

## Table of contents

1. [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's meeting with India's Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj](#)
2. [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Berlin](#)
3. [Foreign Ministry to host exhibition of archive documents on 190th anniversary of establishing Russian-Greek diplomatic relations](#)
4. [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to attend official opening ceremony of historical and documentary exhibition Munich-38. On the Threshold of Disaster](#)
5. [Developments in Syria](#)
6. [Developments in Tripoli](#)
7. [Developments in Afghanistan](#)
8. [Developments in Cameroon](#)
9. [Update on the arrest of Maria Butina in the United States](#)
10.  [Igor Giorgatze's news conference on bio-laboratory in Georgia](#)
11. [Statement by former US Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman](#)
12. [Statements by US President's National Security Adviser John Bolton with regard to International Criminal Court](#)
13. [The US administration's decision to shut the PLO office in Washington](#)
14. [Statements by Minister of the Armed Forces of France Florence Parly](#)
15. [The Munich Agreement](#)
16. [We Remember. We Hope. We Live! rally in Berlin](#)
17. [Desecration of a monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia](#)
18. [Opening of a Russian school in South Ossetia](#)
19. [Discrimination against Crimean journalists at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting](#)
20. [Legal grounds for the entry of Russian investigators to the Donetsk People's Republic for investigating the assassination of Alexander Zakharenko](#)
21. [Briefing with Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova on the sidelines of the 2nd Eurasian Women's Forum](#)

### Answers to media questions:

- [Religion and politics](#)
- [Nagorno-Karabakh settlement](#)
- [Russia-Georgia relations](#)
- [Great Britain's response to statements by Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Bashirov](#)
- [Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Bashirov](#)
- [Balkan states face geopolitical choice](#)
- [Water and energy supply in Crimea](#)
- [Hungary blocked from voting in EU Council](#)
- [Syrian Constitutional Committee](#)
- [Statements by US on Donbass elections](#)
- [Red lines in international relations](#)
- [MGIMO University and Poland's Foreign Ministry](#)

### **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's meeting with India's Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj**

On September 13-14, Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj will visit Moscow to attend the 23rd meeting of the Intergovernmental Russian-Indian Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation.

Today in the evening, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will have a meeting with India's Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj, with the officials exchanging opinions on the bilateral agenda, as well as topical international matters.

We expect the visit to Russia by India's Minister of External Affairs to expedite joint work to further expand the potential of traditionally friendly ties between Moscow and New Delhi.

### **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Berlin**

On September 14, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will pay a working visit to Berlin.

Sergey Lavrov and his German counterpart Heiko Maas will attend the official closing ceremony of the Russian-German "overlapping" year of regional and municipal partnerships 2017-2018, the key event in the programme of Sergey Lavrov's visit. This unique all-encompassing initiative that continues the time-tested practice of holding thematic exchanges at interstate and public levels in Russian-German relations has helped further expand bilateral inter-regional ties, confirming their significance as an important and self-sufficient channel of communications and cooperation between our countries and nations.

Winners of a competition of municipal cooperation projects will receive honorary certificates signed by the Russian and German foreign ministers. In all, 30 pairs of recipients have been selected from among representatives of Russian and German regions and municipalities. During the closing ceremony, new partnership agreements will be signed between Vyborg and Greifswald, Tuapse and Schwedt, Zvenigorod and Lahr.

The ministers will hold talks where they will review the state and prospects of bilateral cooperation, expanded trade, economic and investment interaction, as well as furthering cultural and humanitarian ties and stronger contact between the public of the two countries, based on the results of the top-level Russian-German political meetings in Sochi on May 18 and in Meseberg on August 18.

Other subjects to be brought up will include efforts to resolve the conflict in Syria and the crisis in Ukraine, ways of normalising Russia-EU relations and improving cooperation between Russia and NATO, the situation in the Balkans, in the Middle East, the preservation of the JCPOA from which the United States has withdrawn, strategic and regional stability, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction, arms control and disarmament, including OPCW aspects, combating new security challenges and threats, as well as the UN Security Council agenda, with due consideration for Germany's non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council in 2019-2020.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will also speak at a meeting of the German-Russian Forum, discussing integration processes in Greater Eurasia and prospects for building a common economic and humanitarian space from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

#### **Foreign Ministry to host exhibition of archive documents on 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing Russian-Greek diplomatic relations**

On September 19, the Foreign Ministry will host an official ceremony of opening a historical and documentary exhibition marking the 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Russia and Greece.

The exhibition will include over 60 documents and photos from the Russian empire and Russian Federation's foreign policy archives, including such crucial documents for both countries' history as a letter from Greek military leaders to Emperor Nicholas I asking him to support the Greek nation's struggle and to help it gain independence (1826), a decree by the National Assembly of Greece on electing Ioannis Kapodistrias as the head of the Greek government for a period of seven years (1827), a marriage contract between King of Greece George I and Grand Duchess Olga Konstantinovna Romanova (1867) and the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Greek Republic (1993).

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Hellenic Republic to the Russian Federation Andreas Frygnas, officials of the Greek diplomatic mission in Moscow, representatives of Russian federal executive agencies, the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, media outlets, clerical and public circles will attend the event.



#### **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to attend official opening ceremony of historical and documentary exhibition Munich-38: On the Threshold of Disaster**

On September 19 at 11 am, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will attend the official opening ceremony of the historical and documentary exhibition Munich-38: On the Threshold of Disaster at the Exhibition Hall of the Federal Archives at 17 Bolshaya Pirogovskaya Street.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Federal Archival Agency, the State Archives of the Russian Federation and the Russian State Military Archives.

It will include genuine documents from the archives dealing with the history of international relations on the eve of World War II, including foreign documents.

Members from the Foreign Ministry's Archives were actively involved in preparing the exhibition and provided numerous material.

#### **Developments in Syria**

Tension in and around Syria is escalating once again.

On the ground the most challenging situation is in the Idlib province as tension escalates due to a high concentration of terrorists. These fighters are proactively centralising their command and are preparing to defend their positions for a long period of time, while getting rid of opposition group leaders inclined to accept reconciliation. They are also looking at the possibility of staging offensive operations directed against Aleppo and Hama. According to the available information, several hundred ISIS fighters arrived in Jisr ash-Shugur the other day to join the Hurras al-Din group that is already operating in the area.

Russian military observers from the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides have noted a substantial increase in the intensity of shelling targeting nearby communities on the territory controlled by the Syrian Government by fighters in the Idlib de-escalation zone. For example, on September 7 terrorists used multiple rocket launcher systems to shell Mahardah with its mostly Christian population, killing nine civilians, including five women and three children, and wounding 30. Between September 1 and 10, as many as 289 ceasefire violations by illegal armed groups were reported in the Idlib de-escalation zone, an almost three-times increase compared to similar periods in previous months.

In addition, terrorist attacks against Russian military sites using drones continue to originate in this area with 55 UAVs destroyed over the past two months.

Fighters and White Helmets continue preparations for a chemical weapons attack within the Idlib zone, even though their plans to stage a chemical weapons attack and blame the government troops for it have been exposed.

Against the backdrop of threats coming from US officials to carry out a massive strike against Syria, the terrorists are doing everything they can to prepare this provocation. Last Friday, they held what was portrayed as peaceful protest rallies across Idlib against an upcoming large-scale offensive by the Syrian army. Judging by the posters carried by the demonstrators, those behind these protests would very much like this offensive to begin as quickly as possible. This is the only way to explain the obscene insults on these posters targeting not only and not so much the President of Syria, but also his family members. All this proves that these actions are nothing more than provocations.

At the same time, the so-called international coalition led by the US has started military exercises in eastern Syria using the Al Tanf military base, and let me remind you that it has no right to be present in Syria. The purpose of these exercises is to practice moving and deploying rapid response forces, as well as attacking terrorists from the air as well as from the ground. It is reported that 100 marines have been dispatched to Al Tanf.

Moreover, the remaining ISIS fighters have found refuge in the 55-kilometre safe zone created by the US, and these fighters continue to stage wicked attacks toward Palmyra, Al-Sukhnah and As-Suwayda.

In terms of international politics, Washington is using a broad range of tools, from official statements to comments appearing in biased media outlets in what seems to be a bid to prepare the international public opinion to a new aggression against Syria. This is a matter of serious concern. The true purpose of these actions can be hardly concealed, consisting of diverting Syria from the path toward settlement and stabilisation that has prevailed over the past twelve or eighteen months. We view these actions by Washington as an attempt to artificially prolong hostilities and the fratricidal bloodshed in Syria by saving terrorists affiliated to Al-Qaeda from a definitive defeat. What they want is to justify their illegal military presence in Syria. It does not matter to them that there will be more bloodshed and

suffering from millions of Syrians. Those guided by this vision have no misgivings when it comes to paying such a high price for aligning the outcome of the conflict that has been going on in Syria for eight years with their geopolitical goals, so that they could claim their victory in the protracted and epic Syrian conflict which has brought suffering to civilians.

We have other global reasons to voice our concerns. We view the developments around Syria as an attempt by the US to test a new mechanism for ensuring its global dominance. The essence of this approach consists in building a Western coalition with the view to showing force and the resolve to solve any problem by military means in any part of the world. This policy undermines the existing world order based on the UN Charter. It is clearly aggressive. Russia strongly believes that an approach of this kind can put the world on the verge of a precipice and presents a dangerous challenge that is not limited to Syria. We need to show our resolve and firmness in countering this vision by combining the efforts of all right-minded members of the international community.

[Back to top](#)

#### **Developments in Tripoli**

Despite the efforts of the UN Support Mission in Libya aimed at the reinstatement of law and order in the Libyan capital, new clashes between armed groups are taking place in some parts of the city.

A terrorist attack carried out by ISIS on September 10 at the office of the Libyan National Oil Corporation dealt a serious blow to the security system in Tripoli. Two attackers were killed, and about ten injured. On September 11, unknown militants launched rockets at Mitiga International Airport which had to close after reopening only a few days earlier. Luckily, nobody was killed.

These extremist actions once again confirm the vital need to consolidate all responsible forces in Libya in order to create a strong opposition to the terrorists who are striving to hamper the process of the intra-Libyan political settlement, being carried out in accordance with the Action Plan of Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya Ghassan Salame.

I would like to say that it is an illustrative and very tragic example of the total failure of the western countries' experiment in geopolitical modelling, which, of course, affects the entire region and was the cause of the destruction of the Libyan statehood.

I would also like to remind you that democracy was supposed to come to Libya, so the western states claimed. It seems that it did come, because there are still no single government bodies in the country.

The Libyan scenario would have been repeated in Syria if the Russian Federation had not provided support to the legitimate government of the country, when Damascus requested it.

#### **Developments in Afghanistan**

Tensions remain high in Afghanistan. The Taliban now control the Khamyab District in the Jowzjan Province on the border with Turkmenistan. They also might capture the Day Mirdad District in the central province of Wardak. A series of explosions has recently hit Kabul and the Nangarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan, killing dozens of people.

In our opinion, such a course of events once again confirms the failure to put strong pressure on the Taliban to engage in talks and the need to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan problem, including with the assistance of international partners within the Moscow format.

#### **Developments in Cameroon**

In the past few months, there has been a serious deterioration in the situation regarding crime in the Republic of Cameroon. Due to an inflow of refugees from various regions of the country, the security situation has been aggravated in the capital, Yaounde. There have been documented cases of racketeering and armed assault in previously safe districts of the city, including near government agencies and the diplomatic missions of foreign countries.

Due to the increased crime rate, the Russian Embassy in the Republic of Cameroon has taken additional measures to improve the security of the building.

The Foreign Ministry advises Russian citizens in Cameroon to be vigilant and exercise caution.

#### **Update on the arrest of Maria Butina in the United States**

We continue to monitor the situation with Maria Butina, who was detained in the US on July 15 on charges of acting as an unregistered "foreign government agent."

On September 10, Russian diplomats in Washington attended the hearings of the case against her. Following the hearings, the federal court of Columbia DC refused to release the Russian citizen from jail and place her under house arrest and ruled to continue the trial behind closed doors. The Russian Embassy in the United States published a detailed commentary on this in social networks.

We are indignant over the US Department of Justice's attempts to regard consular visits to Maria Butina and our notes with demands to respect her legitimate rights as proof of some special circumstances connecting the situation around our compatriot and the Russian government.

We will continue to regularly visit our compatriot and focus on ensuring that she will be provided with all the necessary aid. We will protest again to the US Department of State on US official agencies' allegations against us regarding Maria Butina's case.

We demand that the unfounded prosecution of the Russian citizen who is detained as a political prisoner should be dropped. All sober-minded forces should unite their efforts to liberate her and return her back to Russia as soon as possible.

We will not abandon what is going on with Maria Butina. The entire situation is on the edge of the legal space. The US does everything to prove its actions are legitimate, but each time, even each day I think, the legal grounds are becoming smaller, and in some cases there are no legal grounds at all. This is a case of politics' total dominance over law and common sense.

**SECRET**

#### Igor Giorgadze's news conference on bio-laboratory in Georgia

We noted the news conference held by Georgian public figure, head of the Georgia Abroad movement Igor Giorgadze on September 11 in Moscow. During this news conference, new documents on the undisclosed activities of the so-called Lugar Centre for Public Health Research, which is a highly-protected microbiology lab built by the Pentagon in the village of Alekseyevka near Tbilisi.

This seemingly civil institution that is formally part of the Georgian Healthcare Ministry is hiding the US Army Medical Research Directorate-Georgia. US military personnel researches especially dangerous diseases typical not only in Georgia but in neighbouring countries as well, including in Russia. This is why this topic raises our concern. The Pentagon's interest in Georgia cannot be explained by humanitarian reasons alone. We all know how Washington cares about the countries not located close to the US borders and what happens because of this humanitarian part of the equation: unfortunately, it ends in nothing constructive but in very dangerous games with a highly unpredictable outcome.

New facts listed by Igor Giorgadze once again raise the question about the true purpose and tasks the US military have in Georgia as well as their compliance with medical ethic norms while carrying out experiments on Georgian citizens and with other norms of international law.

Russian statesmen and public activists, deputies of the State Duma and non-government experts have many times voiced their concern over the military agencies of the US and other NATO countries stepping up medical and biological activities along the Russian border.

This is a matter of concern for many government agencies and Russian citizens, which is understandable. I have a question: is anyone in Georgia concerned about this? These labs are located on the territory of their sovereign state. What are they doing there? What possible outcome will there perhaps be?

The Foreign Ministry will ask the US Department of State for an official explanation regarding the new facts listed by Igor Giorgadze that prove the shady role the US military play in the microbiology lab on Georgian territory.

I think that countries have fought to preserve and confirm their sovereignty and independence, sometimes so desperately, not for other countries' military to carry out biological experiments on their citizens. And this is what is happening there.

Let me repeat that we are greatly concerned with this due to the close proximity to Russia.

In addition, we will continue to work with our friends and allies, with the neighbouring states, explaining to them the risks of the US stepping up their military medical and biological activities in the post-Soviet space.

I would like to stress once again that sovereign states must not become labs and these states' citizens and residents should not become test subjects in experiments that may threaten their lives.

I would also like to say once again that to all our previous requests we received answers saying that this is all conspiracy theories, allegations and speculations; that we are making this up to make a senseless fuss. Several officials and media representatives told us that this is all misinformation, fake news and Russian propaganda. We were told that an international inspection of the Lugar Centre registered no violations and all the documents sent to the UN are all in order.

What will happen next after the new data has been presented? The documents say otherwise. Either the Georgian authorities or the US have been willfully misinforming the international community. All the information and material of the news conference I have mentioned can be accessed freely on the internet. Everything can be studied. Unfortunately, we would like not to have heard everything we have heard, because our lives would be much calmer then. Perhaps we would have also continued to live with the illusion that there were some mistakes in our analysis and this data is not accurate. I do not know if it is for the better or worse, but this data has been not only confirmed, but also substantiated, and this substantiation is difficult to imagine. Look through the website and the documents. They are about very dangerous manipulations.

We believe that not only journalists and citizens of the countries neighbouring the country where this lab is located must study them but also the competent authorities and services of the Russian Federation. Of course, the specialised international organisations must investigate this.

I think there will be many questions after these documents are studied. They can and should be addressed not only to the Foreign Ministry, but also to the countries that are directly involved in this experiment.

**SECRET**

#### Statement by former US Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman

Yesterday's speech by former US Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman for Beyond 100 Days on BBC World News warranted our attention. She said Russia's "stronger economic position" is not in the US "national security interests." At the same time, the former diplomat added that she does not want "to harm Russian people" and believes "they have the right to live decent lives." The level of cynicism is just off scale here, especially considering what followed: The West needs to "think strategically about what they need to do to weaken Vladimir Putin's control in this country." And these people tell us about Russia, the Kremlin, or Moscow interfering in their affairs! This is the former top manager of the entire US foreign policy talking. These people stood behind the adoption of the country's foreign policy decisions, in particular those concerning Russia; the people who worked in a team with a candidate for the highest state office in the United States. I say it again, I am perfectly aware that this person does not hold an official position at the moment, but she did for many years.

Apparently, these are the "real" Western values: to introduce illegal economic sanctions and to manipulate the oil price and the dollar exchange rate to weaken the positions of sovereign countries and democratically elected heads of state.

It seems to me that we need to think again and then reread the very first sentence. It turns out that any improvement in Russia's economy is in conflict with US national security interests. National security is the most important thing in every state. It is the primary source of a country's statehood. Do you see what the person who has been in the leadership of the US Department of State for many years is saying?

I think this revelation has made it clear how our American partners see the development of bilateral relations and Russia's future. This has nothing to do with the American people, democracy, or human

rights. This is the policy of a certain political group in the United States, which has failed to take power but has now launched this terrible Russophobic campaign to justify its own political blunders.

I think this is a quote that needs to be learned by heart. This is a reason for our European partners to think if their economic growth, political well-being, economic and political stability suit the US national security interests. Their energy cooperation and promising bilateral economic ties might at some point get in the way of the US national security, as Ms Sherman just said. I will remember this forever.

#### **Statements by US President's National Security Adviser John Bolton with regard to International Criminal Court**

The US President's National Security Adviser John Bolton's statement with regard to the International Criminal Court can hardly be called a new word in US diplomacy which mostly stakes on force and unilateral sanctions. This time, the International Criminal Court's judges were threatened with visa bans, the freezing of assets and legal prosecution, unless they make the right decisions or work in line with US wishes. Otherwise they will face visa bans, their accounts will be frozen, and criminal cases will also be opened against them. And the United States will think twice before allocating aid to countries daring to cooperate with the International Criminal Court in investigating the crimes of American citizens.

We don't quite understand why similar US statements and actions with regard to independent states are perceived calmly. We would suggest being consistent, while objecting to the use of illegal unilateral sanctions and other pressure tactics, and this should not be done only when this court is being threatened.

As Mr. Bolton himself admits, his statement is a logical continuation of the current US policy. In 2002, the US Congress passed an act to protect American civil service employees. This document allows the President of the United States to take necessary action against the International Criminal Court and its employees if they dare act against the United States in any way. The United States has signed a number of bilateral agreements with other countries, ruling out the extradition of American citizens to the International Criminal Court. Therefore the United States has been recognising the international justice system for a long time only if it deals with other states and their citizens.

Mr Bolton also pointed out such problems concerning the International Criminal Court such as corruption, susceptibility to manipulations, inefficiency plus exorbitant costs. To be honest, one finds it hard to disagree with this, and we have been discussing this aspect for a long time.

However, the United States has never voiced any claims with regard to ad hoc international crime tribunals that have the same organisation and virtually the same shortcomings, including the notorious International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. How can this be explained? The answer is contained in the statements by Mr Bolton who has clearly indicated that the international criminal justice system must deal with other states, except the United States and its allies. Everything fits into a standard concept.

This story has a new twist: from now on, international criminal justice is being openly manipulated, and one can say that the manipulators have now been unmasked.

I would also like to recall that Russia has been consistently drawing attention to the politically motivated behavior of international courts, including the International Criminal Court, that are often used to pressure "disgraced" states and governments.

We are once again urging everyone to think whether this state of things meets the interests of the international community.

We are shocked by this selective targeted approach when some decisions are welcomed, and when the judges themselves will be punished for other undesirable decisions that might be made.



#### **The US administration's decision to shut the PLO office in Washington**

We have taken note of the US administration's decision to shut the Washington office of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The US Department of State explained that since as far back as November 2017 the prospect of the Palestinian mission being able to continue its work in the US was conditioned on moves on the part of the PLO to promote a direct and substantive dialogue with Israel, which, according to the American side, did not follow.

Despite this unfriendly demarche towards the Palestinian side and the fact that it damaged the efforts aimed at creating conditions for the re-launch of the peace process, the US administration said that it had no intention of dropping its "peacekeeping" initiatives and wants to push them onwards.

Judging from the previous steps that include the transfer of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (in breach of the well-known UN Security Council resolutions), slashing financial support to the Palestinian National Authority's budget and cutting off financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), it is through building up pressure on one of the parties to the Palestinian conflict – this is precisely how our American colleagues view the road towards a "just" peace in the Middle East. Certainly, this is a dubious standpoint.

So far, however, Washington has not revealed its vision of the parameters for restoring the peace process. All that is circulated in the public space is bogus stories about a certain "deal of the century" designed to put an end to the long-standing conflict and satisfy all the parties concerned. Unfortunately, nothing is specified. As for our calls for collective efforts on the Middle East settlement either at the UN Security Council or within the framework of the Middle East Quartet, it looks like the United States prefers turning a deaf ear to them. The experience of the previous US administrations that attempted to tackle the Palestinian-Israeli dossier single-handedly clearly shows that the logic of unilateral moves that are not based on corresponding consensus decisions by the international community does not work here. Such efforts risk going to waste.

#### **Statements by Minister of the Armed Forces of France Florence Parly**

It is with bewilderment and disappointment that we regard the September 7 statement by Minister of the Armed Forces of France Florence Parly at the National Centre of Space Research, in which she accused Russia, without proof, of "hostile behaviour" in space.

Let me remind you that earlier this year the Russian Ministry of Defence provided all necessary explanations, following concerns expressed by Paris about the Russian telecom satellite Luch-Olymp "dangerously approaching" the French satellite Athena-Fidus, which allegedly happened in 2017 and was described by Florence Parly as "aggressive." For one, it was stated that our satellite's movement posed no threat to the French spacecraft, and, most importantly, it did not violate any international norms. We consider this incident exhausted, all the more so that Paris has never brought it up during bilateral contacts, including during French President Emmanuel Macron's visits to St Petersburg and Moscow in May and July this year.

It is particularly sad that the French side is trying to use this invented pretext to substantiate the need for a build-up of defence potential in outer space and for due allocations for these purposes. We

presume that the people of France should be aware of the fact that, despite this statement, no questions were raised during bilateral contacts in Moscow. Such anti-Russia moves have an extremely counterproductive effect on the development of bilateral relations, particularly in light of President Emmanuel Macron's calls to "reconsider" the European security architecture and step up a "strategic" dialogue with Russia in this connection.

We, for our part, firmly advocate the use and exploration of outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes. Our approaches are confirmed in the Declaration of the 10th BRICS Summit, published on July 26, which underscores the paramount significance of strict compliance with, consolidation and strengthening of the existing laws and regulations stipulating the peaceful use of outer space. It also voices the common concern of the BRICS countries over a possible arms race in outer space and the fact that it might turn into an arena of military confrontation.

In the past several years, we came up with a whole set of initiatives aimed at preventing an arms race in outer space. The key one is a Russian-Chinese-proposed draft treaty on the prevention of the deployment of weapons in outer space, the use of or threat of using force against outer space objects, the renewed version of which was submitted to the Conference on Disarmament in June 2014. Sensible forces in many countries support us. We intend to pursue active and result-oriented work in this direction.

We invite our French partners to join our initiatives, including on not being the first to deploy weapons in space for the sake of preventing an arms race in outer space.

We would like to hear a response to our proposal, which was made publicly, from our French colleagues, publicly as well.



#### **The Munich Agreement**

This year, the world marks the 80th anniversary since the signing of the Munich Agreement, which took place on September 29, 1938, and became one of the most tragic events that took place in the wake of World War II. On that day, leaders of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Great Britain and France authorised the annexation of Czechoslovakia, which led to the country's losing its independence.

The USSR was the only state ready to confront the Nazi regime and stand by Czechoslovakia in accordance with its obligations (as stipulated in Treaties of Mutual Assistance signed with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935). However, as known, London and Paris placed immense pressure on Prague so that it would refuse resisting and choose not to ask for Soviet assistance.

Poland played a particularly harmful role in the crisis by participating in the division of Czechoslovakia together with Germany. Hungary acted in the same way.

Today, in the era of globalisation, when humanity is facing new challenges threatening its very existence, the matter of the Munich deal has become extremely relevant. It has now become the subject of careful examination by not only historians and political scientists, but by the broad international community as well. This is evidenced by scientific and practical conferences, historical and documentary exhibitions and other events dedicated to this topic.

Unfortunately, we must admit that even today not all of us understand that sooner or later, immoral political decisions and overt violations of international law and universally accepted ethical norms lead to the results that are the opposite of what was intended, and backfire against their initiators.

The Munich experience teaches us about the necessity of forming a modern system of international security that excludes the possibility of domination and dictatorship by separate states; it teaches us that such security is indivisible and cannot be ensured at someone else's expense, and that we can only achieve this goal through common efforts.

#### **We Remember. We Hope. We Live! rally in Berlin**

Since 1962, every second Sunday of September, International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism is marked. Lately, the subject of preserving the memory of these victims has become especially relevant due to increasing glorification of Nazism and attempts to falsify history taking place in a whole range of countries. We have repeatedly stated that we believe this practice to be unacceptable and simply dangerous.

In this regard, we would like to report that on September 9, a rally called We Remember. We hope. We Live! was held in Berlin. It was organised by a number of Russian public organizations. Our country's delegation was represented by two Heroes of the Russian Federation and 33 former young prisoners from fascist concentration camps. They flew to Berlin to honor the memory of the victims of fascism and to draw the international community's attention to the increasing number of attempts to falsify history and justify fascism. During their visit, the participants laid flowers to the Soviet War memorial in Treptower Park, visited the site of the former Sachsenhausen Nazi concentration camp, and held meetings with veterans of anti-fascist movements, victims of fascism and representatives from German public organizations. They also had a meeting with Sergei Nechayev, Russian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Germany.

#### **Desecration of a monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia**

On the night of September 8-9, another monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia was vandalised.

We insist that the Bulgarian government take comprehensive measures to protect the monuments in accordance with the Russian-Bulgarian agreements related to preserving monuments of common history and culture in both countries. Please note that the Bulgarian party has still not taken any measures to prevent the desecration of the memory of Soviet soldiers who gave their lives to save the European continent from the Nazis.

We are confident that such acts of vandalism will never meet with understanding from the people of Bulgaria.

#### **Opening of a Russian school in South Ossetia**

On September 5, a ceremony was held in the village of Leningor, South Ossetia to open a Russian secondary school built as part of the Russian Federation's investment programme to improve the republic's social and economic development.

In addition, a boarding school in Dzau, a secondary school and a kindergarten in the village of Orchosan, and a kindergarten in the village of Leningor opened recently after an overhaul.

The development of socially important infrastructure in South Ossetia is an important part of large-scale support from the Russian Federation aimed at developing the republic as an independent state.

**BACK TO TOP**

#### **Discrimination against Crimean journalists at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

During a plenary session on the freedom of the media of an OSCE OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting held on September 11 in Warsaw, the delegations of the US, EU and Ukraine with the support of other Western delegations, in particular, Canada, tried to prevent officially registered Crimean activists and journalists from making speeches. I would like to emphasise that those who tried to deliver a speech had official accreditation for the event. They were not impersonators, and they had all the necessary documents.

In violation of the procedure, after another attack by the Ukrainians, the moderator of the session refused to give the floor to head of the Crimean Tatar television channel Millet Ervin Musayev and representative of the Crimean Civic Chamber Anzhelika Luchinkina. The immediate demarche by the Russian party in protest of this egregious case of discrimination against a journalist brought results: both Musayev and the others were able to speak freely. In this regard, we give credit to the event organisers and the Italian presidency of the OSCE.

Thus, right in front of the eyes of the entire global community, at the platform of the OSCE, an organisation which aims to provide the freedom of speech, including the rights and freedoms of the media, the freedom of speech was suppressed. We are astonished by the level of hypocrisy of some Western countries, first of all, the US, Canada and Austria, which for so many years lamented the human rights violations in "occupied Ukrainian Crimea," and then when they got a chance to receive information firsthand from the Crimean representatives, these countries did their best to deny their right to speak. The true goal of this is obvious. With all these so-called concerns about human rights and the rights of Crimean residents, Western countries are using the humanitarian subject as an excuse for self-promotion and Russophobia.

I would like to say that the truth will triumph. This plenary session on the freedom of the media at the OSCE platform was, in my opinion, a true dark day for Kiev propaganda: numerous Crimean, and also Ukrainian journalists who have been at the SSU prisons for their professional activity, during the day spoke about the real situation with the freedom of speech in Ukraine, about illegal arrests, physical measures, riots, threats and so on. Everything that was covered up with huge financial inflows will come out more and more. It is scary to imagine what it will be. Everything is being done under the pretext of the fight against the so-called information aggression of Russia.

Apparently, seeing that it was not possible to deny the Crimeans the right to speak, the Ukrainian delegation after some time left the meeting hall in protest. It was uninteresting for them to listen to what was happening in Crimea from its residents. They want to listen to themselves.

I will repeat that the foundation was laid. Crimeans will speak out more. I would like to emphasise that I am not speaking of some new residents or people who are registered in Crimea and have lived for the past 40 years in Russia, but of Crimeans who have lived in Crimea for decades. I hope that you will also listen to them and not ignore what they say.

Our journalists – from Moscow, Crimea and other Russian regions – will continue to actively participate in the OSCE meetings. I want to hope that they will work more actively. It is unbearable to listen to more paid-up Ukrainian propaganda. It was not just an attempt to turn off the microphone for the Crimeans, everything began earlier. I want to share some new information with you.

Journalists, representatives of the Crimean Tatar population of Crimea, on their way from Moscow to Warsaw through Riga, were not allowed aboard an Air Baltic plane by the airline's staff who said that their Polish visa did not allow transfers. This was something new in the visa regulations. We are now trying to find out if there was a political bias in the actions of the staff. The journalists exchanged their tickets and came to the conference. Someone always tries to put a spoke in our wheels, by not turning on the microphone, or trying to hush up the journalists or not allowing them aboard a plane, denying a visa or cancelling the accreditation.

**BACK TO TOP**

#### **Legal grounds for the entry of Russian investigators to the Donetsk People's Republic for investigating the assassination of Alexander Zakharchenko**

Russian forensic experts will assist local authorities in their efforts to investigate the terrorist attack at the latter's request.

#### **Briefing with Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova on the sidelines of the 2nd Eurasian Women's Forum**

The next briefing is scheduled to be held at 3 pm on September 20 at Tavrichesky Palace in St. Petersburg, on the sidelines of the 2nd Eurasian Women's Forum.

We are inviting Russian and foreign media outlets to take part in the event.

Accreditation begins today on the Foreign Ministry's official website ([www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru)).

**BACK TO TOP**

#### **Answers to media questions:**

**Question: The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I has recently sent two representatives to Ukraine. Does another religious war lie in store for us?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Thank God, we are not facing this prospect. But, unfortunately, the Ukrainian state is manipulating the matter of religion, religious convictions, faith and the right of people to freedom of religion and to choose their religion. This is an established fact. I don't even want to refer you to the opinion of experts or journalists, just analyse the speeches of President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko. I

have never seen any ruder or straight-forward statements in the area of influencing and tampering with church affairs. I know how people defend the interests of believers. But it is another thing when the head of state reshapes religious views and convictions at state level, when his policy aims to pit believers against each other and to play political games inside the church, and to conduct a divide-and-rule policy in an area outside his remit, rather than simply use all this for political purposes (this level is now history). As we all thought, President Poroshenko was the head of a secular state, and I did not hear that he had placed himself in charge of the church, although even more unusual scenarios are possible in the run-up to elections. But, frankly speaking, the statements that have been made give the impression that he probably has some ambitions in this area, as well.

**Question: The matter of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has become rather acute in the past few days. OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger has visited Azerbaijan and Armenia, and President of Russia Vladimir Putin has discussed this matter with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and later with Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan. Do they influence the process in any way? What can you say about the process, considering the developments of the past few weeks in Armenia? What do you think of it?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Of course, we analyse all the statements concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh peace settlement, and we follow statements being made in the relevant countries. I would like to recall that Russia's position regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh peace settlement remains unchanged. We believe that the final status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region should be determined by political-diplomatic methods in line with the agreements between the warring parties. For its part, Russia as co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group will continue to provide mediatory services, needed to attain compromise, to the warring parties. It goes without saying that the relevant sides should create the appropriate climate for moving ahead.

**Question: Not so long ago, the Georgian authorities denied entry to four Russian citizens who were going to participate in the South Caucasus international media forum, "The role of the media in building confidence in the region." I would like to ask you to comment on these actions on Georgia's part.**

**Maria Zakharova:** We saw these reports, and we were already asked to comment.

On September 4-7, Tbilisi hosted an international media forum of the South Caucasus, organised by the North-South Political Centre, the Sodruzhestvo Press Club and the Georgia and the World newspaper. The purpose of the media forum was to develop intercultural professional dialogue as well as to strengthen contacts between representatives of the media, the expert community of the South Caucasus and Russia aimed at unbiased coverage of regional problems. More than 80 journalists and political analysts from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Russia together with other countries attended the event.

I would like to note that the event was planned as a platform to discuss positive Russian-Georgian affairs. Unfortunately, the opponents of getting our bilateral relations back to normal dubbed the event "a forum of pro-Kremlin propagandists" even before it began.

Maybe it is not worth talking about, and maybe I should not even mention it, from my professional experience, but I cannot help reacting to this phrase. I am ashamed to say that I found out about this event from the media reports. I do not know the pro-Kremlin propagandists who organised this forum. Unfortunately, Imedi TV and radio, Rustavi 2 TV, the Ekho Kavkaza (Echo of the Caucasus) radio station and others spared no effort to stir up the negative publicity.

I saw that the four Russian participants who were supposed to speak at the forum were denied entry to Georgia. There were provocative actions during the days of the forum, in particular, from the youth wing of the United National Movement. Later there were reports that the forum had taken place and was not compromised.

In our opinion, there are no pro-Kremlin propagandists involved. On the contrary, any attempts to establish a multilateral dialogue, any opportunity to exchange views should be welcomed. The opinions may differ, someone might not like some of them, but anything can be discussed at a table with the microphones on, especially when it comes to an expert journalistic community. What can be wrong with this is completely incomprehensible. It is a bad thing when they start grabbing the microphone from each other or turning it off; it is not right to demand the expulsion of accredited journalists, or not letting them participate. I have cited several examples today.

The harmonisation of contacts between the countries and peoples of the region should be promoted, not hampered. I very much hope that any attempts to disrupt these efforts will be doomed to failure.

**Question: (retranslated from English): John Glen, MP for Salisbury, qualified statements made by Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov in an interview with Margarita Simonyan on the RT Channel as untrustworthy and not the same as the intelligence information. Have you seen this video?**

**Maria Zakharova:** What video are you talking about? The British MP was in it? I haven't seen this. If you mean the Petrov and Boshirov interview, I've seen it, of course. Who hasn't seen it?

You asked me about my attitude to the opinion of the British MP who called this interview false, misinforming and untrustworthy. He is not alone in this. Literally within 40 minutes of publication — I looked at my watch — similar statements were made by the British Foreign Office. They also said this was untrue and disinformation. What are these statements based on? Or are they simply a political declaration? What specifically was false? Regrettably, after today's publication Britain's statement that these people do not exist proved to be a lie.

Let us recall how this story developed. At first strange photos were shown and Russia was asked to admit that it had poisoned the Skripals. Russian officials said instantly that they did not know these names. Sometime later they said they requested that Britain send the case materials on these people but our request was denied. Then we said that if Britain officially refused to give us any substantive information on this case, we would have to analyse the media reports. I said this standing at this rostrum in this hall. I said that the law enforcement officials would deal with this, considering a criminal case had been opened. This is exactly what was done and President of Russia Vladimir Putin spoke about this yesterday.

It appears that British officials lied when they said that these people do not exist and that their names are false. It transpired that they do exist as we have all seen today and their names are not false. They described what had happened to them. I don't understand on what grounds the Brits officially called them liars in a matter of an hour. Has their psychological condition and conduct been tested? In one hour? In the same way as Novichok was identified and traced to Russia? They said in one hour that these statements were false. Based on what? Did they call the "flight control center" at Downing Street and asked what they should say about everyone's lies? And received confirmation that the Russians always lie and this idea must be promoted? On what grounds was the official statement made? Moreover, they are the same. The cannonade has been launched. What for? To prevent the British public from thinking and hearing what they said?

I am asking British diplomats again: on what grounds were statements about specific people made rather than simply mythical suspects and photos. Why were their statements qualified as lies and disinformation?

I saw this video today and heard their version of what happened. I immediately contacted Editor-in-Chief of RT TV Margarita Simonyan whom I have known well for several years. I asked her about their psychological condition and what she thought about this interview. Ms Simonyan replied that they were extremely depressed. She said she felt this and they told her about it. She also said that the people sitting in front of her were on the brink of a psychological collapse, a breakdown. I was told this by Ms Simonyan who talked with them personally.

I believe all the questions about false statements or actions should be answered by law enforcement and investigative bodies. It is absolutely unacceptable to accuse people of lying within 30-49 minutes after they gave this account. In addition, they asked the media to protect them against the slandering of their names on a global scale. Saying that they are not comfortable will be a huge understatement. I'm again asking British officials: what legal grounds and what legal framework motivated those who accused these Russian citizens of lying, in only 40 minutes? What prompted this — their psychological profiles, visual impressions or a picture? What lies did British officials discover? When people are accused of lying, this is an official statement. Should the official authorities bear no responsibility for this?

Moreover, we were also asked by many media outlets whether we were perplexed by the photos shown by British officials as screenshots from CCTV cameras. We said honestly that we had questions about them. Let me recall that these were the screenshots of Petrov and Boshirov (they appeared to exist) walking in the corridor. The time on these screenshots was identical to the second. We said we had questions about these corridors and the coincidence in time. I was eager to know whether Ms Simonyan would ask this question and she did! I was interested because after we said we were perplexed, we were attacked by many journalists who said there were many corridors and the two men walked in parallel. The only former official who had questions was the former British ambassador

who even wrote about this in social media. Petrov and Boshirov said they were surprised by these shots themselves because they had never walked liked that. This is what they said in the interview.

There are two moments: the lie of British officials that such people do not exist and that in accordance with their information their names are false. It has been proved that this is a lie. These people exist and all of us have seen them. The second moment is about the screenshots. I cannot accuse anyone of lying but after the interview many more questions have arisen as regards the photos, screenshots and the materials presented. Who published them? Who produced them? Who prepared them? What explains these incoherencies and what are these corridors about? Here's a question that was asked by Petrov and Boshirov themselves, as well as Ms Simonyan, a question that the entire world has asked: apart from the photos of the corridors, are there any other photos that would connect Petrov and Boshirov in any way with Britain's accusations? We are looking forward to seeing these materials. We are all very interested. If the British officials can personally accuse two civilians of lying within 40 minutes, in five months they should have been able to acquire photos that would link the history of these two people with the accusations against the Russian Federation.

As for any other questions, they should be addressed to the investigative and other law enforcement bodies and all those who must professionally get to the bottom of this horrible story. It is horrible because everything is involved in it: the British propaganda machine, politicians and people who defend their specific interests and pursue their aims.

Today, after this interview, I can understand why Boris Johnson retired. After the statement made by the Foreign Office 40 minutes after this interview, I no longer have any questions about the reasons for his retirement. The experienced politician did not want to be on the team of not simply a "sinking ship" but a "holey boat" under the command of Theresa May. Today it is becoming obvious how these decisions are forged by the British Foreign Office. We saw this mechanism at work today — it took 40 minutes to make yet another accusation, this time, against specific people.

**Question:**

**Question: What does the Foreign Ministry think of the statement made by the Prime Minister of Armenia that in the future Nagorno-Karabakh could become part of Armenia?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I spoke about Russia's position on Nagorno-Karabakh in my previous answer.

**Question: Yesterday President of Russia Vladimir Putin said that we found those people, and today they gave an interview to the RT television channel. Did the Foreign Ministry take part in searching for those people?**

**Maria Zakharova:** You are overestimating our capabilities. We do not deal with such issues but with political assessments. We do not search for people but specialised agencies do; it is strange that you do not know this.

**Question: But the Foreign Ministry is also a specialised agency in a sense.**

**Maria Zakharova:** We specialise in politics, political assessments and bilateral relations. When we provide concrete data on the fate of and search for people as well as on the aid we provide them, we rely on the information received from specialised agencies. Sometimes we name them: this might be the Russian Emergencies Ministry, Defence Ministry, Healthcare Ministry and so on. Sometimes we just say that these are specialised or law enforcement agencies. I think this is obvious; this is how most foreign services act, or at least many of them, although everyone has different structures. This is how our service works.

**Question:**

**Question: Today Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov spoke about themselves; they are "ordinary" entrepreneurs. When the first information about these two citizens emerged, Fontanka magazine carried out an investigation and published copies of their Russian international passports. According to these data, their passport numbers only differ in the last number: they follow each other. Do you know how they managed to get such passports?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Now the big question is whether they are "ordinary" or not. I have no idea. First of all, I have never met them in person. The first time I saw them speaking was when I watched their interview at about 1.20–1.25 pm today. I have never seen them before. I do not know what passports or visas they have got. This is not our issue. I think if you have questions about their passports you should turn to the law enforcement agencies that perform searches, issue passports and deal with all the related issues. Numbers, differences in numbers, seals on these passports and signatures are not an issue of ours.

**Question: It is simply curious how this could be because these are passports for travel abroad. Haven't you asked why it is so?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Who issued these passports?

**Question: I don't know who issued them. Russia has, its governmental agencies.**

**Maria Zakharova:** You are a Russian citizen. Do you understand who issues passports here?

**Question: The Federal Migration Service and the Foreign Ministry.**

**Maria Zakharova:** Look this up and contact the agency that will answer an official request. I have not seen the passports or the numbers. I have only seen the interview, in Russian, without translation, Margarita Simonyan's questions and Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov's answers. I have not seen any other versions of the video except the one in Russian that was published at about 1.15 pm.

**Question: Do you plan to contact them to help them communicate with the British services, which, as I understand, have questions for them?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Maybe unilaterally. For example if they see me now, we can say that we contacted them, but unilaterally. Personally, I do not plan to contact them. If they, or any other citizens, are in need of the ministry's assistance on any issue, they can, as you know, turn to us publicly, as the fashion is now, as well as via the section for public requests or our email. What assistance can be provided? Any assistance a Russian, and sometimes a foreign, citizen may have; we have various requests and they will all be examined. I do not want to speak now about the ways that we can provide help; this is a question for these people. If they need anything, like all other Russian citizens, they can use the corresponding mechanisms to send their request to the state agencies. The Foreign Ministry is a state agency; we will examine all public requests.

**Question:**

**Question: The European Union's Institute for Security Studies has published a report on various scenarios for the Balkan region. The report mostly implies that the Balkan countries need to make a geopolitical choice between Russia and the EU. Do any Balkan countries face this choice today? What does the Foreign Ministry think about this?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Regarding this approach that, unfortunately, we have experience with, this implies not just these regional countries but other countries, including Ukraine, as well. Ukraine was told to make this choice and to renounce one thing in favour of another before taking its development to a new level. So, we really need to talk about those who force this choice on others, rather than specific regions.

Unfortunately, I agree with you completely: This is an entire direction of political thought that aims to persuade various countries to remain inside their respective associations, organisations, etc., rather than harmonise and coordinate various integration processes and work with countries in certain integration processes without hurting their national interests, or regional ties or goals or their desire to join other integration processes in the future.

This is not Russia's approach. We advocate working together, where countries, nations and states are not forced into an "either-or" choice. We do not understand why they suggest dividing lines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century after decades of multi-level international integration and globalisation; they urge countries to make a choice, to cross a threshold and close the door behind them. This runs counter to Russia's approach.

**Question: In addition to what you are saying, we noted a statement by US Senator Ron Johnson who has met with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, the country's Prime Minister Ana Brnabic and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic. After that, in his interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, he touched on Russian influence in the Balkan region. In his opinion, Russia cannot offer anything to Eastern Europe that would promote the region's economic recovery; on the contrary, it only destabilises the situation. He also added that the United States would like Russia to be a friendly rival, but that it is, most likely, a rival. Do you agree with this?**

**Maria Zakharova:** No, we disagree with this completely. Although these statements are, in our opinion, basically incorrect, they call for certain examples and facts. We constantly hear clear accusations with regard to Russia whose authors, especially US Senators, fail to provide examples or facts. We would like to hear at least a couple of reasons for the Senator's statements, so as to provide some counter-argument. In a broader, theoretical, sense, we disagree.

**Question: Regarding the region's economic development, what about the South Stream project? How did this infringe upon someone's interests?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Maybe you should address these questions to the European Commission or those countries that used their political tools to meddle in the pragmatic decision-making process.

**Question: You promised to prepare an answer to the question on whether Russia has abandoned its citizens in Ukrainian prisons.**

**Maria Zakharova:** Yes, we are working on it. We are working on it, there will be an answer. Today I have already answered a question from you. I will give an answer to the other question as soon as possible. We have most certainly not abandoned them. You also promised me to be more specific. What exactly would you like to know?

**Question: Are you aware that Russian nationals who fought in Donbass were convicted in Ukraine and are now asking President Vladimir Putin to exchange them for Ukrainian nationals in Russian prisons?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Please provide specific names and facts so that I can give you a specific answer. Overall, we are aware of a great number of stories that you mentioned about Russian nationals who are arbitrarily detained by the Kiev regime, including in prisons, and their rights are violated. We are dealing with these matters and offering regular comments. If you have questions regarding specific names or lists of names, we will be glad to provide all the information. Please give me names and I will answer.

**Question: Yesterday Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavel Klimkin announced that the water supplies to the "occupied territory" (meaning Crimea) will never be provided under a contract that says "Crimea, Russia." Due to this difficult situation, the man-made disaster, is Russia ready to agree that the contract will somehow state that the territory is occupied by the Russian Federation and thus resolve the humanitarian problems of the local people?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Do you know that any threat to civil infrastructure is qualified as an act of terrorism by international law – specifically, European law?

**Question: I do not quite understand how this is related.**

**Maria Zakharova:** Very simply. A lot of what is being done by the Kiev regime – either directly or by 'inspiring' so-called public activists to impose energy and other types of blockades on Crimea, to act in a harmful manner, as well as to promote blocking campaigns to prevent Crimea's civil infrastructure from operating – all this is one way or another subject to legal assessment and is qualified by the European Union as acts of terror. When people are blackmailed and threatened with having water shut off, electricity cuts, arson, explosions and everything else that goes along with blockade threats, it is all the same, unfortunately. As concerns vital supplies to Crimea such as water and electricity, I can assure you that the Russian Federation will do everything that is necessary. I really wish Kiev did not stoop as low as starting another cycle of terrorist activity as qualified by European law and did not inspire anybody to engage in explosions, arson, cutting off water and electricity and what not. There are plenty of examples. I think that if someone promotes democratic values it is time they stopped literally blowing things up.

**Question: Did I understand you correctly that, in your opinion, Crimea does not need water from Ukraine because Russia is already handling this matter?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I said that Moscow will take all necessary measures for Crimea to have water, electricity and other vital supplies, including through inter-agency cooperation. As you understand, the Foreign Ministry is not responsible for water supplies. I can get more information from my colleagues and send you a detailed answer. I understand that you, as a citizen of Ukraine, feel for Crimea and, as a Ukrainian journalist, you will do everything to prevent Crimea from having no water. Do I understand you correctly? On our part, we will do what we can.

**Question: Yesterday the European Parliament launched a mechanism that can be used to suspend Hungary's right to vote in the Council of the European Union. It is clear that the problem concerns the fact that Hungary does not want to accept refugees and closes NGOs, such as the Open Society Foundations. Considering the fact that Prime Minister Viktor Orban is one of the few politicians who are in favour of raising sanctions from Russia, would you regard this as Strasbourg challenging Moscow?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I cannot agree that Viktor Orban is one of the few. The number of such politicians is growing. He is one of the few who does this publicly. A vast number of various politicians speak about this unofficially or off the record, including heads of state and government, representatives of parties and movements. I think almost everyone writes about this today, showing numbers together with analyses.

Speaking about matters related to migration and quote introduction and distribution, the European Union must deal with this on its own. Of course, we see and understand what is happening there. We cannot help worrying about these processes, because they have nothing to do with human rights and analysis of what can happen in the future. This makes us question the solidarity we so often hear about from our European and Western colleagues. It can manifest in totally made-up stories, but the situation remains far from solidarity when it comes to the actual situation "on soil" in EU countries.

**Question: Do you think sanctions are aimed at Hungary only because of immigrants and NGOs? Or also because of Viktor Orban's friendship with Moscow?**

**Maria Zakharova:** It is hard to tell. It is difficult to answer this question. It would be better to ask those behind these sanctions. But it is obvious that in some countries people who openly proclaim their disagreement or alternative opinion (I am not only speaking about heads of state and politicians, but also about usual people who cannot tolerate anti-Russian sentiments and this endless "with us or against us" anymore) are being regarded as enemies or "Kremlin agents." We have spoken about this today; there are many examples. I am not speaking only about politicians and heads of state but about the general shadow of Russophobia all over the world. You can see that people have become desperate trying to say how much these sentiments are hindering the development, of European states in particular.

**Question: An employee of Rudav television channel, a Syrian citizen, had to live abroad in Iraqi Kurdistan like many millions of Syrians. After the alleviation of the situation, he decided to return back home, but was detained by Syrian forces during his trip to Aleppo. His wife and children were let go, but nothing has been heard from him so far. The channel and his family fear for his life.**

**I am saying this because Russia does a lot to help the refugees return (both internally displaced persons and those living abroad). It is widely discussed in Syria; President of Russia Vladimir Putin talked about this during his foreign visit. Could we hope that the Russian Foreign Ministry would help get any information about our employee?**

**Maria Zakharova:** You can send us your requests and the material. We will see what we can do in this case. I cannot say anything about this case. I do not know the situation, but I am ready to transfer the information to those who work with this "on the ground."

**Question: The process to establish the Syrian Constitutional Committee should have been launched after the Tehran summit. Would you say that everything is being done to derail this process?**

**Maria Zakharova:** I cannot tell if everything is being done. I am not the one to judge the scale. But I can confirm that there are attempts to torpedo the settlement process in Syria, including related to movement towards a constitutional reform. Unfortunately, the facts are clear; we have the corresponding information. I do not believe any special knowledge is necessary to see the clear trend to try to torpedo the process.

**Question: Washington has voiced its position on Donbass and the election in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics. The US Department of State's spokesperson Heather Nauert said that the US condemns the plan to hold elections there and noted that these territories allegedly remain under Russia's control, which makes the elections impossible and contradictory to Russia's obligations under the Minsk agreements. Does the US have the right to comment on the Minsk agreements without being party to them? Can this statement be viewed as the US's attempt to destabilise the situation?**

**Maria Zakharova:** To answer your question directly, it believes it does. We ask this question (regardless of whether it has the right or not) considering how constructive these statements are and whether they are made to improve the situation on the ground.

If we are speaking about elections in Donbass, first of all we believe that the decision to hold an election is the decision of the people of Donbass. As you know (I will repeat what you know well), the announcement on holding elections on November 11 for the heads of people's councils of the Donbass republics followed the death of DPR head Alexander Zakharchenko in a terrorist attack. I would like to note once again that he signed the Minsk agreements. It is completely obvious that this murder was aimed to torpedo the settlement process in Donbass. Unfortunately, considering the analysis of the political statements that have been made, all of this fits Kiev's logic of a military solution to the intra-Ukrainian crisis. Based on all the above-mentioned factors and these conditions, any power vacuum can be quite dangerous. Those who ordered and executed the attack must yet be found. Probably those who supported this murder and this attack morally, emotionally and politically hope to destabilise the situation.

Speaking in global terms, of course we understand who pushes Kiev into this "muscle-flexing" and endless return to the combat scenario: Western curators. These are people who regularly provide lethal weapons and send military inspectors there. These are not people who try to appeal to Kiev's conscience to rebuild normal and civilised life, for example, to return pension and social payments in Donbass or make payment systems function again. No, these are people who provide everything related to the combat scenario there. For example, the US Special Representative for Ukraine Kurt Volker said that the Donbass republics must disappear. In what context? The Minsk agreements? The concept that the entire world agrees there is no alternative to the Minsk agreements? Or the logic of what has really happened in Donbass: the murder of Alexander Zakharchenko? The big question is why such statements were made.

Despite these provocations, we stand on the fact that the Minsk agreements – and we reaffirm this – remain the only way to settle the crisis peacefully and should be strictly observed. We call on our partners to influence Kiev so that it would shift from military rhetoric and actions to implementing its obligations as soon as possible.

**Next in line**

**Question: State Duma Deputy Sergey Mironov said that accusations against Russian leaders are intolerable and could be a reason to break diplomatic relations. Where is the red line?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Public representatives, analysts and journalists can make such statements only as a personal opinion. Only the Russian leadership has the right to make statements like this.

Regarding the red line, this is a metaphor. I think the red line has already been crossed in many areas. With respect to London, it is honour, dignity and respect for freedom of speech and an independent media. This is only about Salisbury and the Skripal case. Respect and care for the UN system and the related agencies as well as respect for international law in general – these are all points where a red line was crossed long ago.

Take several examples of what is happening in and around the OPCW; how it is forced to make political decisions in the interests of a certain group of countries.

Look at how the media work: in the last five months all the updates on Salisbury, Amesbury and the Skripal case were not made by official representatives of the British government but by the media. The media were used as a speaker, a tool and a mechanism.

It took 30–40 minutes today to officially call two men liars. For five months we only saw how London spreads the information it needs through media leaks in order to create an impression that an investigation is being carried out without providing facts it will have to answer for later.

All of this proves that the red line has already been crossed in many respects.

**Question: Poland has dismissed MGIMO graduates from its Foreign Ministry. We know that you, too, are a MGIMO graduate. Is it such a terrible university that its graduates have to be dismissed?**

**Maria Zakharova:** Why do you think that, if someone is afraid of something, he or she fears just one thing? Perhaps, this highlights a phobia and the poor stress-resistance levels of people who are afraid of MGIMO, as well as of the dark and mice.

This decision was not made yesterday; this story has been dragging on for a long time and is being regularly revived by Polish politicians and representatives of official agencies. This often happens during bilateral relations: A story is chosen and is updated and revived over and over for no apparent reason.

We have heard these statements before. We want to clearly reaffirm the fact that human resource policies, especially those of foreign ministries, are the sovereign prerogative of an independent state.

This whole story seems strange. Instead of commenting on the Polish side's statement, I would like to say that MGIMO graduates and those of other Russian universities, including those in the humanities, science, mathematics, physics, art, culture and regional studies, work successfully in many areas and achieve fantastic results for the benefit of their countries at international organisations and in many areas. These people are the pride and glory of their countries. In this respect, you should focus on pragmatism and people's contribution to their country's overall potential, rather than ideological considerations. It is important to look at professional qualities and see if they are patriots and a valuable asset of their country or unprofessional specialists.

Many graduates of Russian universities are a valuable asset to their home states and nations. People are proud of them.

Despite regular political changes in Poland and the world, these people are treated with respect. This attitude hinges on the contribution of specific persons to the development of the nation, people and the state, rather than on time-serving and ideological approaches.

The story you mentioned in your questions is reminiscent of a prehistoric and archaic approach.

**Next in line**