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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to attend the opening of MGIMO University Odintsovo branch

On June 3, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will take part in the opening ceremony of the MGIMO-University Odintsovo branch.

Moscow Region Governor Andrey Vorobyov, Head of the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science Sergey Kravtsov, and Anatoly Torkunov, Rector of MGIMO-University at the Russian Foreign Ministry, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, are also expected to attend the ceremony, during which the MGIMO standard will be presented to the head of the branch, Sergey Vasiliev.

The fact that MGIMO University is expanding by opening a new branch shows that the university, affiliated with the Foreign Ministry, has a high profile, and the education services it provides are highly relevant. During this academic year, MGIMO's Odintsovo branch has started to enrol students for its bachelor's and master's degrees programmes, as well as vocational training courses. In addition, the MGIMO's Gorchakov Lyceum intended for school students grades 10 and 11 is about to be launched.

On the same day, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will chair a meeting of the MGIMO University Supervisory Board. On the agenda, among other things, will be a report by the Moscow Region Governor Andrey Vorobyov on the efforts by the MGIMO Odintsovo branch to provide further training and retraining to Moscow Region government officials.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's talks with Foreign Minister of Finland Timo Soini

On June 6, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland Timo Soini will be in Moscow at the invitation of

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. This will be his first visit to Russia since taking office in May 2015.

We note that the relations between Russia and Finland are traditionally marked by regular and practical political dialogue. We have established equal, mutually beneficial cooperation in many areas, based on solid trade and economic ties, joint efforts on the state border separating the two countries, proactive inter-regional and cross-border cooperation and people-to-people contact.

Russia and Finland collaborate constructively in the UN and within other international organisations, as well as regional frameworks in northern Europe and in the Arctic, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Arctic Council, and the Northern Dimension.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to take part in the meeting of the Foreign Ministry's Council of the Heads of Russia's Constituent Entities

On June 7, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will chair the 27th regular meeting of the Foreign Ministry's Council of the Heads of Russia's Constituent Entities.

The agenda of the upcoming meeting will focus on promoting integration within the Eurasian Economic Union and how it impacts social and economic development in Russian regions. Participants will discuss ways to concentrate on and strengthen cooperation between Russia's constituent entities and the EAEU member countries. The meeting will feature presentations by Tatyana Valovaya, Member of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission in charge of integration and macroeconomics, as well as the governors of the Novosibirsk and Chelyabinsk regions.

The meeting is expected to result in the adoption of recommendations to the Russian constituent entities, federal ministries and agencies regarding the level of region-to-region cooperation, strengthening bilateral cooperation formats and making efficient use of the opportunities provided by the Treaty on the EAEU.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's talks with Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr. Riad Al-Malki

On June 8, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will meet with Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr. Riad Al-Malki, who will be on a working visit to Moscow.

The officials will focus on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process in light of the June 3 Middle East peace conference in Paris. Deputy Foreign Minister, special presidential representative for the Middle East and Africa Mikhail Bogdanov will represent Russia at the event. The parties will focus on the complex situation on Palestinian territories and the prospects for the restoration of intra-Palestinian unity. The ministers will also discuss current issues of bilateral Russia-Palestine cooperation in various areas.

Dr. Riad Al-Malki's upcoming visit is one in a series of regular Russian-Palestinian political contacts, which provide for regular updates to issues of mutual interest and regional issues.

Russia continues to work mainly within the framework of the UN Security Council and the Middle East Quartet of international intermediaries and seeks ways to resume a direct dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis. We believe that there is a need for a comprehensive, fair and sustainable settlement of this decades-old issue. We are well aware of the need to find or to approach the solution to this issue today. A comprehensive and sustainable settlement must be based on the rules of international law, which envisage the creation of an independent Palestinian state that can live in peace and security with its neighbours.

Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh's upcoming visit to Moscow

On June 9, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Nasser Judeh will be on a working visit to Moscow.

Mr Lavrov and Mr Judeh will hold talks during which they will address a number of regional and global issues, as well as a set of topical issues of bilateral relations. The officials will place special emphasis on the current situation and developments around Syria in the context of both countries' participation in the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). Other issues will include the developments in Iraq and the global efforts to counter ISIS and other terrorist groups, as well as the prospects for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, with Amman being its key regional participant.

We note that the dialogue between foreign policy heads of Russia and Jordan is intensive and includes regular contacts. The dialogue features high confidence and close or equal approaches of both countries to numerous global and regional issues.

The situation in Syria

We point out that tensions remain high in Syria. However, the ceasefire regime is generally holding. Active Russia-US contacts are underway to strengthen the ceasefire regime in Syria. The current priority is to create distance between terrorist groups and those armed groups that observe the ceasefire, something that should have been done long ago but has not. Those who monitor Russia - US contacts, including telephone conversations between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry, probably remember that Russia has regularly raised this issue. This must be done to make progress possible. It is no less important to close the Turkey-Syria border to illegal arms supplies and the fighters who cross it to join terrorists.

We are closely monitoring developments north of Aleppo, where an ISIS offensive has split an enclave

controlled by several anti-government groups in two. The Kurdish militia, which has come to the assistance of the town of Marea under siege by terrorists, helped evacuate the wounded and those civilians who wanted to leave. The media have published shocking photographs taken at the site of fighting between ISIS and “moderate” opposition forces, primarily Ahrar ash-Sham. Those who saw them can make their own conclusions regarding the “moderate-ness” of these opposition groups. For example, they could see photos of smiling Ahrar ash-Sham fighters holding the severed heads of ISIS terrorists. They are both chips of the same block, the ISIS terrorists and the “moderate” fighters who are not at all moderate but real cutthroats.

In the past few days, Kurdish fighters suspended their frontal attack against Raqqa, which is known as the unofficial ISIS capital, and undertook a surprise flank manoeuvre, moving simultaneously south along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River and north along the western bank towards the city of Manbij. If successful, the Kurds will block the main routes connecting Raqqa to the Turkish border.

Unfortunately, it should be said that partisan media still refuse to cover the situation objectively, and instead are fanning hysteria over humanitarian deliveries to the region. As we see it, they want to blame the Syrian and Russian air forces for the strikes that destroyed hospitals and killed civilians in Idlib and Aleppo. Ultimately, the goal of these media outlets is to prevent the defeat of Jabhat al-Nusra, which continues to influence some anti-government forces and is hiding behind them and using them, and even peaceful civilians, as human shields. In the western regions of Aleppo, Jabhat al-Nusra has been acting under the cover of Jaysh al-Mujahedeen, or Army of Mujahedeen, which al-Nusra controls. Jabhat al-Nusra has resumed their intensive shelling of the Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud district in Aleppo. This is sufficient to decide that this criminal union must be broken up as soon as possible. We again call for more active international cooperation against terrorism in Syria, including against Jabhat al-Nusra. There is no time to lose and no justification left for presenting terrorists as “moderate opposition.”

Regarding the Syrian political process, we have taken note of the ado raised over the alleged May 29 desertion of the chief negotiator from the opposition High Negotiations Committee, which has done its utmost to disrupt the fragile intra-Syrian peace talks sponsored by the UN in Geneva. Mohammed Alloush from the radical group Jaysh al-Islam said that he was resigning because of the international community’s unwillingness to see the importance of ending the bloodshed in Syria. Where do these people find the impudence to make such statements? Plainly put, this extremist has laid claim to representing “humanitarian” ideas.

I’d like to remind you that Jaysh al-Islam is responsible for the bulk of those indiscriminate missile and mortar raids against Damascus that claim civilian lives, including women and children. But “humanitarian” eyes are averted from these scenes. Jaysh al-Islam, acting jointly with other jihadists, has staged demonstrative executions of Christians and Alawites and even mortar attacks against the Russian Embassy in Syria.

Anyway, it turned out later that Mohammed Alloush has not resigned from the High Negotiations Committee and will remain on the HNC delegation in Geneva, though not as chief negotiator.

We firmly believe that political talks are the only way to settle the internal conflict in Syria. This is our principled stance, to which we have always adhered. This calls for a serious and constructive approach from all parties to the negotiations. Attempts to use the Geneva platform as a venue for self-promotion show disrespect towards the international community. Much hard work and great effort, including

materially, have been put into launching the peace process. But the most important consideration is human lives, as people continue to die because some opposition members hold their personal ambitions above not just the political process but also common sense. These actions are unacceptable, and they must and will be prevented.

New anti-Russian statements by Turkish leaders

I would like to comment on new statements by Turkish leaders regarding the Syrian peace settlement. As you know, Turkish authorities have once again voiced some very tough rhetoric. Ankara has once again provided some outspoken and a priori false information about air strikes allegedly conducted by the Russian Aerospace Forces against civilian facilities and peaceful residents in Syria's Idlib Governorate. As before, the Turkish side has failed to provide any evidence and to cite any authentic sources for their information. As we understand, these statements are based solely on fabricated reports from dubious resources, such as the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. As is well known, such organisations are notorious for their numerous anti-Russian cliches. It is our pleasure to cite authentic information from our colleagues from the Defence Ministry. Russian aviation did not fly any combat missions in Idlib Governorate, nor did it conduct any strikes there.

Against this backdrop, Ankara's accusations concerning Russia's alleged violations of political settlement principles and the ceasefire agreement in Syria, of course, sound even more ridiculous. I would like to recall that it is precisely Russia that helped conclude the initial ceasefire agreement. Let's recall the 2015 statements by our US and European colleagues, and I have already mentioned regional players. What ceasefire did they talk about 12-18 months ago? We heard only one mantra that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad should resign. All attempts to refer them to the text of the 2012 Geneva Communique proved futile, they neither wanted to hear nor recall what they had signed. If this was an isolated fact, then it would be possible to say that it is not dignified to claim that Russia is violating the ceasefire agreement. In this case, however, any dignity is out of the question. Russia helped conclude the ceasefire agreement in line with the Joint Statement of Russia and the United States as co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group. By the way, Turkey is involved in the Group's work. Russian military personnel are monitoring the ceasefire regime in coordination with their US partners and the Humanitarian Access Task Force of the International Syria Support Group. Apart from monitoring the ceasefire, the Russian military have managed to involve 128 Syrian communities and 60 illegal armed units of the Syrian opposition in the national reconciliation process, the results of which are actually quite impressive. Objectively speaking, Russia cannot be interested in torpedoing its own efforts, all the more so as it took a lot of time and effort to implement the ceasefire. It is common knowledge that extremist groups that are, unfortunately, assisted and patronised by the incumbent Turkish authorities are the main violators of the ceasefire.

But were it not for Turkey's criminal armed intervention into the affairs of their neighbouring country and which entailed support for terrorist organisations in order to achieve unrealised geopolitical ambitions, the political settlement in Syria would have been achieved much earlier. And these are not just mere assertions. The evidence lies on the surface; it suffices to simply assess Ankara's motives for imprisoning undesirable journalists who have reported on the Turkish government's weapons and ammunition

deliveries to Syria. This has now become Ankara's standard method for settling accounts with people who are voicing and pushing an alternative viewpoint inside the country.

We hope that the latest anti-Russian plants and statements by Turkish leaders will not divert the attention of the international community away from Turkey's detrimental line in Syrian affairs, their ongoing punitive operation being conducted by Turkish authorities against their own citizens in southeastern Turkey and their unrelenting efforts to stifle freedom of speech.

Migration crisis in Europe

We are closely following the situation with mass arrivals of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa in Europe. As is common knowledge, this crisis has resulted from the irresponsible and short-sighted interference in domestic affairs of sovereign states in order to destabilise and violently overturn undesired regimes.

It has come to our attention that, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, only last week around 880 refugees died in the Mediterranean Sea, including at least 40 children. Since the beginning of 2016, some 2,500 people drowned in the Mediterranean, which is 700 people more than over the same period last year.

According to the International Organisation for Migration, between January and May 2016, over 156,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Greece, 37,000 in Italy and 1,063 in Spain.

This state of affairs cannot but cause alarm. We agree with UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Filippo Grandi, that the migration issues of the European Union are not exceptional. Other countries accept many more forced migrants while they do not have the resources of the EU.

We note that a number of international organisations, NGOs and public figures working in this field have expressed serious concern regarding the recent agreements on the collective repatriation of migrants from the EU without clear guarantees of their security under international law. We urge our European colleagues to be more responsible about their international obligations in this area. You are the great defenders of human rights. Please respect these values when it comes to yourselves and your obligations.

We believe that the large-scale inflows of refugees must not be allowed to erode the institution of asylum. It is important to clearly distinguish between refugees as defined in the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol to it, and illegal economic migrants who are merely taking advantage of the situation.

Moreover, we believe it is necessary to establish additional channels for legal migration, ensure due control of migration flows, cut short criminal activity by migrants and upgrade readmission mechanisms. The necessary legislative framework is already in place. The EU has experience in analysing actions of neighbouring countries. Others' mistakes or actions could be helpful for the EU to analyse its own steps. All things considered, it is necessary to ensure that terrorists do not enter the European countries along

with those who truly need help. This is a critical issue that we have repeatedly pointed out.

Russia supports accelerated and coordinated efforts by the international community seeking to find political solutions to the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa and to counteract international terrorism, primarily the Islamic State, based on the generally recognised international law and with the UN playing the pivotal role.

Currently, the main task is to eliminate the original cause of the migration crisis, primarily by achieving a peaceful settlement in Syria, Libya and Iraq. We note that our European colleagues are gradually coming to realise this.

The first step is peaceful settlement. Another important measure is to assist the countries the migrants are fleeing from in their social and economic development. So, this is step number two. Socioeconomic development and state-building is the critical next step. We assume that the states that were largely involved in sparking the conflict must take primary responsibility for bringing humanitarian aid to its victims.

Status of underage refugees in Turkey

We have already spoken about the status of underage refugees in Turkey and heard our colleagues from Ankara trying to justify themselves. It is good that they heard us as we will have more to say. We'd like to raise the issue of underage refugees in Turkey again. It seems this issue arouses concerns only in our country, not so much in Europe, despite their human rights campaigns. I must say the European leaders are alone here because Western public agencies, non-governmental organisations and the media are increasingly concerned about this problem.

In particular, Italian reporters and human rights activists have pointed out that Turkish factories whose products, incidentally, are exported to the EU are using child labour as cheap workforce. We are talking about roughly 800,000 underage workers who have to toil away 12 hours a day to earn their food and help their families. They are paid 1.5 euros per day maximum. Journalists said some textile companies have already admitted to using child labour and have taken measures to stop it. But most of them continue to keep silent as they seem to receive tacit support from the Turkish authorities.

Italian human rights activists have brought to light another issue – widespread child sexual exploitation in Turkey. They said the incident at the Turkish Nizip refugee camp, when at least 30 underage refugees fell victim to sexual violence, was not the only one.

The political establishment in Europe prefers to turn a blind eye to these issues and keep them low-profile in the belief that it is a one-time incident. In reality, refugees in Turkey live as miserable people (if people at all) without any rights. As for sexual violence, it has gone beyond the limits of human rights and now the question is whether we are human if we prefer to ignore such outrageous events. Unfortunately, Europe seems far more concerned about curbing the immigration flow, which is why they are ready to close their eyes and overlook a lot of things. It is rather surprising that such a sensitive subject as

children's rights does not seem to worry Brussels and its officialdom. Even if it does, why haven't we heard about it? Is it discussed behind closed doors? Is it something that cannot be talked about in public? We believe that it should be widely discussed in public and in the media and that our European colleagues must report on the measures they are taking to prevent similar incidents in the future. When we hear about the moral standards European countries demand of their neighbours, the question arises whether they apply these standards to themselves or prefer to exclude themselves from the documents they adopt? Where is the sympathy and condolence with those who are really suffering, including children? We hope that this issue will come into the spotlight and that we will hear official comments from our European colleagues.

Situation around crew of Russian Mekhanik Chebotarev oil tanker

We have been keeping you up-to-date on the situation around the crew of the Russian oil tanker Mekhanik Chebotarev. We are working to free the crew members held in Libya. On May 31, the Russian Ambassador to Libya, Ivan Molotkov, discussed the issue with the Libyan premier.

We are monitoring the situation and will continue to do so.

Outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit

On May 23 and 24, Istanbul hosted the World Humanitarian Summit, held at the initiative of the UN Secretary-General. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 9,000 participants were in attendance, including 55 heads of state and government, as well as representatives of international organisations, NGOs, businesses and academia from 173 member countries. I understand that holding an event like this one in Istanbul sounds surreal, taking into account what I've just said on the refugee situation in Turkey. So goes the world, it seems.

Russia was represented by an inter-agency delegation headed by Deputy Minister of Civil Defence, Emergencies and Disaster Relief Sergey Voronov.

The summit's agenda featured discussions on ways to strengthen international responses to humanitarian emergencies caused by natural disasters and armed conflicts. The main message was related to the need for the international community to coordinate its efforts in preventing and settling conflicts as a means to reduce the need for humanitarian aid around the world.

Members of the Russian delegation took the floor at the plenary session and two ministerial roundtable discussions to inform the summit of Russia's key approaches toward reducing the burden on the global humanitarian response system by resolving conflicts through political means. Our delegation also presented Russia's potential and continued efforts as an important and responsible donor involved in

multilateral and bilateral programmes to deliver humanitarian assistance to those suffering from natural disasters.

We believe the non-transparent approach taken by the organisers of the World Humanitarian Summit, including the fact that the so-called voluntary humanitarian commitments were drafted without input from participating countries, to be counterproductive. Some of these commitments go far beyond the issue of international humanitarian response and the summit goals, such as the permanent members of the UN Security Council refraining from exercising the right of veto in certain cases, restricting national sovereignty with a view of ensuring urgent humanitarian access, and providing definite amounts of funding for humanitarian needs. As a result, not all member countries, including Russia, agreed to approve these commitments. We outlined our perspective in this respect ahead of the summit. This did not come as a surprise.

This was not the only blunder of the summit organisers. Let me mention a number of other issues that are hardly acceptable.

Russia believes that Turkey abused its status as a host country by denying the delegation of the Syrian Government the right to attend the World Humanitarian Summit. This country accounts for 40 per cent of the world's total humanitarian needs. Syria has the same rights as any other UN member country. No one has ever questioned the presence of Syria or its delegation in any UN body. Turkey was not the sole sponsor of this forum. This is a UN event. We will make relevant conclusions to this effect.

Russia also views Mustafa Akinci's invitation to the summit, the leader of Cypriot Turks, as a provocation since it runs counter to the approaches adopted by the international community regarding the settlement of the Cypriot issue.

We regard these actions as an irresponsible violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, as well as the rules and procedures for the participation of UN member states in events sponsored by the UN.

It is also regrettable that the heads of Ukrainian and Georgian delegations used the summit as an opportunity to once again voice groundless accusations against Russia. We vehemently oppose such approaches and believe that they can achieve only one goal: to politicise the humanitarian agenda.

As for further developments, the summit is expected to provide a foundation for future meaningful intergovernmental talks on all aspects of the international humanitarian agenda starting this year.

Cyprus settlement in the light of the incident at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul

It is with regret that we learned about new obstacles related to the breach of protocol. I'm referring to the UN-led talks to settle the Cyprus dispute.

It all started with the invitation of Mustafa Akinci, the leader of Cypriot Turks, to take part in an event

held as part of the World Humanitarian Summit. He was invited as the “President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.” In addition, during the summit, the staff of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon scheduled a meeting with the leader of Cypriot Turks without notifying the Greek Cypriot community. The question we have in this respect is the following: Do high-ranking UN officials in charge of this issue really care about UN complying with the resolutions of its own Security Council, under which the only internationally recognised government in Cyprus is the Government of the Republic of Cyprus?

In the current situation, with all the challenges related to the inter-community talks on Cyprus, Russia would like to draw the attention of the UN top officials to the need to strictly and consistently abide by their own decisions and be impartial when it comes to dealing with the Cypriot issue. It goes without saying that the status of the Republic of Cyprus as approved by the UN should not be challenged or questioned in any way whatsoever.

The continuing issue of mass statelessness in the Baltic states

We cannot help but notice the resumed discussions in Latvia over mass statelessness. Unfortunately, however, at this point we still do not see any enthusiasm for looking into and objectively evaluating this unacceptable situation. Over 12 per cent or 250,000 residents of the country remain completely deprived of an entire range of fundamental political rights, including voting and socioeconomic rights.

The measures currently being taken, including legislative measures, are not, by and large, improving the situation. Yes, statistically the number of stateless persons is decreasing, although very slowly. The disturbing aspect is that the reduction is not the result of people being granted citizenship or an improvement in the human rights situation but a result of the decreasing number of Russian-speaking population.

It has to be noted that the same applies to neighbouring Estonia with over 80,000 stateless persons. This is a shame for modern Europe.

The adverse state of affairs in human rights in the Baltic countries has been confirmed by the extensive criticism and the numerous recommendations by involved international organisations, including the Council of Europe. Even the United States, the Baltic’s closest ally, is calling for an immediate resolution to the statelessness issue. In particular, representative of the US Department of State James Baker spoke about this in his recent interview with the Latvian media. However, these appeals, even from close allies, remain ignored.

It appears that there is an unspoken understanding that “we will criticise you but you can still do whatever you want.” Our Western colleagues have all the necessary leverage to resolve this issue. At any rate, it would have been resolved had there been genuine interest.

For our part, we will continue to bring this problem to the attention of the international community until there is a drastic change.

President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan's anti-Russian statement

We understand that it is difficult for current Turkish leadership to abandon attempts to explain their domestic problems by certain external factors. With the civil conflict with the Kurdish population unremitting, President Erdogan has not found a better justification for toughening the punitive operations in the southeast than to accuse Russia of supplying arms to the Kurdistan Workers' Party. What can we say? Even in this hall, we have spoken about these supplies many times. Ankara's statements are another fiction and nonsense that have nothing to do with reality. Unlike Turkey, Russia is not involved in illegal arms and ammunition supplies.

Russia officially provides certain weapons to Peshmerga fighters in Iraq – under an agreement with the government in Baghdad. This was announced by representatives of our foreign missions in the country and representatives of the Iraqi government in Moscow. We have provided transparent and open answers to all related questions. The purpose is to assist Iraqi Kurds in combating ISIS and this purpose has never been concealed. Many countries, including Turkey, are assisting Erbil in this.

Instead of wasting efforts on seeking external enemies, we appeal to Ankara to provide the necessary conditions to return the Kurdistan issue to the path of peaceful resolution, however hard it may be, and to take effective measures to cut off the transit of militants, arms and chemical weapons through its territory to neighbouring Syria.

Turkish officials' statements on bilateral normalisation

Recently, Turkish officials renewed their statements to the effect that they hoped for an early resumption of Russian-Turkish relations. That's funny! They make a lot of statements that are mostly at odds with reality and that discredit this country. We've disavowed this, at all levels, practically every day. And then they say they are interested in improving our bilateral relations!

Specifically, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu suggested creating a joint working group to normalise relations. You should at least adjust your statements before talking about any likely normalisation. You'd better decide for yourself what you will do: Criticise Russia and constantly make irrelevant statements or start thinking about how to improve the situation. These two processes are incompatible.

To quote Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov, no working group can solve the crisis in bilateral relations. It is unclear what official Ankara's optimism is based on. We have repeatedly stated our terms for normalising relations. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated these in his latest interview with Komsomolskaya Pravda.

We'd like to stress once again that it is the Turkish leaders who are fully accountable for the current crisis. And we expect them to make specific steps to settle the crisis that has emerged through no fault of ours.

Statement by President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Every day we read statements by Turkish officials. One of the latest statements by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Russia has "traded in good relations because of a pilot who made a mistake. For this or some other reason, Russia is sacrificing a huge country like Turkey."

What surprises or even amazes us in this phrase is the absolute lack of system. The Turkish officials seem to have no operational memory and don't remember their own statements on this issue. If the Turkish officials would instruct their many aides to collect their quotations starting from November 24, they'd get a conflicting mess. Each day they make contradictory statements. Now they are talking about the pilot's mistake. Earlier they made contradicting statements. At first they claimed they didn't know it was a Russian bomber. Later it was asserted that they would have done the same regardless of the aircraft's country of origin. These contradictory statements have been made constantly and in large numbers.

We decided to analyse this particular quote: after all, it has appeared against the backdrop of Ankara's assurances that it is willing to normalise relations. Both we and, it seems, the entire Turkish blogosphere asked: What pilot are they talking about? A banal question: What pilot made the mistake Mr Erdogan is referring to? Was it the Russian pilot? That cannot be so. He made no mistake because in keeping with the existing agreements we operated in absolute coordination with our US colleagues heading the coalition of which Turkey is a member. Accordingly, we advised our US partners of all our moves and the Americans assumed the commitment to inform all coalition members. A Russian pilot's mistake is not possible.

Well then, could Turkey be alluding to the Turkish pilot's mistake? We called the Turkish Embassy in Moscow, who said – after a pause – that they had no comment. We said that the case in point was a statement by the Turkish President. Could they please explain what pilot he had in mind? It would seem as odd to you, as it was to us. The reply was: No comment. This means that the Moscow-based Turkish diplomats don't know what pilot their president is referring to. It does not work that way! It appears, they are afraid to jump to a conclusion. But this goes against the backdrop of statements about the resumption of relations. You should at least know for certain what your president is alluding to.

What pilot Mr Erdogan had in mind is still an open question.

IAEA Director General's report on Iran's compliance with Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

On May 27, Yukiya Amano, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, published a report on verification and monitoring activities under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which addresses the situation with the Iranian nuclear programme and UN Security Council Resolution 2231. The report's main conclusion is that Iran is complying with its obligations in full, and that its nuclear programme is developing in strict observance of the JCPOA parameters.

We also consider important Mr Amano's conclusion about IAEA's efforts to confirm the absence of undeclared nuclear activity and nuclear materials in Iran. We hope that this will allow IAEA to draw an unequivocal conclusion on the peaceful nature of Tehran's efforts in the nuclear area, which is the main task of JCPOA and Resolution 2231.

Russian Embassy in Warsaw published a list of Polish cities that have dismantled monuments to Soviet soldiers-liberators

Since 2014, the website of the Russian Embassy in Warsaw has regularly updated a list of Polish cities that have dismantled monuments to Soviet soldiers-liberators. We are focusing on this issue. The local governments' unilateral decisions flagrantly violate a number of international legal documents signed by Poland, including the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Poland on Friendly and Good-Neighbourly Cooperation of May 22, 1992, the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Poland on Cooperation in Science and Education of August 25, 1993, the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Poland on Burial Sites of and Memorials for Victims of Wars and Repressions of February 22, 1994, the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe of October 3, 1985 and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of May 23, 1969.

We believe the publication of this list is timely in view of the fact that a war on Russian military memorial heritage continues in Poland with the blessing of official authorities and when episodes of our countries' shared history are being methodically and openly falsified. In this connection, we would like to point out that the local governments of Polish municipalities are responsible for desecrating the memory of Soviet soldiers who died while liberating Europe from Nazism, as well as for trampling upon the norms of international law and human morality. For its part, the Russian public, which has been displaying very serious interest in this issue lately, is acting correctly. The Russian public is also outraged by Warsaw's actions and deserves to know where exactly these decisions on our monuments are being made and to draw the appropriate conclusions.

Ukraine's sanctions against Russian media

Ukrainian authorities have approved sanctions against leading Russian media executives and journalists. This is fresh evidence of Kiev's policy of disregard for international standards on human rights and freedom of speech, which it has pursued since the 2014 political coup. Politically biased decisions to introduce or lift sanctions against foreign journalists, members of the creative community and public figures are evidence of Kiev's pained reaction to alternative views.

Unfortunately, Kiev does not seem to realise that being a European country is not an issue of geography but primarily of commitment to democratic values, the most important of which is the right to have an opinion and to freely express it.

All of this is happening with the connivance or inertia of Kiev's Western patrons, who try to hush up the real situation in Ukraine. We point to the use of double standards and bias by international human rights institutions, which did not always objectively react to the introduction of sanctions against Russian journalists but give priority attention to Western journalists. In other words, the Western establishment only reacted when Kiev took similar action against Western journalists. But it preferred to avert its eyes when such measures were taken against Russian journalists.

Therefore, we again urge the international community to take note of this.

I would like to say that Human Rights Watch has called on the Kiev authorities to immediately lift the restrictions levied against 17 Russian journalists.

We urge Kiev's foreign sponsors and specialised international organisations such as the OSCE, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, UN bodies and their leaders who are responsible for matters concerning journalists' freedom of speech to provide an objective assessment of Kiev's actions.

The Foreign Ministry creates an Instagram account

We continue to expand the presence of the Foreign Ministry and its foreign offices on social networks. It can be even said that we have created a corporate network of our own. The ministry has accounts on such popular networks as VKontakte, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Today we are presenting a new account on Instagram, which is a very popular network. Judging by the number of fake accounts, we should have created an Instagram account long ago. We are launching our Instagram account today, and here is its address. Please write it down and inform the public that it is the official Instagram account of the Foreign Ministry of Russia.

All our accounts have a distinctive image and character. I believe that the materials we will publish on Instagram will offer insight into one more facet of our work and life. You can call it Instafacet.

Our first entry on Instagram is a very intriguing story. We have recently learned that peregrine falcons are living in the steeple of our building. Russian zoologists have shown interest in this.

These birds are a couple. Zoologists have ringed the female, but the male, logically, has so far escaped them. Judging by the bird professionals who regularly come to the ministry to analyse these birds' behaviour, our peregrine falcons mostly hunt hawks, common snipes and woodcocks. Peregrine falcons have a wingspan of about a metre and an incredible diving speed of up to 400 kilometres an hour. You will be able to watch them on our Instagram account. I want to show you unique footage of these birds' life in the high-rise ministry building.

Welcome to the Instagram account of the Foreign Ministry of Russia.

Answers to media questions:

Question: On May 31, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov confirmed that a meeting on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement was scheduled for June. Yesterday US co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group James Warlick said that the co-chairs were looking forward to a meeting of the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents in June. Today, Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian will be meeting with the co-chairs in Paris. Does the Russian Foreign Ministry believe that the June meeting of the two countries' presidents stand a chance? When approximately can the meeting take place and what objectives will it focus on? Recently, Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said that the negotiations would aim to work out new guidelines and principles for a peaceful settlement. Have any relevant documents been approved yet?

Answer: Regrettably, my answer won't be as elaborate as your question. I can only say that the agreement to hold this meeting was reached in Vienna on May 16. As for whether there's a possibility that it will take place and the exact date of the meeting, it's up to the two parties to decide. As soon as the meeting details, timeframe and parameters are agreed on, the parties will make an appropriate statement. That is all for now.

Question: Do you feel that regular talks between the Russian and US foreign ministers make the prospect of a joint military operation in Syria real?

Answer: This was not just Russia's initiative. We believed it was extremely important to start coordinating our actions with the United States, the country that leads a coalition, and start a dialogue between the military [of the two countries]. Our position on this issue was absolutely straightforward and clear. We said that coordination between the military could produce the necessary results and improve the situation. As you know, first, the US showed no enthusiasm for the idea. Then gradually it woke up to the need of this type of coordination, prompted, among other things, by the situation on the ground and the ongoing negotiations. As you know, currently, we have a joint coordination centre operating at a UN site in Geneva and contacts are being maintained by the military, although now and then our American colleagues show signs of "disavowal", that is, they disavow the work they are doing. We understand why this is happening; it looks inconsistent when they cooperate with Russia while trying to persuade others not to get involved in any such cooperation. To all appearances, the need to secure a settlement in Syria and find a solution to the Syrian crisis has weighed down the US ambitions, which are to impose sanctions against Russia and to isolate it – that is why coordination is underway. Of course, it could be more dynamic and effective. We're ready for this. We've never refused to coordinate our actions or provide our American colleagues with information they asked for. I'll say it again, we believe that this work could be much more comprehensive and, accordingly, much more effective not for our two countries but for the process of peaceful settlement in Syria.

I repeat, we've initiated this work, we're involved in it and we're committed to carrying it out in the future.

Question: The holy month of Ramadan will begin soon. Various forces in Syria plan to use it in their

interests. Even the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, wanted to put off the next round of the intra-Syrian talks until the end of Ramadan. Some opposition groups suggested that a regime of silence be announced for the entire month. However, we see that terrorists are violating this regime. Can you comment on claims about the alleged violation of the silence regime by the Syrian Army and Russia?

Maria Zakharova: I have not prepared any comments on the upcoming month of Ramadan. We adjust our actions to the political process that was launched several months ago. At the time, we had our own vision of how it should develop. We have been doing our best to keep up the multi-vector course, spurring this or that track, which have faltered through no fault of ours.

While analysing the situation in Syria, I have said today that there are two critically important elements at the current stage. The first is the final, unconditional and irreversible separation of terrorists, without any evasion, double standards or political games, from moderate opposition or those who want to stop their collaboration with terrorists. This division must be final, so that pro-peace forces can move out of the shadows and stop any and all interaction with terrorists.

The second critically important element is the restoration of order on the Syria-Turkey border. How much longer can we keep talking about this? We have been telling this to our partners, in the International Syria Support Group, on the bilateral basis and at the UN. Not only experts and students but even children know that it would be naive to talk about a political settlement without these two elements. There can be no political settlement while a section of the border is open for the movement of fighters and terrorists who decapitate people, blow up civilian infrastructure and kill civilians, who have been denounced as such by the international community and not just by some Syrian officials, yet freely cross into a country where they are provided all kinds of assistance. The peace process cannot be integral unless we rout the terrorists and place them in a situation where their hands will be tied.

As I said, the critically important elements we need to work on are order on the Syria-Turkey border and complete and final separation of terrorists, fighters and extremists from those whom they use as a human shield or who pretend to be moderate opposition but are in fact terrorists. Really, we do not see any reason why this cannot be done. In our opinion, what we need for this is political will and political pressure. All the conditions are in place for us to do so. Our colleagues, including at the ISSG, only need to use them.

Question: Foreign Minister of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier has said he had a positive view on the possibility of lifting sanctions against Russia. He said that many people in Europe are sceptical about extending these sanctions. The Deputy Chancellor of Germany expressed a similar opinion. But the next day after Steinmeier's statement, a deputy spokesperson of the German Government said they see no reason at all now to roll back sanctions against Russia. Do such conflicting statements affect your work?

Maria Zakharova: Not at all. If somebody in Germany does not see something, it is their problem. We can see everything, and so we have no problems here.

Question: We have recently received a few reports from the Russian and Ukrainian sides about Ukrainian prisoners serving sentences in Crimea. Can you comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: It is a complicated humanitarian issue, which has to be addressed in strict compliance

with Russian and international law. We are ready to discuss the problem with our Ukrainian partners, and we are open about it.

Attempts to politicise the issue and our work, and add a PR spin to it won't help the situation. Unfortunately, this is what official Kiev is opting for. We are prepared to work to resolve the issue based on Russian and international law. It is not about trading remarks or recriminations in public. Instead we should focus on practical measures, and Russia is ready for this.

Question: Is Russia considering deploying land combat units in Syria?

Maria Zakharova: The details of the counter-terrorist operation are within the competence of the Russian Defense Ministry.

Question: My question concerns Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's recent statement demanding Turkish troop withdrawal from Iraq. What steps have been taken in this respect?

Maria Zakharova: The public statements you hear are only "the tip of the iceberg" as to how the problem is being addressed. Our statements are generally in response to journalist questions or to bring issues to public attention. We understand that this issue needs to be promoted. We have been tackling it on a bilateral basis and through international organisations. You are right, we have repeatedly and consistently formulated our position. I can't say what specific steps will follow tomorrow or the day after tomorrow because our experts are working on the process in various formats: bilateral, multilateral and within international organisations.

Question: The press service of the Armenian Apostolic Church reported today on negotiations between the heads of the Russian and Novo-Nakhichevan dioceses at the Russian Foreign Ministry, in the wake of the German Bundestag's decision to recognise the Armenian Genocide. What was the meeting like?

Can you comment on Ankara's decision to recall the Turkish ambassador from Berlin?

Maria Zakharova: I don't have the details of the meeting, but I can find out. As for the Bundestag's decision to recognize the Armenian Genocide, we received plenty of questions on the issue before the briefing. These kinds of decisions are a purely domestic matter for Germany. Let me remind you that the Russian State Duma passed decisions on this question a long time ago and has reapproved them since. The Russian stance on the Armenian Genocide is absolutely clear. Germany has come closer to the Russian position now. But let me repeat that this is a domestic issue only. Recalling the Turkish ambassador from Berlin is part of the bilateral agenda of Turkey and Germany alone.

Question: Has Russia submitted a report to the UN Security Council on fulfilling the March 2016 resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea?

Maria Zakharova: Our non-public reports for the UN and its various agencies are communicated through existing channels. Now that this question has been asked, I can say that the appropriate documentation was, indeed, submitted. We are talking about a document submitted by Russia's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York. The document notes that, in the context of the agenda of the UN Sanctions Committee that was established by the appropriate UN Security Council resolution and also in compliance with clause 40 of UN Security Council Resolution 2270, the Russian side reported that

it was fulfilling its provisions in full. The document also notes that a draft presidential executive order on fulfilling this resolution, submitted by the Russian Foreign Ministry, is being coordinated by the concerned ministries and departments. The resolution was approved on March 2, 2016, and the Russian Foreign Ministry informed the executive agencies the same day that the resolution's provisions would be applied on Russian territory pending the issue of the appropriate presidential executive order. That same document also notes that the Central Bank of the Russian Federation has issued an information circular instructing Russian banks to honour clauses 33-36 of the above resolution as regards the appropriate restrictions on interbank cooperation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Permanent Mission to the UN also submitted this document to the appropriate agency. We have also reported this to you.

Question: Several days ago, Kiev decided to rename Moscow Avenue as Stepan Bandera Avenue, and a monument to Nazi supporter Garegin Nzhdeh was unveiled in Yerevan on Saturday. What does the Russian Foreign Ministry think about this rewriting of our common history by our neighbours?

Maria Zakharova: I can say nothing about the second incident you mentioned; I have seen no such reports.

We have a good idea of Ukrainian processes. Unfortunately, this is a campaign, of sorts. We have assessed the actions of official Kiev from the very beginning. Of course, this amounts to rewriting history and educating a new generation with a different perception of history that will meet the interests of the current authorities in Kiev. How can we respond to this? Of course, we have our own stance. This is part of our common history, Russian-Ukrainian history, and it cannot be divided. So we make open opinions, and we do not conceal them.

The reaction of the Ukrainian public to these actions is also very important. It goes without saying that nationalists and extremists support these decisions. But the majority of people simply reject these actions! If all this took place under peaceful reforms or peaceful transitions, then it would probably be an issue of public accord or disagreement or public discussion. But the situation is different now. Frankly, a civil war has flared up in Ukraine. The entire international community is involved in the peace settlement process to a varying extent. We can see that the appropriate formats have been created, and that the appropriate documents inducing Ukraine to consolidate its society are being adopted. The Minsk agreements also stipulate this. It is impossible to stop what is going on in Ukraine, unless the Ukrainian people are united. The consolidation of society, political reforms and amendments to the Ukrainian constitution are pivotal not because someone wants it but because society would simply be unable to develop without it, and because the country would be unable to move forward.

We ask, whether these actions aim to bring people together or not. There is no doubting the fact that they would cause an even greater societal divide between different categories of Ukrainians. This is obvious. The world has already gone through this. It is like sprinkling salt on a wound. This serves as an additional irritant in a society that has already disintegrated completely. Therefore, apart from our assessment, this is also a domestic Ukrainian issue. But, considering the fact that the crisis in Ukraine has been internationalised (not a single European or non-European country involved in the system of international relations in one way or another can avoid the Ukrainian variable), Ukrainian society and other countries should therefore respond to this. This comes in addition to all basic aspects voiced by us in the context of rewriting history, including that of World War II. This issue also has a purely applied aspect, namely, the process of the Ukrainian peace settlement.

Question: Following the four-day war in April, Armenia claimed that Azerbaijan turned to Moscow for help brokering a ceasefire, while Azerbaijan claimed the opposite. Who made the request of Moscow?

Maria Zakharova: I think that requesting to put an end or to help put an end to the hostilities would have been a good idea for anyone who is interested in a peaceful settlement and restoring peace. I think that all those who sought assistance should, on the contrary, be proud of having done so and consider it an important contribution to the peace process. So, I'm not sure I understand your question. Does it matter who was the first to reach out for help or who did so more often? The point is that we managed to stop the escalation of violence. We are doing our best now to make sure that it doesn't happen again, and to launch, or rather re-launch, the negotiation process. I think this is what matters.

Question: What do you think about the proposal made by non-governmental organisations regarding the formation of a Christian region in Iraq and Syria? What does the Foreign Ministry think about this proposal?

Also, I learned that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is coming to Russia on a working visit. What can we expect from this visit in the context of the forthcoming Middle East conference in Paris?

Maria Zakharova: As you may be aware, comments on contacts between heads of state are provided by the presidential press service. We follow the chain of command in this regard.

With regard to creating Christian regions or any other entities in Syria or Iraq, we said that it's an internal matter to be addressed by these states. We do not issue prescriptions or engage in modelling the future of these countries. It is their internal process. We can provide our assistance in terms of analysis or advice. We can serve as a bridge and provide a platform for dialogue on these issues. As you may be aware, we provided a platform for the Syrian opposition forces and the Syrian government to establish a dialogue. We can convene international forums, as we did to discuss the Syrian settlement.

However, setting maps in stone, as our Western colleagues often did without taking into account the desires and realities in those countries, is a dangerous proposition. We are just not going to do that – we've always said that this path leads nowhere. It is a matter of internal organisation of states, internal consensus and discussions that should take into account the opinions of the government forces and the opposition. All the conditions for doing so are now in place. We help launch this political dialogue, but discussing issues, let alone making decisions, is up to them. We had the same position with regard to the plans announced by the Kurds. The same applies to all other forms of government organisation in Syria and Iraq.

Question: I have a question about Russian citizens using their internal passports to enter Armenia. As far as I know, the Russian Foreign Ministry is working on it. Could you please update us on the status, and when will Russian citizens be able to enter Armenia using their internal passports?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to say that this proposal came from our Armenian partners. I can confirm that this work is underway. Its primary goal is to amend the Armenian-Russian Intergovernmental Agreement on Mutual Visa-Free Travel of the Citizens of Russia and Armenia. This document was signed on September 25, 2000. I can't say exactly when it will be completed, because other experts are working on it, I'm not. I can assure you that this work continues unhindered. This issue is important to us. I will provide regular updates on this issue during our briefings.

Question: Yesterday, the US Treasury expressed its concern about money laundering in the DPRK and imposed further sanctions on the financial system. You have already mentioned the Russian Central Bank, which issued a circular to enforce the measures mentioned in the resolution. What does Russia think about the additional sanctions?

Maria Zakharova: We have adopted a clear stance with regard to the UN Security Council taking collective action with respect to a particular state in order to resolve an issue or encourage a particular process, or, conversely, to stave off certain bad scenarios. The Security Council is the place for making collective decisions. The collective benchmark is important, because it is a compromise area. It provides an opportunity to look for a compromise where there's not just one dominant point of view, or prevailing interests of just one side, but a balanced assessment, which would make it possible to resolve a problem, rather than to use it for the self-serving interests of a particular state.

This is what the UN Security Council and relevant institutions, which impose sanctions on states, are for. These sanctions are legitimate, and we accept them. Whenever they are adopted, we go ahead and comply. Any other unilateral actions that are being taken in this particular case are at odds with international law. This is why the UN Security Council worked on it. Everyone was invited to bring up additional questions. Anything that is taken in circumvention of the UN Security Council cannot, of course, be considered legal international instruments.

Question: Do the peregrine falcons have names yet? How long have they been living there?

Maria Zakharova: All I can say is that they don't. That's a good point, we'll give it some thought. They have been living there for several years now, and they are being observed by specialists. Let's not discuss everything at once, or we will lose our train of thought. We will keep you up to date on them through our accounts, Instagram in particular.

Foreign Ministry comment on developments in Afghanistan

On the eve of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, we again turn our attention to developments in Afghanistan.

It must be acknowledged that the military and political situation in that country remains extremely tense. The Taliban continues to fight in a number of provinces. They extensively use terror against their compatriots, with civilians accounting for most of the victims. The ISIS branch in Afghanistan also remains as active as ever.

The national reconciliation process has come to a standstill. The attempts of the quadrilateral contact group (Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China) to encourage the Taliban to pursue reconciliation with Kabul have failed so far.

Russia supports the inter-Afghan dialogue on the unconditional understanding that the armed opposition must renounce the use of violence and break all ties with terrorist organisations, primarily ISIS and al-Qaeda.

We are urging all sides to the Afghan conflict, and especially the new leaders of the Taliban, to remember that Ramadan is a festival of moral improvement that should motivate believers to display friendship, peace and mercy. Under the circumstances, all parties should renounce violence and use the fasting period to establish a productive inter-Afghan dialogue in the interests of all Afghans.

For our part we confirm that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council the Russian Federation is ready to continue rendering political assistance in the interests of restoring peace and to facilitate the successful implementation of a post-war transformation of Afghanistan, a country with which Russia has a long history of close cooperation.