnesses to help the investigation have only just been published. Could anyone, upon seeing this footage five months later, recall the circumstances or whether they saw a particular person? Is this really possible? This is a kind of mockery of people and of all the things that London and the other states are calling for when it comes to high-profile crimes. And this is a very high-profile crime committed on British territory. We will make a note of this statement by the British police, although it does not contain any facts or versions of this Russian citizen's death.

We continue to insist on being informed on the essence of the investigation into the death of the Russian citizen. We again have to state that, despite our requests, London has failed so far to inform us about its decision concerning a formal request by the Russian Prosecutor General's Office on legal assistance in the criminal investigation into Nikolay Glushkov's murder, which was forwarded to the British side on April 23, 2018, or exactly four months ago. We regard this as a violation of international legal standards because, let me repeat, the point at issue is the death of a Russian citizen.

We again call on the British side to provide constructive and responsible cooperation with Russian law enforcement agencies in investigating this case.

RUSSIA

Investigation into Salisbury and Amesbury incidents

We remain concerned about the lack of information about the condition of Russian citizens Yulia Skripal and her father Sergey Skripal, their whereabouts, and continued refusal by the British authorities to provide the Russian Embassy's consular staff with access to them. We consider these actions illegal.

We read a report about re-hospitalisation of Charles Rowley, one of the victims in Amesbury. Notably, according to representatives of the hospital in Salisbury, no one is currently being treated for ailments

related to nerve agents. We would like to take this opportunity and wish Charles Rowley a speedy recovery.

We hope London will show common sense and stop the provocative spinning of the Salisbury incident and unreasonable and misplaced accusations with which the British side came up in a hurry without waiting for the results of the investigation.

We continue to strongly insist on an independent, objective and transparent investigation into the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents. We reiterate our willingness to work jointly on the case. We are expecting to receive a substantive response to requests for legal assistance from the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation sent to London in connection with the criminal lawsuit opened by Russia's Investigative Committee on March 16 in connection with the attempted murder of Yulia Skripal committed in a manner that is dangerous for the general public.

Visiting Salisbury and surroundings

We are receiving lots of questions from our citizens concerning the safety of visiting the county of Wiltshire, in particular, Stonehenge - the UNESCO World Heritage Site - as well as the nearby town of Salisbury which is home to Salisbury Cathedral. This tourism attraction, which is popular also among Russian tourists and compatriots, remains open to visitors.

British competent authorities continue to investigate incidents involving the poisoning of Russian citizens Sergey Skripal and Julia Skripal in Salisbury, as well as British citizens in Amesbury.

Since the investigation is still underway and given that the British authorities continue to insist on Russia's involvement in these incidents, we cannot rule out the possibility that Russian tourists visiting the area may find themselves in the crosshairs of the British special services and become an object of their heightened attention. Importantly, a military facility operated by the British Defence Ministry - Porton Down R&D laboratory - is located nearby.

All these factors must be taken into account. In this regard, we would recommend that the tourists think in advance about places they want to visit, exercise caution and keep phone numbers of Russian diplomatic and consular missions in the UK handy. All contact information is available on our official websites.

Visit of experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to Britain to provide "technical assistance"

The British authorities are persistent in their attempts to use the purely technical Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to achieve their short-term political ends and link the organisation's activities to the provocative activities they have been involved in in recent months.

Last week, we learned about a regular visit by OPCW experts to Britain to provide London "technical assistance" in identifying the chemical agent that afflicted the Skripals – father and daughter – last March and British subjects in the neighbouring town of Amesbury later in June.

Official London does not find it necessary to conceal that it does not expect the OPCW to make a practical contribution to the investigation of all the circumstances of the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents. The only thing it needs is that this organization validates the results of the analysis of some, as they say, identical chemical agent that has allegedly been found in the biomedical and environmental samples collected by British specialists in both cases.

This is blatant abuse by Britain of its rights as an OPCW member country. London did not avail itself of Article X of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which lays down in detail the procedure for providing assistance and protection to countries in case chemical weapons are used against them. Instead, the British authorities referred to paragraph 38 (e) of Article VIII of the CWC, which concerns technical assistance to the member countries as they fulfill their routine obligations under the Convention, which means their obligations to destroy their own stocks of chemical weapons and ensure proper oversight of the toxic agents covered by the Convention.

The cynical manipulation of legal tools is the calling card of London's foreign policy today.

We again note that provisions of Article VIII of the CWC do not give the OPCW a mandate to conduct an independent investigation, formulate their own conclusions or undertake "independent verification" of the results of investigation conducted by a country. I would like to highlight again something that, unfortunately, goes unreported – the samples were collected by British specialists rather than their colleagues at the OPCW.

This interpretation is corroborated by the practical application of Article VIII of the CWC: previously, the relevant assistance was provided primarily to countries that lacked skilled personnel, the required equipment and technology. We all know that Britain has all this in abundance.

This begs the question, why then did London resort to the OPCW? The answer is obvious: having made groundless accusations of Russia's alleged complicity in the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents, which, to all appearances, had from the outset the sole aim of discrediting our country, the British authorities are now seeking to have the OPCW throw its weight behind these accusations. By and large, it is already not important what articles are in question. It is important to conflate the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents, Britain's official position and persistent mention of the OPCW in the public consciousness, which is generally what is happening now. Manipulation plain and simple, a classic propaganda ploy.

To advance its anti-Russia campaign, it might not matter to London that the OPCW is not authorised to identify the country of origin of the toxic agent that was found in Salisbury and Amesbury and that is allegedly identical to the high-profile chemical agent Novichok. To all appearances, the British propaganda machine finds it sufficient that the OPCW happened to be involved in the notorious Skripal case and has allegedly verified some of the "conclusions" of Britain's national investigation that was absolutely closed and non-transparent. The objective is very simple: it is to have a mixture of all these statements, high-profile names, geographical names and the name of a large international organisation embedded in the public consciousness.

Despite our insistent calls, London continues to flatly turn down our requests to give Russian investigators access to the materials in its possession.

Statements by US Assistant Secretary of Defence Randall Schriver

We have noted the public statement made by the US Assistant Secretary of Defence Randall Schriver during his visit to Manila. In essence, the US official felt it possible to blackmail the Philippines saying that continued defence industry cooperation with Russia allegedly endangers its "allied relations" with the USA.

Of course, this is yet another case of Washington applying dishonest means in an effort to force third countries to purchase US-made weapons instead of Russian armaments.

Apart from being a salient example of unfair competition and a desire to promote the interests of its defence industry, such escapades indicate that the USA is ratcheting up its propaganda to put a negative

political spin on Russia's defence industry cooperation with other countries.

Speaking in Manila the US Assistant Secretary of Defence went as far as to say that weapons cannot be purchased from Moscow due to its allegedly irresponsible foreign policy. To back up his claim, the American official came out with the customary set of groundless accusations against us, including "aggression in Ukraine" and "involvement in chemical attacks in the UK."

I have a question. Can we reverse this logic and say that all the partners the US sells weapons are responsible foreign policy actors? Take a list of countries the US sells its weapons to, look which conflicts including military ones they are engaged in, try to draw your own conclusion about who pursues an aggressive or irresponsible policy.

We consider such behaviour unacceptable. It is clear that the development of ties between Russia and Asia Pacific Region countries impedes the enhancement of US military and political positions in the region. Regretfully, when these countries opt for Russian over US military products for objective reasons, Washington has no qualms about exerting pressure and making irresponsible, provocative claims aimed at forming a negative image of our country.

We call on our American partners to engage in honest competition.



"Leaked" mid-term report by the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee on North Korea's expert group to the media

Moscow is indignant in connection with the "leaked" contents of a report prepared by the expert group of the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee on North Korea, established pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1718, to the media prior to its discussion by this Committee's members and prior to its official circulation by the UN Security Council President. This is by no means the first case of publicly leaking the Committee's confidential documents, which is a gross violation of Committee regulations and practical aspects of its activities, as well as elementary diplomatic ethics. This concerns the normalisation of the situation in the region rather than its deterioration, and this should always be kept in mind.

Considering the report's contents, it is obvious that the aim of this campaign is to pressure certain countries on the North Korean file within the policy promoted by a number of actors to exert maximum pressure on Pyongyang. This is being done contrary to Pyongyang's current willingness to cooperate on the denuclearisation matter and to help normalise the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Judging by the principle "seek among those whom this profits," it is easy to find out who is behind these leaks.

We are planning to demand that the UN Secretariat conduct a prompt and thorough investigation of this outrageous incident, identify the culprits, report all circumstances of what has taken place to the Committee and suggest measures for preventing such things happening in the future. We expect members of the 1718 Sanctions Committee to take an active part in these efforts as well.



Situation update concerning monument to Marshal of the Soviet Union Ivan Konev in Prague

We have noted that, on August 21, a so-called "explanatory plaque" was attached on the initiative of municipal authorities to the monument to Marshal of the Soviet Union Ivan Konev in Prague. According to this plaque, prepared by anonymous Czech historians, Marshal Konev personally supported information reconnaissance missions prior to the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in 1968. This essentially absurd claim is not backed by historical facts and is below any criticism.

The actions of Prague's municipal authorities highlight a purposeful attempt to use the sensitive pages of our common history for creating a long-term irritant in bilateral relations. In connection to this, the fifth act of vandalism against the obelisk to Red Army soldiers who were killed in action during the battle of Prague in May 1945 (that is located near the walls of the Prague Castle/Hradcany) in the past three months looks hardly accidental. We regret that municipal authorities are unable to guarantee the safety of this monument in the very heart of the capital of the Czech Republic.

A striving to downplay the importance of the personality of Marshal Konev who commanded Soviet troops liberating Prague (under the pretext of pseudo-historical objectivity) runs counter to the official line of the Czech Republic's leaders and to the respectful attitude of most citizens of this country towards the memory of Soviet officers and soldiers who liberated Europe from Nazism. In this context, efforts to artificially link Marshal Konev's personality with the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia look sacrilegious and are an historical fake.

Besides, the Russian Federation's official position regarding the events of 1968 is well-known; our Czech partners are also aware of it. This position is formalised in the preamble to the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation of August 26, 1993 that notes the desire of the parties to completely do away with the totalitarian past linked with the unacceptable use of force against Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the subsequent unjustified presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. Top Russian leaders confirmed this position on numerous occasions afterwards.

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The Nazi origin of slogans used by Ukrainian propaganda

According to media reports, a new military salute, "Glory to Ukraine! – Glory to the Heroes!", will be used in Kiev on August 24 at the military parade dedicated to the 27th anniversary of Ukraine Independence Day. This greeting should replace "Hello, comrades!" and "I (we) wish ye health!" inherited from the Soviet army.

We think this is one of the most provocative attempts by the Ukrainian government propaganda to plant in the public consciousness a slogan that many in Ukraine and elsewhere associate with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Stepan Bandera, and their crimes during World War II. It will be recalled that UPA's activities were banned in the Russian Federation by a Supreme Court ruling of November 17, 2014. As we understand, Kiev wants to dissociate this slogan from its embarrassing origins and fill it with a new positive meaning so that the whole world accepts it as entirely progressive and totally consonant with the global agenda.

Since the Ukrainian ideologists trace the origins of their modern statehood to the [Zaporozhian] Cossacks, they have made attempts to find something similar to this phrase in the traditional Cossack greetings. But no reliable historical source has preserved any documented and formalised Cossack salutes. All cases on record date back to a period, when this phrase began to be widely used outside of the Cossack context.

There are attempts to break up the phrase and ascribe it to Ukrainian literary classics, such as the poet Taras Shevchenko or Pavel Chubinsky, the author of the current Ukrainian anthem. Most often references are made to the Shevchenko poem, "To Osnovyanenko," which has the following lines: "?? ??, ????, ????, ?????, ????? ??????!" ("This is where, people, our glory, Glory of Ukraine!"). But the poet says, "Glory OF Ukraine" (Genitive), rather than "Glory TO Ukraine" (Dative). A reversal of cases definitely changes the meaning and it proves impossible to draw the analogy sought by the Ukrainian propagandists. The anthem also has the words "Ukraine" and "glory" but there is no direct grammatical link between them. The same goes for "Glory to the Heroes!"

It is quite obvious that the slogan "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!" is a calque of a well-known German National Socialist greeting. Aside from their identical syntax, both phrases have an identical stress pattern. It was adopted as the official greeting of UPA Bandera supporters by the 2nd Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists held in German-occupied Krakow in April 1941: "The salute in the Organisation shall be performed in the form of raising an outstretched right arm pointed at an angle to the right slightly above the head. The effective full greeting is: 'Glory to Ukraine' and the reply is: 'Glory to the Heroes.' The greeting can be shortened: 'Glory' – 'Glory.'" As you can see, it is a faithful copy of the German Nazi greeting.

I would like to remind you that during the war this Nazi salute was used by Ukrainian regular and irregular nationalist armed units, most of which were loyal to the Reich, and some of these were officially incorporated in its armed forces. In the post-war period, the tradition of the Bandera-style greeting was preserved and cultivated by clandestine crime rings in Western Ukraine and the UPA combatants, who surrendered to the US forces and thus escaped the law, being able to live out their remaining days in the West. It is these communities that sought to defend the slogan and embellish its origins. They also tried to set apart Ukrainian nationalism from the vanquished German nationalism and cleanse it from crimes committed at the instigation of the latter. Ideally, they would like to shift all the blame to the Germans.

I would like to remind you about several crimes perpetrated by the Ukrainian nationalists who invented this slogan: the Lvov massacre of July 1-3, 1941, when several thousand residents, mostly Jews, were killed; executions at Baby Yar near Kiev between 1941 and 1943, when Ukrainian nationalists helped to destroy tens of thousands of people, including Jews, Ukrainians and Soviet POWs; rout of the Jewish ghetto in Rovno in July 1942, with over 5,000 people killed; the burning of the Byelorussian village of Khatyn in March 1943; the Volyn Massacre in the spring and summer of 1943, when tens of thousands of Poles, several thousand Ukrainians from among those sympathetic to the Poles and members of mixed families were killed; punitive operations during the Slovak National Uprising in 1944.

We have repeatedly drawn the attention of our Western partners, international organisations, public figures and politicians to a dangerous upsurge of nationalist sentiments in Ukraine, as well as to the recurrent attempts to revise WWII results. Speaking about the results and their revision, these are not just global and tectonic shifts or documents, but a spreading ideology, rehabilitation, an attempt to give an official status to what was unthinkable to voice some 30 or 40 years ago.

We are calling on all those who are not indifferent to the history of World War II to give a fitting assessment to this outrageous instance of glorifying the Nazi stooges, their greetings and symbols.



Statement by Latvian and Estonian ministers of justice on seeking compensation from Russia for alleged "Soviet occupation"

These statements are nothing new. People come and go, but these ideas remain. There is nothing new or sensational in this. A return to this issue, especially in the context of an election campaign – Latvia is to hold parliamentary elections on September 6 and Estonia on March 3, 2019 – fits well into the general policy of the past few years of making bilateral relations with Russia more difficult. Unfortunately, this is being done out of shortsighted political interests and contrary to common sense.

Our official position remains the same. Russia rejects all notions of the alleged "occupation" of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union, as well as related absurd and absolutely groundless "legal and historical" grounds constituting the gist of claims against Russia, including financial claims.

All assessments have been made, and they are available on the Foreign Ministry's official website.



Prospects for resuming local trans-border traffic between the Kaliningrad Region and northern Poland

At our previous briefing, I was asked to comment on the prospects for reinstating local trans-border traffic between the Kaliningrad Region and the northern regions of Poland.

As you know, on July 4, 2016, the Polish side temporarily suspended the agreement on the local trans-border traffic under the pretext of tightening security measures during the NATO summit in Warsaw and World Youth Day in Krakow. Kaliningrad Region residents were denied permission to enter Poland. Russia was forced to respond and suspended the local trans-border traffic regime with Poland as a symmetrical measure.

The events that served as a pretext for these actions of Warsaw are long over, but the Polish side is obviously in no mood to resolve the situation, which we find highly surprising. All our proposals to reinstate the previous procedure encounter a blind wall of confrontationist anti-Russia rhetoric.

Today, Poland is not interested in resuming the local trans-border traffic, and this negatively affects the interests of people on both sides of the border. Local trans-border traffic has won a reputation as a tool for expanding human contacts and strengthening cultural and economic ties. Most Kaliningrad Region residents and Polish citizens took advantage of the simplified regime. One cannot but deplore the fact that Polish authorities persistently retain artificial barriers and hamper normal communication between people.

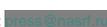


International Anti-Drug Camp of Russian Anti-Drug Union

The sport-therapeutic camp of the Russian Anti-Drug Union will be open from August 28 through September 3 at the Mandarin recreation centre at 17 Peschanaya Street in Peschanoye, Crimea's Bakhchisarai District. In the past 15 years, the camp has annually attracted over 1,000 drug abusers who have been treated at private rehabilitation centres in Russia, Belarus, Germany, Israel, Thailand and other countries.

On August 30, the Anti-Drug Camp will host an expanded off-site meeting, whose participants will discuss standardisation issues and criteria for gauging the performance of rehabilitation centres at the Russian Anti-Drug Union's venues. The meeting will take place with the support of the Foreign Ministry, involving representatives of the Ministry of Healthcare and the Internal Affairs Ministry. There are plans to hold a roundtable discussion on launching a nationwide awareness raising campaign #World_without_drugs.

As usual, the event will also feature sports competitions.

We invite media representatives to take part in covering this event. For accreditation and additional information, please contact the press service of the Russian Anti-Drug Union: , + 7 (985) 345 6145, Tatyana Yegorova.



20th Summer Diplomatic Games

On August 25, the Zavidovo resort, an affiliate of the Main Administration for Service to the Diplomatic Corps (GlavUpDK) under the Russian Foreign Ministry, will host the 20th Summer Diplomatic Games.

The event will be attended by heads and members of the diplomatic missions accredited in Russia, Foreign Ministry officials and members of the GlavUpDK, as well as famous Russian athletes and cultural figures.

The jury board will include renowned Russian athletes.

Some 40 teams of diplomatic missions will compete in six categories: football, volleyball, basketball, trap shooting, billiards, tennis, fishing and cross-country running.

As per tradition, Zavidovo guests will be offered an interesting cultural programme and a tasting of Russian cuisine.

We invite media representatives to take part in covering the event.

For more details, please visit the GlavUpDk official website.



School under Russian-Tajik (Slavic) University moves to another building

We were asked to comment on the moving of the school under the Russian-Tajik (Slavic) University to another, less prestigious building in Dushanbe.

We took note of this situation because it is a special school. It was established in 2007 in accordance with a bilateral intergovernmental agreement and is a subdivision of the Russian-Tajik (Slavic) University. The school's language of instruction is Russian and the curriculum corresponds to Russian educational standards. It has over 1,300 students and is considered to be one of the best schools in Tajikistan.

Russian diplomats held consultations with the leadership of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan, rector of the university and the school principal. According to our partners, there are plans to build a new school building at the same address, 138 Rudaki Prospekt.

We hope that the school will retain its outstanding staff, which mainly consists of highly skilled Russian-language experts. We hope that the transition period will not last long, and the school will begin the academic year of 2019/2020 in a new building at the historic place.



Commemorative events in Iceland dedicated to WWII Arctic convoys

In August, Reykjavik was the venue of commemorative events dedicated to the Arctic convoys of 1941-1945. The occasion was supported by the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Iceland. As is common knowledge, the majority of polar convoys, starting from the first one, PQ-0 Dervish, to PQ-17 were formed in Iceland, first on the eastern coast and later in Reykjavik and the Whale Fiord in the west.

On August 16, Reykjavik hosted an international conference dedicated to this heroic chapter in the history of World War II, sponsored by the St Petersburg-based Polar Convoy Regional Public Organisation and the Russian Embassy in Reykjavik. The conference was addressed by Arctic convoy veterans Taras Goncharenko (Russia) and Jack Patterson (UK) as well as relatives and descendants of heroic sailors from Russia, Iceland, the US and Britain, historians, members of the intelligentsia, and media people. Russian Ambassador to Iceland Anton Vasiliyev and Iceland's former President Olafur Grimsson delivered welcoming remarks.

The participants at the conference signed the Memorandum on the Establishment of Allied Convoy Brotherhood, an association designed to promote cooperation between veteran organisations, museums and educational centres, facilitate the popularisation of the history of convoys, as well as counteract the falsification of history. The association is planning to install a monument to the Arctic convoy sailors in Edinburgh and organise an international sailing regatta in 2020 in honour of the 75th anniversary of the Allied Victory in World War II, with Reykjavik as its rallying point.

On August 15, President of Iceland Gudhi Th. Johannesson and Russian representatives held a joint ceremony at the city cemetery in Reykjavik, laying wreaths at the Hope Memorial (sculptor Vladimir Surovtsev) erected in memory of Arctic convoy participants from different countries.

The Reykjavik events were a shining example of international public coordination to consolidate the historical memory of the allied brotherhood in the fight against Nazism.



Disappearance of Pantelena tanker in the Gulf of Guinea

According to Russian KAT Samlot crewing company, the Pantelena tanker flying the Panamanian flag disappeared in the territorial waters of Gabon on August 14 as it sailed from the port of Lome, Togolese Republic, to the port of Libreville, Gabonese Republic. Owned by Lotus Shipping, Greece, the tanker has a crew that includes two Russian citizens: Chief Mate M. Dyuzhakov and Third Engineer A. Ramoshka.

The Russian Embassy in Libreville reports that the search operation mounted by the Gabonese Ministry of Defence has brought no results: the vessel has not been spotted in the country's territorial waters. Currently the search operation involves Coast Guard ships of neighbouring countries.

The Foreign Ministry continues to monitor the developments.

Answers to media questions:

Question: NATO has deployed about 4,000 service personnel near Russia's western borders. According to NATO Spokesperson Oana Lungescu, these defensive actions aim to deter any

possible aggression. The West is no longer trying to find a logical explanation for its actions. Lungescu did not comment on the establishment of a training facility in Romania or the deployment of a US tank battalion to Poland. How can you comment on these statements?

Maria Zakharova: These are traditional items from the "absurd news" section. What potential threats are there, and how were they assessed? This issue is absolutely unclear. Specific methods for registering, estimating and calculating military contingents and their deployment areas for defence against some unspecified threats are also something absolutely illusory and absurd. We have noted this, and we have also stated that the reinforcement, redeployment, reformatting and expansion of military contingents in Europe certainly do not facilitate stability and a balance of power on our common continent. Nor do they bring openness and constructive attitudes to our already complicated dialogue. The goals and tasks are absolutely unclear. Apart from Russia, the question should be addressed to them. We need to ask them to what extent the residents of the concerned NATO member countries understand the motives behind these actions because none of this is free; this costs a lot and requires tremendous efforts. Obviously, it would be good to learn how the taxpayers' money is being spent.

I repeat, calculation methods are the most absurd thing here. We have repeatedly noted the political response. But, considering the fact that answers to the question "What's the purpose of these actions?" imply that this is a well-calculated response to a potential threat, I would like to say once again that this can only be described by the word "absurd."

Question: Baku and Yerevan always underscore Moscow's mediatory role in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace settlement. At the same time, we can see that Moscow hosted the last meeting between Russian, Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers about 18 months ago. How can you explain this? Russia is a strategic partner and ally for Azerbaijan and Armenia. As we know, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev is expected to arrive soon. Will there be any meetings in this format this year?

Maria Zakharova: We will tell you if any meetings are forthcoming. Our mediatory efforts continue. We maintain multi-format contacts with the sides.

Question: US President's National Security Adviser John Bolton has noted Washington's readiness to discuss various aspects of resolving the crisis in Syria, provided that Iran withdraws all forces from that country. I would like to hear your comment on this issue.

Maria Zakharova: I have just discussed the deployment of US forces in specific Syrian regions and the purpose of this deployment. On what grounds are they present there? Who was their deployment coordinated with? This is absolutely beyond any legal provisions and frameworks. When you expect others to honour international obligations, you should probably start with yourself. In the context of the Syrian peace settlement, we need to once again ask the United States and their official representatives who make such statements: What are the grounds for deploying the US Armed Forces there? What are they doing there? What is their role?

Question: A Japanese business delegation was to visit the Kuril Islands in mid-August. Can you give any reasons why this didn't happen? My TV company was told that the Japanese business people had been denied entry to Iturup Island. What was the reason?

Maria Zakharova: I can say that these visits, namely the third Japanese business mission to the southern Kuril Islands, were indeed scheduled for August 16 under Russian-Japanese top-level agreements.

As distinct from the first two missions, this mission was to involve the Russian and Japanese parties in holding a concrete discussion on the ground, with the participation of business representatives from both countries, on the content and formats of future joint economic activity (JEC) projects to be implemented on the southern Kuril Islands in five areas approved by the Russian and Japanese leaders, namely aquaculture, greenhouse business, package tours, wind power, and waste recycling. Russian agencies planned workshops to clarify the opportunities available in the corresponding areas. A representative Russian delegation led by Natalya Stapan, head of a group for commercial aspects of JEC (established within the framework of related talks at the level of deputy foreign ministers) and director of the Department for Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects at the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, was formed for the purpose.

But adverse weather prevented the Russian delegation from leaving Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk for the islands. The departure of the Japanese mission from Nemuro was delayed too.

Given all these circumstances, it was decided to put off the visit till a later date. It was suggested to the Japanese side that it expedite coordination of new dates for the business mission via diplomatic channels. The reasons are quite prosaic.

Question: The Foreign Ministry of Afghanistan has declared that despite Afghanistan's good relations with Russia and the fact that our positions are aligned on many issues, the official delegation of the Government of Afghanistan will not attend the meeting on Afghanistan scheduled for September 4 in Moscow. It was noted that the peace process should be directed by Afghanistan. The US has also declared that this meeting would not lead to peace in Afghanistan. How can you comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: The United States attempted to bring peace to Afghanistan on its own and failed. For this reason, the international community has to become engaged collectively. US activities have not led to more stability in the region. Neither are they leading to added stability in the current situation, at least not to as much stability as Washington claimed it would achieve in keeping with the commitment it has assumed.

As for the meeting of the Moscow format of consultations on Afghanistan, we have provided detailed explanations on our website. Right now, the potential composition of participants is being studied. As soon as Kabul sends an official response via diplomatic channels, we will offer comments.

Question: What responses to the recent US State Department sanctions is the Foreign Ministry considering? What is Russia's attitude to the introduction of sanctions against Turkey and Iran, our partners on Syria settlement?

Maria Zakharova: Hypothetically, we provide a fitting response to sanctions – new, newest, upgraded or adjusted. We don't comment on the decision-making process but, as always, the responses are fitting. We always emphasise that this is not our choice. These are not decisions that Russian adopts at its own initiative, but solely in response.

Question: Later this year, Bulgaria is celebrating the 140th anniversary of liberation from the Ottoman yoke. I would like to invite Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and you to Pliska, where Yard of the Cyrillic Alphabet cultural and historical complex is located.

Maria Zakharova: Thank you very much. I accept your invitation with pleasure. I will take a look and consult with my superiors.

Question: US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Ashley Ford went on record as saying that the US was planning to accuse Russia of interference in the upcoming November elections. Does this mean that the US is planning a new information campaign against Russia?

Maria Zakharova: I don't know whether it makes sense to prepare a new campaign because the current one appears to be going quite well. As for accusing us of would-be sins, it's surreal – they are accusing us of something that doesn't exist and say so openly.

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