

Table of contents

- 1 The missing EgyptAir plane
- 2 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's participation in the fourth session of the Russia-CCASG strategic dialogue
- 3 The development of the situation in Syria
- 4 The status of efforts toward a settlement in Libya
- 5 Developments in a Middle East settlement
- 6 The situation in Afghanistan
- 7 The South Sudanese settlement
- 8 The extension of the mandate of United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei
- 9 The situation on the Korean Peninsula
- 10 The situation in Brazil
- 11 Preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit
- 12 The aftermath of the ongoing "counterterrorist operation" in southeast Turkey
- 13 Sexual violence against children in the Syrian refugee camp in Turkey
- 14 Turkey's destructive policy around Crimea
- 15 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' statement on the anniversary of the Crimean Tatar deportation
- 16 Answers to media questions:
- 17 Changing the name of Dnepropetrovsk
- 18 The missing plane3. Election in the Taiwan Province of China
- 19 Signing the protocol on Montenegro's joining NATO

The missing EgyptAir A320 airliner

I would like to make an exception to our traditional format, and begin not with Minister Lavrov's schedule, but with the tragic news that shook us all today – the disappearance of the EgyptAir A320 aircraft.

Currently, there's no information about any Russian citizens onboard the missing flight, which was going from Paris to Cairo. We have information about foreign nationals on board, but no Russians.

The details of what happened are not yet clear. We are in contact with our partners in order to clarify what happened. I would like to express my sincere condolences to the countries and peoples directly affected by this tragedy.

[Back to top](#)

Minister Lavrov to participate in the fourth session of the Russia-GCC strategic dialogue

The fourth meeting of the strategic dialogue between Russia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will be held in Moscow on May 26. It will be attended by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman, as well as the Secretary General of this subregional organisation. This is the first such meeting to be hosted by our country (previous Russia-GCC meetings were held in Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, and Kuwait City).

Russia consistently advocates building up relations with the Arab Gulf States across many areas both at bilateral and multilateral levels. We believe that close cooperation with the Arab monarchies meets Russia's long-term interests, strengthens our position in the Gulf and throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

At the same time, active contacts with the GCC are an integral part of Russia's relations with the Islamic world. They help promote our diverse, including business, positions in the Muslim community, and bring money into Russia's economy on mutually beneficial terms.

Russia maintains an intensive political dialogue with the GCC countries, covering all the most complex processes unfolding in the world and this region in particular. The Moscow meeting participants will focus on resolving conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, creating preconditions for the region's transition from protracted crisis to stability and sustainable growth, and providing reliable security in the Gulf region.

We attach great importance to deepening coordination between our countries as we try to counteract transnational terrorism and extremism, neutralise other challenges and threats in the region, and establish an inter-faith and inter-civilisation dialogue.

Expanding trade, economic and investment cooperation is a priority of the upcoming Moscow meeting. Russian economic operators show growing interest in major projects that are being implemented or planned by the Gulf countries. The exchange of delegations is on the rise, as is the dynamic and steady expansion of mutually beneficial relations, especially in the areas where Russia and GCC members can maximise the use of existing potential of the partnership, and complement each other's capabilities. We

believe that the most promising areas of cooperation include oil and gas, finance, power engineering, transport infrastructure, implementing advanced Russian technology, including for the peaceful use of nuclear energy, space, tourism, and the cultural and humanitarian spheres.

Bilateral meetings between Minister Lavrov and the Arab participants will be held on the sidelines of this strategic dialogue meeting. The participants will continue to discuss the aforementioned issues on the regional and international agenda. There will be a detailed exchange of views on ways to promote Russia's relations with the GCC countries and the GCC in general.

[Back to top](#)

The situation in Syria

Moving over to regional issues, I'd like to address the situation in Syria. A recent ISSG meeting was devoted to this. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke about its outcome.

The situation in Syria remains tense. The ceasefire is generally holding although there are occasional violations. This situation, the way it is developing, is not to the liking of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists, who are continuing their bloody provocations, including violence against civilians. At the same time, Jabhat al-Nusra is actively involving militants from other groups, whose leadership has announced compliance with the ceasefire regime, in its activity.

Here are the facts. On May 12, terrorists from Jabhat al-Nusra and allied groups attacked the Alawite village of al-Zara in the Hama province. You may know that they perpetrated a massacre, sparing neither children nor women nor elderly people. According to different reports, between 70 and 100 civilians were killed or tortured to death in al-Zara. Many women and girls were abducted into slavery. There is no and there can be no justification for such crimes.

We are seriously concerned by the attempts, which are being made not without the involvement of external forces, to "rebrand" certain radical groups operating on Syrian soil. Mr Lavrov discussed this in depth with his colleagues in Vienna and also referred to it at his news conference. It became known, among other things, that an "umbrella" formation, called the Northern Front or Northern Army, is being created in northern Syria, which is supposed to unite all anti-government forces active in the Aleppo province.

What is the purpose? Officially, outside "sponsors" are setting their "clients" the goal of fighting ISIS along the Marea-Jarabulus line. Groups such as Ahrar al-Sham, Faylaq ash-Sham, Jaysh al-Sham and Nour al-Din al-Zenki, which were promised support by the USAF and artillery cover by Turkey, have been spotted among the participants in the "project." In reality, the idea may be to create a vast "security zone" along the Turkish border that external forces hope to control with assistance from the aforementioned Syrian illegal armed formations, keeping both the government army and Kurdish militias out of the zone.

On May 14, the massive redeployment of Northern Army militants and weapons, including tanks, from Turkish territory via the Bab al-Hawa border-crossing point began under the pretext of ejecting Jabhat al-

Nusra from Idlib. It is difficult to say what is really going on. It cannot be ruled out that Jabhat al-Nusra will be able to integrate its “comrades in arms” from the Northern Army into its ranks and redouble the pressure on the government forces near Aleppo.

Against this backdrop, we are compelled to note Ankara’s statements to the effect that Turkey is purportedly fighting terrorism like no other country in the world, as well as media reports citing Saudi Arabian officials as suggesting that the so-called Plan B for Syria will soon be launched.

In this context, we’d like to stress that the fifth ISSG ministerial meeting, which took place in Vienna on May 17 and issued a joint statement (it is available on the Foreign Ministry’s official website), made no reference to any “Plan B.” There were no agreements or serious discussions or decisions regarding any “Plan B” and the parties did not really talk about this. In reality, the ISSG participants reaffirmed their commitment to observe the ceasefire regime, provide humanitarian aid to all Syrians in need, above all in besieged and hard-to-access areas, and promote a peace settlement in Syria on the political track in keeping with UN Security Council resolutions (Resolution 2254).

Humanitarian issues are of paramount importance for the development of the situation in Syria. It was given considerable prominence during the Vienna talks, and not only within the framework of the meeting but also on a bilateral basis. Significant progress was made regarding humanitarian aid to blockaded areas. Access to al-Darayya, al-Ma'adamiya and al-Hamma in the Damascus province and the town of al-Rastan in the Homs province remains limited (but not closed). The Syrian authorities have sanctioned the provision of medical aid, school textbooks and food for children (milk) there. In addition, they have authorised the delivery of the same supplies to the town of Douma. Delays in the movement of UN convoys were mostly caused by shelling attacks carried out by illegal armed formations and the associated concern for the safety of UN personnel. Unfortunately, there are instances of arbitrary actions by individual commanders on the ground, but they are extremely rare and we are not inclined to dramatise them.

Overall, Damascus is committed to constructive interaction with the relevant international humanitarian agencies (this is our view). The procedure of approving humanitarian operations has been considerably simplified (applications from humanitarian agencies are granted within five to seven days). The Syrian authorities have allowed the delivery of mobile hospitals to all blocked areas, except for al-Darayya. This suburb of Damascus, which has been literally wiped off the face of the earth, is controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra militants, who carry out continuous hit-and-run attacks against government checkpoints. The Syrian government is ready to ensure the provision of free qualified medical aid to the residents of all these districts at nearby state hospitals; for example, al-Madaya residents have already taken advantage of this opportunity.

The provision of humanitarian supplies to Kurdish areas in the Al-Hasakah province is still an unresolved issue. Ankara is still blocking the reopening of the Nusaybin-Kam?sl? border-crossing point, which runs counter to UN Security Council Resolution 2258 regarding humanitarian access via border checkpoints.

We note the Syrian government’s proactive efforts to ensure the successful implementation of the national reconciliation programme that it has initiated, as an important trend. There have been several rounds of amnesty for members of illegal armed formations and army deserters. This is being done within two formats: on a state level, based on corresponding presidential orders, and within the framework of local ceasefire agreements, when local militants are invited to “legalise their status” and return to civilian

life.

[Back to top](#)

The status of efforts toward a settlement in Libya

We were asked, including by our Italian colleagues, journalists, for reasons you may be aware of, to regularly comment on this topic.

On this point, I would like to say that the intra-Libyan political process, launched in September 2014 under the UN aegis in order to put an end to the civil strife in Libya and pave the way for national reconciliation, is not going smoothly. We have noted that repeatedly. It continues to falter due to the remaining differences between the main political forces in Libya on implementation parameters for the intra-Libyan agreement that was signed in the Moroccan city of Skhirat on December 17, 2015, and bolstered by UN Security Council 2259.

To promote the implementation of the Skhirat agreements, a regular international ministerial meeting on Libya was held in Vienna on May 16, in which a Russian delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov took part.

The meeting produced a joint communique asserting the parties' commitment to ensuring the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Libya. Support was voiced for efforts by Prime Minister Fayeze al-Saraj with the assistance of the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Libya Martin Kobler to form a national accord government and create national security and law enforcement structures in Libya in order to address urgent issues of ensuring security and public order in that country.

We hope that the decisions adopted in Vienna will help consolidate the Libyan political forces and bring them closer to compromise solutions on the remaining disputes. This will enable the newly established consolidated state governing bodies to become fully functioning and start restoring law and order in the country and, above all, neutralising the terrorists who are present in large numbers on Libyan soil.

[Back to top](#)

The current outlook for a Middle East settlement

Our attention is always focused on the current situation with respect to a Middle East settlement.

The seeming abatement of tension between the Palestinians and Israelis should not mislead us. The latest incidents in Jerusalem and the West Bank and the recent escalation around the Gaza Strip indicate that the situation on the Palestinian-Israeli track remains fairly explosive.

Against this backdrop, the stagnating peace process and the absence of negotiating contacts between the

parties are playing into the hands of radicals and extremists who are not interested in restoring peace. To bring the situation back onto the political and diplomatic path (where, we believe, it should be), we conduct intensive parallel work both with Israelis and Palestinians through bilateral channels. Simultaneously, we also work within the Middle East Quartet for similar purposes.

The quartet is now completing a report on the situation in the Middle East settlement. The document should contain recommendations helping to create conditions for restarting substantive (as journalists always ask questions about the meaning of the word 'substantive', let's replace it with 'to the point') negotiations between the parties to promote a settlement based on the universally accepted international laws. We expect this document to be finished and published in late May.

We are convinced that an inclusive, just and durable Middle East settlement is impossible without the creation of an independent, viable and territorially cohesive Palestinian state that would coexist with Israel in peace and security. The implementation of this conceptual task implies, among other things, ending the occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories, ensuring reliable security for all countries of the region, Israel included, and normalising Arab-Israeli relations. Such a reliable settlement will guarantee the advancement and prosperity of the peoples inhabiting the region.

[Back to top](#)

The situation in Afghanistan

Another region no less problematic is Afghanistan. Of late, the military and political situation in that country remains strained. We regularly provide you with the latest updates on what is happening there. The Taliban movement continues to fight in some regions of the country. The most complicated situation is in the southern province of Helmand, where extremists have already seized four districts and in three other districts there are ongoing armed clashes with government forces.

There is still much concern about the situation in the north of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan where Taliban militants have established control of a number of regions and continue attempts to seize provincial centres. The ISIS-controlled branch in Afghanistan is as active as ever as it is seeking to spread its influence to the bordering states of Central Asia and the north of Afghanistan.

Remember that earlier efforts by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group made up of the representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the US and China to convince the Taliban to make peace have, regretfully, proved fruitless. (This is our opinion based on the facts showing how the situation is actually unfolding on the ground.) We are in favour of current negotiations between the representatives of Kabul and the opposition Islamic Party of Afghanistan. However, it is common knowledge that this group is not the pacesetter in working out the anti-government forces' common position on the issue of national reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Russia is ready to help facilitate the negotiating process and take, among other things, a flexible approach toward the possible easing of sanctions against the Taliban unless this will be in conflict with the national interests of Afghanistan.

[Back to top](#)

Settlement in South Sudan

We welcome the positive changes in the process of bringing the situation in the Republic of South Sudan (RSS) back to normal, including the return of armed opposition leader Riek Machar to Juba at the end of April and the forming of the Transitional Government of National Unity, in keeping with the peace agreements signed in August 2015 to settle the conflict in the country.

We highly appreciate the mediation efforts of the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

We are calling for all sides to take balanced political and diplomatic steps to support the peace process in South Sudan. We believe that presently, at this very sensitive settlement stage, parties to the conflict in South Sudan should be given time to implement all the agreements.

Russia as a permanent member of the UN Security Council is ready to continue to do all it can to facilitate the process of bringing the situation in South Sudan back to normal.

[Back to top](#)

Extending the UN Interim Security Force mandate in Abyei

Within the framework of international efforts to normalise intra-Sudanese relations through the agreements documented in the joint protocol of cooperation, which the presidents of Sudan and South Sudan signed in Addis Ababa in September 2012, on May 12 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2287 unanimously on extending the mandate of UNISFA to November 15, 2016. The agreement includes an interim administration and security in the Abyei border area.

We are confident that the final status of the area can be settled through a neighbourly Khartoum-Juba dialogue toward a mutually acceptable compromise with support from the United Nations and the African Union. The creation and efficient work of a transitional national unity government in South Sudan is called on to build productive interaction between the two states.

[Back to top](#)

The situation on the Korean Peninsula

We are closely monitoring the developments on the Korean Peninsula, which is not only one of the longest running hotbeds of instability in the Asia Pacific Region but also an area that borders the Russian Far East.

We can say that we're content that the apprehensions about North Korea's possible violation of UN Security Council resolutions during the 7th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea did not materialise. Much was said about this risk, and we were asked for our expectations. Luckily, our fears weren't realised. We count on North Korea to further pursue responsible policies and comply with its pledges as a UN member state.

We noted the initiatives to reduce intra-Korean tensions and improve the atmosphere on the Korean Peninsula, which the North Korean leadership advanced at its party forum. We hope that none of the sides to which Pyongyang addresses its appeals will turn down its proposals without due consideration or reach hasty conclusions. On the contrary, the proposals should be subject to painstaking analysis and followed by responsible decisions.

We are confident that the progress of Northeast Asia toward peace and stability should be reciprocal and actively involve all parties represented in the region. As we have said more than once, this approach would provide conditions for normalising North Korea's relations with South Korea, the United States and Japan, and for a transition to practical efforts to establish multilateral mechanisms for regional security and cooperation based on nondiscrimination and equality among all participants. That is the point of view from which we see the prospects to settle the Korean nuclear issue. We proceed from the assumption that not resolving this issue is the main generator of military and political tension in the region.

In this connection, we would like to stress the importance of reducing regional military activities. We deem it unacceptable to point to the so-called "North Korean nuclear missile threat" to attain unilateral military advantages and deliver large amounts of the latest weaponry to the region – and specifically, to establish a new ABM deployment area as a regional part of the United States' prospective global missile shield.

Russia is always ready for the closest possible cooperation with all interested nations for the sake of peace and stability in the region and the settlement of the Korean nuclear issue by political and diplomatic means.

[Back to top](#)

Situation in Brazil

We have received a lot of requests to comment on the political situation in Brazil. We understand that the political situation is a domestic affair of the country. At the same time, we are ready to share our stance.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has repeatedly commented on the issue, including after Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was suspended to face impeachment.

We continue to follow closely the developments in Brazil. We are convinced that Brazil, a long-standing friend to Russia, will get over this complicated period in its history within the constitutional and legal framework, relying on its strong democratic institutions and traditions. We believe the Brazilian people should resolve their problems themselves through a peaceful political dialogue without any destructive

outside interference or influence. It is all crucial for preserving political stability and national unity. We are hopeful that efficiency and stability of regional multilateral structures will allow the Latin American community to work out the best possible position on the Brazilian issue in traditional solidarity.

We consider Brazil to be one of our priority partners in Latin America and the Caribbean. We are constructively cooperating with this country within the UN, the G20 and BRICS frameworks. We hope for further consistent development of the Russian-Brazilian strategic partnership both in the bilateral and multi-lateral formats for the good of international security and stability, of our countries' development, in the interests of the peoples and undoubtedly in the interests of a multi-polar democratic world order.

[Back to top](#)

Preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit

The World Humanitarian Summit will be held in Istanbul, Turkey, on May 23-24 on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's initiative. The purpose of the summit is to discuss ways to build up the system of international response to humanitarian emergencies due to natural disasters and armed conflicts.

We are seeing an increase in the number and scale of humanitarian crises, which more and more often become lingering – that against the background of an unprecedented growth in the conflict potential of international relations.

The approach of summit organisers has moved many countries, Russia among them, to question the summit format and the status of the final documents from the start.

A few days before the summit, the UN Secretariat prepared a package of far-reaching and voluntary humanitarian commitments. The organisers expect them to be the main achievement and expect all participants' approval. Meanwhile, some of these commitments cross the limits of international humanitarian response and summit goals – for example, the inability of UN Security Council permanent members to use the veto in certain instances, the limitation of national sovereignty by nations themselves for the sake of urgent humanitarian access, or guaranteed amounts of humanitarian funding.

Our doubt is compounded by the so-called “commitments” elaborated by the UN Secretariat on its own, without involving the member states though their governments will bear the brunt of efforts to meet these commitments. This, I suggest, is a major problem because these initiatives cannot exist outside practical situations and certainly cannot be endorsed without relevant contributions by the nations themselves.

So, the UN member states are being called on to assume obligations without any discussion. Russia repeatedly presented its proposals and remarks to the summit organisers, who just shrugged them off. We do not think that briefings for the member states on the eve of the summit can adequately replace proper negotiations, which the situation demands right now.

In this connection, Russia forwarded a message to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations member states, in which it puts forward its position and gives notice that it will not accept the commitments proposed by the UN Secretariat even though we realise that these commitments are purely

voluntary.

I would like to reiterate that Russia is a responsible and consistent participant in international humanitarian cooperation and a major humanitarian donor, so it will not abstain from the summit. An interdepartmental delegation led by the Emergencies Deputy Minister will go to Istanbul. The Russian delegates will address the plenary meeting, two ministerial roundtable discussions and the special themed sessions.

We proceed from the assumption that the summit will be a starting point for practice-oriented intergovernmental talks on the entire international humanitarian agenda, and the UN General Assembly will use their achievements for a relevant resolution.

[Back to top](#)

Consequences of “counterterrorism operation” in southeast Turkey

Despite the efforts undertaken by the international community and numerous appeals by human rights organisations, fighting in southeast Turkey continues and has become even more violent. According to official data, about 300 civilians have been killed in the zone of the “counterterrorism operation” since July 2015.

Reports of more victims come from the region every day. On May 10, the supporters of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) blew up a police bus in the province of Diyarbakir, killing three police officers and wounding 45. Clashes between government forces and Kurdish militants go on in Diyarbakir, Mardin, Hakkari and Sanliurfa. Dozens have been wounded. The siege of Sirnak has lasted for about two months.

The other day, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, denounced the Turkish military operation in the southeastern provinces. He called for investigating a succession of alarming reports about human rights violations, in particular the alleged burning of dozens of people in Cizre and the deliberate shooting of unarmed civilians, including women and children, by gunfire from tanks and other military vehicles. He urged the verification of allegations of torture, reports that ambulances and medical staff were prevented from reaching the wounded, and reported the destruction of property and key community infrastructure. He said that all of this has resulted in a huge displacement. We support the High Commissioner’s call on the Turkish authorities to give independent investigators unimpeded access to the area to monitor the humanitarian situation there.

We strongly hope that the issue of humanitarian arbitrariness in Turkey will not be swept under the rug, especially considering the ongoing summit on humanitarian issues. We hope that the senior officials attending this summit will take note of this issue and, most importantly, will draw Ankara’s attention to continuing events in Turkey.

In light of the military operation’s catastrophic consequences for civilians, we again urge Ankara to use peaceful methods when dealing with the Kurdish issue.

[Back to top](#)

Sexual abuse of children in a Syrian refugee camp in Turkey

We express our deep concern over numerous media reports on the alleged sexual abuse of children in the Nizip refugee camp near Gaziantep. According to available information, at least 30 underage Syrian refugees from 8 to 12 were sexually abused from September 2015 to January 2016.

In light of developments at Syrian refugee camps in Turkey, the confident and optimistic statements made by some EU leaders and high-ranking Brussels officials following their recent visit to the Nizip camp sound strange, if not absurd. According to them, Turkey “is the best example for the whole world [on] how we should treat refugees” (I would say this is not at all how refugees should be treated) and allegedly provides them with opportunities and perspectives. I wouldn’t wish such perspectives on my worst enemy. The reported facts highlight the importance of a more thorough analysis of the situation by the EU and the international community as a whole. As it is, the EU has put its stakes in the European migration crisis on Turkey.

Syrian refugees have come to Europe in search of protection and a better life for themselves and their children. They seek protection from the dramatic situation in the Middle East and North Africa, which was created in part by the unwise, thoughtless and improvident policies of our Western colleagues. The people who had to flee their homes are being exiled to Turkey and forced to live like slaves.

We believe that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other concerned international organisations must react to the outrageous crimes that have been reported in the Nizip camp. This is especially important because the Turkish authorities have adopted a selective attitude to allowing representatives of international humanitarian organisations to visit refugee camps, which is creating conditions that allow these and other crimes in such camps.

[Back to top](#)

Turkey’s destructive policy over Crimea

We would like to share our assessments in connection with yet another series of Turkish official statements regarding Crimea and the “condition of the Crimean Tatars”, including in the context of the latest anniversary of this ethnic group’s illegal deportation in the USSR in 1944.

It is obvious that Ankara’s attitude towards Crimea’s reunification with Russia and the sociopolitical situation in the Crimean Federal District is lopsided and extremely politicised. We understand that this attitude has not changed. On the contrary, the Turkish leaders’ bias in relation to these issues has been growing in direct proportion to their anti-Russian propaganda as a whole.

Since the very beginning of the crisis in Ukraine, Turkey has preferred to disregard the true causes that have led to an orgy of ultra-right nationalistic moods in the country, an actual split in the Ukrainian

society and state, and, as a consequence, Crimea's legitimate withdrawal from Ukraine.

Ankara has also disregarded the fact that this was the local population's expression of free will, people who had fought for years for the right to say what they think on this issue. Regrettably, Turkey thought it more advantageous to characterise the referendum and Russia-Crimea reunification as an "illegal annexation". Recently they have gone even further than that and are calling it "occupation".

I'd like to ask: Whom do we hear saying this? Let me remind you that one-third of Cyprus has been under occupation for more than 40 years, and you know well who has occupied this territory. The UN is still looking for missing persons, who fell victim to the Turkish military intervention. So, when you wish to utter the words "occupation", "intervention", and so on, please start with yourselves and then we will perhaps listen to you. But when you make groundless accusations of what we haven't committed, we will remind you of your own doings.

The current Turkish leadership is pursuing its own geopolitical plans. To be sure, these are imperial ambitions and "phantom pains". We state this and we understand that their statements have no relation to reality.

As is to be regretted, Ankara is consciously gambling on the 1944 illegal deportation of the Crimean Tatars from the peninsula. As did a number of other local ethnic groups in the Crimea, the Tatars were forced to live through the terrible repressions of that period. Pursuing their own propaganda aims, the Turkish president and government are working hard to exploit the historical tragedy which was condemned and recognised as illegal and criminal by both the USSR and modern Russia. I'd like to remind you that the Russian Federation has adopted and is implementing a broad range of measures aimed at restoring historical justice and promoting the political, social and moral revival of the Crimean Tatars. Every year Crimea hosts mourning and memorial events dedicated to the memory of the deportees. Both Crimean Tatars and other local ethnic groups and faiths pay tribute to the victims.

We would recommend to the Turkish authorities and other politicians all over the world who are exploiting this tragedy to stop trying to earn doubtful political capital and focus instead on the history of their own states and, most importantly, on the real processes under way in the peninsula. Come to Crimea! But you choose not to come for some unknown reason. Are you afraid of something? But we are waiting for you there and we – or rather the people of Crimea themselves – will tell and show you everything themselves. We receive a lot of letters from local people who write that they are sick and tired of hearing unjust accusations. They say: those who throw accusations at us and the Russian authorities should come visit Crimea. As local residents, we will tell them about the existing problems and about what has been achieved during this period. To reiterate: Don't be afraid of paying us a visit in Crimea!

Instead of making an objective assessment of the realities in the Republic of Crimea and the positive steps being undertaken in the interests of the local Tatars and aimed at dealing with the backlog of problems accumulated over the "Ukrainian period", Turkish politicians have chosen to support a small group of ill-famed heads of structures and organisations, such as the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. In its present shape, this body has long lost the trust of Crimean people and is certainly unrepresentative of the Crimean Tatars. It has repeatedly discredited itself by carrying out subversive and extremist actions directed against the entire population in the peninsula, including the Crimean Tatars and other ethnic groups. It will just suffice to mention their support for the power blockade of the region.

Let me remind you that on April 26, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Crimea banned Mejlis operations on the territory of the Russian Federation. This “public association’s” service record includes a transport, food and power blockade of Crimea, enforced jointly with Ukrainian ultra-right nationalists, and the recruitment of a “Muslim battalion” that clearly pursues aims other than peaceful ones. Far from improving the situation in the region, all of this is focused on totally different aims and objectives.

This policy can do nothing to improve the condition of the Crimean Tatar part of the multiethnic population in the peninsula and is aimed solely at fomenting interethnic strife and destabilising this region of Russia.

Statement by the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the anniversary of the deportation of Crimean Tatars

The Foreign Ministry has taken note of the press briefing by the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Rupert Colville, regarding the anniversary of the deportation of Crimean Tatars.

Of course, this was a tragedy in the history of Crimea. It is for this reason that the adoption of an executive order to reinstate the Crimean Tatars and other ethnic groups that suffered from repression was one of the first measures by the Russian authorities after the reunification with Crimea. Historical justice was restored. This initiative was a start in gradually rectifying the consequences of deporting Crimean Tatars and other ethnic groups from Crimea.

It is deplorable that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has exploited this date in the history of Crimea that we all grieve over to put forward a number of unsubstantiated claims against the Russian authorities, accusing them of violating the rights of Crimean Tatars.

In fact, it is Crimea’s reunification with Russia that made reinstatement and the recovery of the legitimate rights and interests of Crimean Tatars truly possible. Until then, for more than 20 years they were ignored and trampled on by the Ukrainian authorities. And through all these years the OHCHR has been turning a blind eye to the recommendations and observations to this effect by numerous international human rights groups and bodies. For 20 years there was no such thing as a Crimean Tatar issue. It is only now that it has surfaced. Of course, this issue is politicised.

Russia has put forth a substantial effort lately to make life better for all ethnicities in Crimea, including the Crimean Tatars. I’ve already mentioned some of them. Today, Crimean Tatars are represented in all governing bodies in the Republic of Crimea, including local governments, law enforcement and oversight bodies. They have the possibility to study in the Crimean Tatar language. There are Crimean Tatar media outlets.

We believe that this groundless and politically biased criticism is not worthy of the UN. After all, it is important to rely on verified information and actual developments on the ground. Not only do biased approaches to assessing the human rights situation undermine the high status of the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office, but also play into the hands of the destructive forces that seek to opportunistically exploit the Crimean Tatar issue.

From answers to media questions:

Question: What would your reaction be to the decision by the Ukrainian authorities to change the name of Dnepropetrovsk?

Taking into account that the plane that went missing above the Mediterranean suddenly lost contact, and there is a high probability of a terrorist attack, don't you think that this tragedy could delay the decision to resume air service between Russia and Egypt?

Maria Zakharova: I'll start with what really matters. Regarding the plane crash, I've already said and would like to reiterate that it is now crucial to understand what has actually happened. Anticipatory assessments can be dangerous since they are based on assumptions, not facts. Before drawing any conclusions, it is essential to understand what happened, so as to be able to discuss further steps and statements. Of course we will share our perspective, but only after the facts are established.

As for renaming Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine, you know, on the one hand, this is another state's internal affair, but on the other hand, Russia and the whole world are involved in what is currently happening in Ukraine. You see, anything can be done, all kinds of perversions are possible, but knowing history is still part of it. The people, who call themselves members of parliament, point to the implementation of the "decommunisation" law as a reason for adopting this measure. If the reason behind it is decommunisation and true history is a priority, it should be free from any ideology. This is the core of the claim by Ukraine, its current government, against what they call the Communist period in their history. In this case, you should know your history. You should know that the city was never called Dnepr but Yekaterinoslav. At some point in its history it was renamed Novorossiysk. You have to know this in order not to look stupid or brainwashed. I think that this dishonours the Ukrainian people you represent. What other response did you expect? Honestly, after decisions that are completely separate from historical reality, I fear that other cities and names could also be abbreviated, such as Kherson, Zaporozhye or Saakashvili.

Question: We have taken notice of new developments in Taiwan, China. We know that Russia has taken a clear stance on this, and that this has been reaffirmed in official Russia-China statements and declarations more than once. Can you comment on recent developments as an official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry?

Maria Zakharova: I suppose that the "recent developments" you are referring to are the elections in Taiwan. Indeed, we are monitoring the situation. We know that elections have been held in Taiwan and that the newly elected local administration will assume office tomorrow. We would like to stress in this context that no matter who assumes office on the island, Russia's position on the Taiwan issue will remain clear, firm and consistent. I believe that you are aware of our position. Russia believes that there is only one China, the Government of the People's Republic of China is the only legitimate representative of the whole of China, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. We are against a proclamation of Taiwanese independence in any form. As I said, our position on this issue has not changed.

Question: Can you comment on the NATO foreign ministers signing an accession protocol with Montenegro on the sidelines of the NATO Council meeting in Brussels?

Maria Zakharova: Our negative attitude to this “open door” policy does not depend on current conditions but is based on the unfavourable political and military consequences of the past phases of the alliance’s expansion. Suffice it to recall how attempts were made over several years to convince us that the accession of the Eastern European and Baltic countries to NATO would improve our bilateral relations, cure their phobias of a “negative heritage” and create a belt of NATO countries that are friendly towards Russia. In fact, the bloc’s expansion has only aggravated the “frontline country syndrome,” and today not only these countries’ foreign policies but also their domestic policies are largely based on the assumption that they need “special” protection.

As for the signing of the accession protocol on Montenegro joining the Washington Treaty, it is fresh evidence of Brussels’ desire to accelerate the accession process and make it irreversible. The continued efforts to draw Podgorica into the alliance is based on secret agreements that have been signed with the Montenegrin leadership with disregard for the peoples’ opinion and in violation of democratic principles and procedures, the commitment to which NATO claimed to honour so strictly. Is there any other explanation for the Montenegrin authorities’ refusal to put up this issue for a national referendum? The only possible explanations are that the friendly Montenegrin people have not forgotten the barbarous NATO bombing of the former Yugoslavia, and that the results of a free expression of people’s will could not be predetermined. It appears that it was decided to disregard the Montenegrins’ opinion on an issue that concerns NATO’s geopolitical ambitions.

This latest NATO move undertaken to change the military and political landscape in Europe, especially in light of the bloc’s declared policy of containing Russia, will definitely affect Russia’s interests and force us to react.