

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius Seetanah Lutchmeenaraidoo

On November 12-14, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius Seetanah Lutchmeenaraidoo will pay a working visit to Moscow. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will have talks with him on November 14. The officials will discuss topical issues of further developing bilateral ties in the political, trade, economic, humanitarian, cultural and other areas and promoting a mutually beneficial partnership in transport, fishing, tourism and personnel training. They will also conduct a detailed exchange of views on international and regional issues, with an emphasis on preventing and overcoming crises in Africa and the Middle East, as well as countering international terrorism and piracy in the north-western Indian Ocean.

Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei's working visit to Moscow

On November 14-15, Foreign Minister of Belarus Vladimir Makei will make a working visit to Moscow at Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's invitation.

The officials will discuss a broad range of issues of bilateral cooperation, and a schedule of forthcoming political contacts, as well as compare their positions on urgent international and regional issues.

They will focus on prospects for cooperation in integration associations, such as the EAEU, CIS and CSTO, bearing in mind Belarus' presidency of CSTO later in 2017.

The ministers will pay special attention to cooperation in international organisations, including the UN and OSCE.

Among the most important topics on the bilateral agenda will be reviewing the draft of the Russian-Belarusian intergovernmental agreement on mutual recognition of visas and other accords linked with the entry of foreign citizens and stateless persons to the territory of the member-states of the Treaty Establishing the Union State, designed to create a legal foundation for the crossing of the Russian-Belarusian border by citizens of third countries.

Based on the results of the talks, the sides plan to sign a programme of coordinated foreign policy action of member-states of the Treaty Establishing the Union State in 2018-2019, and a plan of consultations between the foreign ministries of Russia and Belarus in 2018.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's upcoming talks with Argentine Foreign and Worship Minister Jorge Faurie

On November 16, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold talks with Argentine Foreign and Worship Minister Jorge Faurie.

We pay special attention to this visit, which we see as a good opportunity to continue the dialogue on enhancing this comprehensive strategic partnership. The ministers will discuss priority topics on the bilateral agenda, as well as a number of international and regional issues and will examine the schedule of upcoming high level contacts.

Argentina is our longstanding and reliable partner. We appreciate its active participation in world affairs and its firm position on strict compliance with the principles of international law. Special attention will be paid to enhancing cooperation on multilateral platforms, in particular, at the UN, the WTO as well as the G20, where Argentina will hold the chair next year.

An important aspect of Russia-Argentina relations is trade and economic cooperation, characterised by a gradual increase in bilateral trade turnover. A prerequisite for progressive development in this respect is the successful implementation of joint investment projects in such promising areas as energy, including

nuclear power, exploration and peaceful use of outer space, and the creation of a transport infrastructure. We hope to expand cultural and humanitarian projects with Argentina, enhance our information cooperation and mutual media presence. We place particular emphasis on cultural projects, which I've already mentioned, and which we discussed during our foreign ministries' first ever press service consultations, held not long ago. We have many things to discuss, as well as specific proposals from us and from Argentina.

We expect Argentina's national team to come to Russia to take part in the 2018 FIFA World Cup. A friendly match between the Russian and Argentinian teams is set to take place on November 11.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's upcoming talks with Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs Luis Videgaray Caso

On November 17, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will have talks with Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the United Mexican States Luis Videgaray Caso in Moscow.

The meeting of the foreign ministers of our countries is the result of progressive development of the trust-based bilateral political dialogue, which gained additional momentum after President Vladimir Putin's meeting with Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Xiamen (China) on September 3-5, 2017.

Mexico is an important partner of Russia. In the international arena, our countries consistently stand for building a democratic and just world order, based on the principles of equality and mutual respect, strengthening the central role of the UN in international relations, global peace and security. Both countries have been constructively cooperating in various multilateral organisations, such as the UN, G20 and APEC.

The ministers will discuss a wide range of issues on the bilateral agenda, including opportunities to enhance and diversify trade and economic ties as well as to extend cultural and humanitarian cooperation. They are also planning to exchange opinions on the current international and regional topics.

We believe that the Russian-Mexican talks will add momentum to the entire range of bilateral cooperation, including political dialogue and multi-faceted partnership in practical areas, and will contribute to coordination of our countries in the international arena.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's meeting with participants in the Dialogue in the Name of the Future research and educational programme of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund

On November 17, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will hold an annual meeting with participants in the Dialogue in the Name of the Future research and educational programme of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund. This project has been carried out since 2011 and is intended for young foreign and domestic experts in international relations.

We attach great importance to dialogue with members of the research and expert community, who represent a wide range of positions and views on the world politics. We believe that an open and free discussion in this format will enable researchers to familiarise themselves more profoundly with Russia's approaches to the resolution of pressing international issues and will help allay the myths about our country that are being pushed forth by our opponents in the information space.

During the meeting, the Minister will share his assessments of the international situation, dwell on priority fields of the Foreign Ministry's work and answer questions from participants in the Gorchakov Fund' programme.

The situation in Syria

With the assistance of the Russian Aerospace Forces, the Syrian army is completing the elimination of the hotbed of international terrorism on Syrian soil. The Russian Federation continues to give Syria comprehensive aid to promote the speedy normalisation of the situation and help create favourable conditions in order to overcome the consequences of the protracted devastating crisis and the armed conflict.

The Russian side is making strenuous efforts, including during contacts with the UN and various international partners, towards preparing and holding the Syrian National Dialogue Congress. We hope that the Congress will become an important landmark on the path to restoring the unity of the ethnic and religious diversity of Syrian society, asserting the principles of national reconciliation and political and state building.

Today, the media have reported the fall of the last major ISIS stronghold in Syria, the city of Abu Kamal. Earlier, not far from there, Syrian army personnel met with Iraqi forces, who cleared the city of Al-Qaim of ISIS militants on the Iraqi side of the border.

The city of Deir ez-Zor has been fully liberated. Life there is gradually returning to normal. The Syrian authorities are putting maximum effort into organising the restoration of the socio-economic infrastructure and paving the way for the return of civilians to their homes.

Nevertheless, the level of terrorist threat remains high. Disjointed ISIS units continue provocations and terrorist attacks. On November 4, Russian journalists and also sappers, who were clearing the area of mines, were injured in a remote controlled land mine explosion. On the night of November 5, a suicide terrorist drove a car bomb into a refugee camp northwest of Deir ez-Zor and detonated the explosive device: more than 100 people, predominantly children, women and elderly people, were killed or sustained injuries.

We have seen a considerable increase in UN humanitarian supplies to de-escalation zones. Russian service personnel from the Reconciliation Centre are assisting in the safe passage of UN aid convoys. Simultaneously, the Russian military regularly conducts its own humanitarian operations in various parts of the country, bringing food and essential goods to the needy and helping restore schools and hospitals destroyed by the terrorists.

The Russian side continues to work to bolster the ceasefire regime all over Syria. The life of civilians across most of Syria is gradually improving and becoming peaceful. But Jabhat al-Nusra militants and affiliated groups are actively trying to disrupt these efforts. On November 7, terrorists committed a huge provocation in the Eastern Ghouta de-escalation zone: central areas of Damascus came under a massive mortar attack. Several mortars hit the area where the Russian Embassy is located. In November, terrorists launched yet another mortar attack from Eastern Ghouta on a number of suburbs and districts of Damascus.

We again urge international and regional parties to provide active support to the Syrian people, not in words but in deeds, in finding solutions to the conflict and to send humanitarian aid to the hardest-hit areas of Syria without bringing forth any preliminary conditions to the Syrian Government.

Discussion of the Joint Investigative Mechanism's seventh report at the UNSC

On November 7, the UN Security Council met to discuss, among other things, the seventh report of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) on the use of chemical weapons in Syria, as well as the prospects for extending its mandate.

You may have studied Russia's assessments on the issue, which are available in the public domain. We took note of the remarks by JIM head Edmond Mulet, who praised the JIM's methodology to high heaven and portrayed its work as professional and impartial. However, he did not respond to any of our specific

questions concerning the fact that the conclusions of the JIM report are at odds with a strictly scientific approach.

Mr Mulet's perseverance in asserting that the sarin gas that was used in Khan Shaykhun has "Syrian origin", which is inconsistent in terms of theoretical science, as well as logic, is still incomprehensible. A simple explanation is being offered: the chemical composition of Khan Shaykhun samples coincided with the characteristics of sarin DF precursors that Syria included in its initial statement on the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Strangely enough, all other possibilities were ignored. This logic is all the more amazing given that after Syria submitted to the OPCW information about the methods of synthesising binary sarin, as well as considering the fact that the OPCW has samples taken from Syria's former stockpiles, this formula has long ceased to be a secret. It may also be recalled that the DF precursor was destroyed aboard the US Maritime Vessel Cape Ray, where samples of it were also taken. Moreover, it would also be appropriate to recall that according to comments made by Russian experts at a Foreign Ministry briefing on November 2, the sarin of this chemical formula can be not only industrially manufactured but also mixed in the backyard.

As for Nikki Haley's remarks at the meeting, as always, there was nothing new there: groundless accusations against Damascus of using chemical weapons and inappropriate innuendos with regard to Russia, which does not do the US permanent representative to the UN any credit either in terms of diplomatic ethics or from the standpoint of common sense.

For our part, we believe that common sense dictates that we should cast our minds back and analyse the way US diplomacy pushed through the decisions on Iraq at the UN and the UN Security Council, among other places, accusing that country of maintaining and building up weapons of mass destruction.

I'm sure you remember the harsh polemics – the same as now, without any rules, any diplomatic ethics – that were raging at the UN with regard to "Saddam Hussein's criminal regime" that was allegedly developing weapons of mass destruction, planning "global domination" and collaborating with terrorists. Here are just a few quotes, including especially for the benefit of the current US permanent representative to the UN. We know that our American colleagues who are appointed to these diplomatic posts, among others, have no idea about what their predecessors said even recently, let alone decades ago. Here are several remarks made by US officials at the UN Security Council between 2002 and 2003.

For instance, John Negroponte, US permanent representative to the UN at the time, alleged that Saddam Hussein's regime had used chemical weapons against its neighbours and its own citizens; he lied about the development of weapons of mass destruction; he signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and then moved ahead with developing a rather serious nuclear weapons programme.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said they knew that Saddam Hussein was determined to retain his weapons of mass destruction and produce even more of them: "Saddam Hussein has chemical weapons. Saddam Hussein has used such weapons. And Saddam Hussein has no compunction about using them again -- against his neighbours and against his own people. And we have sources who tell us that he recently has authorised his field commanders to use them. He wouldn't be passing out the orders if he didn't have the weapons or the intent to use them."

Remarks by permanent representatives of any country at UN Security Council meetings are available in the archives on the UN website. Make an effort and take a look. Does this remind you of anything? It certainly sounds familiar to me.

This could have been chalked up just to a factual mistake, ignorance or unreliable information, not a deliberate attempt to mislead UN Security Council members. However, the memoirs by former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, which came out recently and contain revelations regarding the dubious evidence used as grounds for launching a military campaign against Iraq in 2003-2011, caught our eye. According to Mr Brown, the United States deliberately misled the British, concealing from them a top-secret report prepared by military intelligence back in 2002 that seriously called into question the

existence of WMD in Baghdad. In other words, the US leadership (including, of course, US diplomats) concealed information even from its closest partners and allies.

According to Gordon Brown, the document (he said he learned about it only last year) indicated that the US military had not found the facilities in Iraq where biological weapons were manufactured, tested or stored, nor did they prove that Baghdad had the capability to manufacture chemical agents. The report noted that the United States also had no reliable information regarding Iraq's nuclear programme (it was acknowledged that 90 per cent of that analysis was based on inaccurate intelligence data). Moreover, it called into question Baghdad's ability to make long-range missiles.

The insistent, forceful and sometimes even brazen way US diplomacy is talking, including at the UN Security Council, about Damascus and the Syrian leadership using chemical weapons is reminiscent of its tactics from the early 2000s. However, those were not mistakes! This is a systematic, programmed action to push through its geopolitical interests. Whether these interests were geo-strategic and geopolitical or whether they were the interests of certain political forces and representatives of the US political establishment in those years – this is a good question.

Frankly, I would like to ask this: maybe this time, too, there was a certain secret report by the US intelligence community about which we will learn some time later? But right now the end – i.e., blame Damascus for something it did not do – justifies the means.

Unfortunately, all of this is happening in keeping with the best traditions of certain representatives of the US political establishment. Still, questions are bound to come up over the methods used by our partners across the ocean.

Collection of biomaterial of Russian citizens by the Pentagon

We have received many questions from the media about the collection of biomaterial of Russian citizens by the Pentagon. At first there were many satirical and sarcastic remarks made about this in the internet and responses on this score. However, when relevant comments came from US power agencies the laughing stopped. People started asking for an explanation as to what is going on.

We are concerned over the reports that the Pentagon is studying biological material of Russian citizens, collected on the territory of this country. Note, this is a military agency and it is worth drawing the attention of those who were laughing to this important fact. This is not cooperation between, say, healthcare ministries or exchange of information between research communities. The Russian Ministry of Healthcare said that US colleagues have not approached it with this matter and does not conduct any cooperation with them. The Pentagon's official explanations sound unconvincing and only evoke more questions that will be raised.

We believe the Pentagon should present convincing evidence so that the relevant studies by the US Air Force do not violate relevant norms of international law.

This transparency is essential because of the Pentagon's tarnished reputation in the biological field. There are plenty of examples and you can read about them yourselves. If need be we can publish some additional material on this topic. It is enough to recall the recent incident with the shipments of live anthrax by Lothar Salomon Life Sciences Test Facility (LSTF) at the US Army's Dugway Proving Ground in Utah. They were sent all over the world, including to US foreign military facilities for aerosol experiments.

Lack of transparency in the Pentagon's medico-biological activities and its close attention to Russia and adjacent states makes it necessary to enhance biological security.

The International Criminal Court's inquiry into the situation in Afghanistan

We have noticed the reports that the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is seeking a formal investigation into the situation in Afghanistan.

Russia is consistently demanding criminal proceedings against those who are guilty of civilian murders, torture, cruel treatment and attacks on civilian infrastructure facilities.

At the same time we are not sure that the ICC that has failed to act as a really independent body of international criminal justice is capable of conducting an unbiased investigation into the situation in Afghanistan. Indicatively, it took the prosecutor over a decade to dare to decide on a request for an inquiry.

Closure of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

We assume the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) will complete its activities before December 31 of this year in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2329 (2016).

Russia has repeatedly noted that the ICTY is considerably politicised and biased in its inquiries. The civil war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s is a tragic page of world history but the ICTY is still trying to present its one-sided anti-Serb interpretation of these events.

The ICTY's attempts to surreptitiously blame nations, governments and states for various crimes are provoking tension and mutual mistrust in the former Yugoslavia and bring to life long-standing problems as well as ethnic contradictions in the region.

It is also alarming that the ICTY is ignoring the fundamental rights of defendants. There are many examples of this conduct. For instance, recently it refused a request for the temporary release of the former Bosnian Serb military leader Ratko Mladic for medical treatment in Russia despite the deterioration of his health and Russia's guarantees to the Tribunal.

The ICTY has not become an effective mechanism of international criminal justice, either. Being an ad hoc tribunal, it existed for over 20 years and spent billions on its activities. Russia repeatedly voiced its serious concern over the extension of the term of its activities by the UN Security Council.

In this context we expect the ICTY to complete its activities as soon as possible and transfer without delay all outstanding cases to the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). We assume the IRMCT is an ad hoc instrument plus we insist on its strict observance of standards of justice, including the terms of criminal proceedings.

Latest developments in Ukraine

We have received numerous requests to comment on developments in Ukraine. We have published many comments. I will venture to give a comprehensive answer to all these requests taken together.

The day before yesterday, Sergey Lavrov mentioned the latest example of the Ukrainian nationalists' barbaric behaviour in Kiev, where they vandalised a military monument by pouring cement over the monument's Eternal Flame. The following day we received reports about yet another vicious act in Ukraine, where vandals damaged a monument to the servicemen of motorised units who perished during the Great Patriotic War in Melitopol. We are shocked by the cynicism and inaction of the Ukrainian authorities, who close their eyes while extremists insult the memory of those who died fighting Nazism. We hope these crimes will be properly investigated and that those responsible will be brought to justice. We also feel compelled to react to other news from Ukraine, where another bout of anti-Russia hysteria seems to be gaining momentum. It looks like almost everyone in the Ukrainian authorities considers it their duty to pitch in.

The tone is set by President of Ukraine Poroshenko. The other day, he signed a law under which Russian

performers' tours in Ukraine must be vetted by the "judges of the arts" from the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). In other words, Ukraine will now live under the total censorship of the current Ukrainian security forces, the very same "blue uniforms [of gendarmes]", to whom Mr Poroshenko bid farewell so bombastically when he announced that Ukraine had been granted visa-free travel to the EU. I suggest he should read the poem from which he quoted again.

The Ukrainian cabinet is doing its bit as well. On November 8, it adopted a decision, which was streamed online, to withdraw from the February 8, 1995 Russian-Ukrainian intergovernmental agreement on the procedure for the mutual deliveries of weapons and military equipment, components and spare parts, as well as on repair and military services. Judging by the broad coverage of this event, the Ukrainian authorities have run out of pretexts for highlighting their "uncompromising" anti-Russia position. It is a logical development. We have long been talking about this. Kiev's policy is leading it into a dead-end, because nationalists will continue to demand new evidence of compliance with the instructions they issued to the new authorities during the bloody Maidan protests. We already see this happening.

A special place in this parade of inadequate ideas belongs to the old Maidan initiative for severing diplomatic relations with Russia. This far from new idea is regularly revived at a time when public attention should be drawn away from the accumulating problems. There is a clear link between the two. Everyone can see a connection between severing diplomatic relations, introducing visas and many other initiatives of the so-called Ukrainian establishment and attempts to divert public attention from the problems ailing Ukraine. None of the Ukrainian politicians stop to think about the consequences of the latest initiative, primarily for the millions of Ukrainians, including those who work in Russia.

We continue to monitor developments in Ukraine. We still hope that common sense will prevail, but it is a dying hope.

The first anniversary of Moldovan President Igor Dodon's electoral victory

Before the briefing we also received a question from Accent TV, a Moldovan channel. The question is this: November 13 marks the first anniversary of Moldova electing a president who favours improved relations with Russia. The relations themselves have fared differently during this period. On the one hand, trade has grown, and people in Moldova are happy with the trade amnesty. On the other, Russian diplomats have been expelled and experts and journalists have been deported. How do you assess this anniversary from the point of view of progress in Russian-Moldovan relations? What is Russia's policy towards a country with an actual duality of power in foreign policy guidance?

We are ready to answer this question. November 13 marks the anniversary of Mr Igor Dodon's election as President of the Republic of Moldova.

President Dodon has taken a number of steps to re-establish cooperation between Moldova and Russia, the EAEU and the CIS.

President Vladimir Putin held six meetings with Igor Dodon this year. A stable dialogue has been established on a broad range of issues, a dialogue that makes it possible to look for solutions to the most urgent bilateral problems.

Agreements reached as a result of the meetings between the two heads of state have boosted bilateral trade and economic cooperation. Moldovan exports to the Russian market have grown significantly and we have managed to solve a number of problems facing Moldovan migrant workers in Russia.

In March, President Dodon applied for EAEU observer status for Moldova. In April, President Dodon and Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) Tigran Sargsyan signed a Memorandum on Cooperation between Moldova and the EEC.

His efforts to promote a dialogue with Transnistria deserve praise. He held two meetings with Transnistria head Vadim Krasnoselsky. There is some progress in dealing with a number of practical

issues related to a Transnistria settlement.

Regrettably, the internal political confrontation between the branches of power in Moldova today makes it impossible to implement President Dodon's initiatives in full and to tap into more of Russian-Moldovan cooperation potential.

Moreover, the Moldovan Government and parliamentary majority have taken a number of steps lately to restrict the President's powers. There are also some openly anti-Russian actions. Nevertheless, Russia is open to long-term development of friendly, partner relations with a neutral Moldova, relations based on long-standing historical ties between our peoples. We hope that the current difficult stage in the country's development will be surmounted.

We wish success to both President Igor Dodon in his activities for the good of the Moldovan people and the strengthening of Russian-Moldovan cooperation and to all of the friendly Moldovan people.

Latvia's plans to grant World War II participant status to persons who fought on both sides of the front

On November 2, the Saeima (Parliament) of Latvia approved the second version of a bill on granting "World War II participant status" to persons who had fought on both sides of the front. The bill aims to "recognise the merits" of Latvian citizens who had fought in World War II. At the same time, the document's authors do not care whether these citizens had sided with Nazi Germany or the Anti-Hitler Coalition. Therefore Latvian authorities have made another step towards whitewashing Nazi criminals and have equated soldiers of the Waffen SS' Latvian Legion with Red Army veterans who had liberated the world from Nazism.

In turn, we have responded with indignation to this report. This is by no means the first instance when official Riga openly glorifies Nazi criminals, while persecuting Soviet Army veterans. But the Latvian authorities cross another red line each time. We consider it absolutely unacceptable to doubt the results of World War II and the verdict of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal that had recognised the SS as a criminal organisation. The second version of the bill On Granting the Status of WWII Participant proves convincingly that the process of substituting specific concepts is assuming increasingly uglier forms. The blasphemous nature of this initiative is obvious. We are expecting to hear an adequate assessment on this matter from specialised international organisations, Latvia's European Union partners and veterans' organisations.

Statements by Republic of Macedonia Prime Minister Zoran Zaev to Montenegro's Antenna M radio station

We have read statements by Republic of Macedonia Prime Minister Zoran Zaev about alleged plans of his liquidation under a "Montenegrin scenario" during his November 5, 2017 interview with Montenegro's Antenna M radio station.

We believe that not only do such statements amount to groundless insinuations and manic conjectures, but, in principle, they resemble an attempt at sacrificial self-advertising. Most importantly, these statements are detrimental to Russia-Macedonia relations and they obviously contradict Skopje's official readiness to engage in constructive cooperation with Russia.

The 'horrors' being voiced in this manner simply serve as a means to cover up the rapid accession of Balkan states so far remaining outside NATO structures to the alliance. A recent political crisis in the state of Macedonia was largely provoked for precisely this reason. Russia has never interfered in domestic affairs of the Republic of Macedonia.

Unveiling monument to Vitaly Churkin in Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

On November 6, a monument honouring Vitaly Churkin, the late Russian Ambassador to the United Nations, was unveiled in East Sarajevo, in Republika Srpska (Serb Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina). The ceremony involved representatives of the Republika Srpska Government, the Russian Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, non-government organisations as well as public activists.

We are grateful to the Eastern Alternative public association, Republika Srpska leaders and East Sarajevo authorities for implementing this initiative.

We would like to note that, during the darkest periods of the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as during the difficult period of the post-conflict settlement, Ambassador Churkin did his best to make a constructive contribution to ending the bloodshed, defending peace and stability in Southeastern Europe. A respectful attitude towards his legacy in the Balkan region makes us feel even more confident that the nations of this region that has experienced extremely tumultuous ordeals will continue to move steadily along the road of mutually beneficial cooperation, inter-ethnic and interfaith coexistence as well as respect for fundamental principles of international law.

2017 Russia/Eurasia – Caribbean: A New Dawn forum

On November 3, the 2017 Russia/Eurasia – Caribbean: A New Dawn media forum, organised by the Bering-Bellingshausen Institute, headed by popular television anchor, Deputy Head of the VGTRK company Sergey Brilyov, and Roscongress Foundation, with support from the Russian Foreign Ministry, took place in Grenada. The event was attended by representatives of Russian social and business communities and media, as well as politicians and business people from a number of Caribbean states. The central topic of the forum was the importance of promoting cooperation between Russia and the Caribbean region, which includes 14 countries, in the context of global power balance and the emerging polycentric world order. The ties with these countries are enhancing due to a progressive extending of the bilateral legal basis, in particular, the signing of agreements on visa-free travel of our citizens. This is what we are actively working on. In September, such documents were signed with Grenada (it comes into effect on 24 December) and Saint Kitts and Nevis (comes into effect on 21 November). The gradual transformation of the Latin America and the Caribbean region into a visa-free zone for Russian citizens is a substantial step for the development of human contacts and people's diplomacy between our countries.

Answers to media questions:

Question: Do you confirm that a meeting between Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and the co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group will be held in the near future?

Maria Zakharova: I can tell you that following the results of the Geneva summit on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, the co-chairs plan to organise a meeting with foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Elmar Mammadyarov and Edward Nalbandian until the end of this year. Such contacts are planned, in accordance with the agreements reached on October 16.

Question: So there is no exact information that such a meeting can take place in Moscow in the near future with the mediation, for example, of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov?

Maria Zakharova: I have given you a clear answer that it is planned by the responsible organisation. When the date and details are available, we will inform you.

Other contacts on this matter in various formats are also possible and are in the works.

Question: Today a meeting of NATO defence ministers will take place in Brussels. They will discuss Afghanistan, including increasing NATO's military presence there. What does Russia expect from the decisions they will make on Afghanistan? Is cooperation possible between Russia and NATO on Afghanistan?

Maria Zakharova: What do you mean by possible? This cooperation was in full swing. We have a corresponding mechanism for this work: the Russia-NATO Council, where full-scale cooperation was underway on all matters related to Afghanistan. We discussed many issues of practical cooperation in this area. This work in the Russia-NATO format was suspended by our colleagues from NATO, for reasons they voiced. We believe it is a mistake. The dialogue should not just be unblocked, but intensified. There are many reasons for that, one of them being the situation in Afghanistan, on which we comment regularly. In this particular case the cooperation did exist. It wasn't temporary. The cooperation was institutionalised, which means that it had a corresponding legal base. We believe that it should not only be revived, but made more active.

As for our expectations from this NATO meeting, we are in favour of active cooperation rather than contemplative waiting.

Question: As you said, a Syrian National Dialogue Congress will be convened to discuss a new constitution that should formalise the rights of Kurdish people. President of Syria Bashar al-Assad said recently that Damascus was not prepared to consider the idea of Kurdish autonomy. Was this statement made to prevent the congress? Does Russia share the Syrian authorities' position on this issue?

Maria Zakharova: We have not seen Damascus taking any steps to derail this initiative. We have a clear position on this. We maintain close contact with the official representatives of the Syrian government in every area, and we are working with them on the issues.

Our position on the need to involve the Kurds in discussions on Syria's future has not changed. We have put this forth many times and at various levels. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke about it in detail. This position has not changed. We understand, as we have pointed out more than once, that the Syrians alone must decide their future. In this particular case, we are not trying to pressure anyone or interfere in Syria's affairs. We are doing our best to give the Syrians an opportunity to launch a dialogue. The congress you mentioned can become an additional venue for launching a dialogue, for example between representatives of various ethnic and religious groups, including the Kurds. There are no contradictions here. We are acting on the assumption that the Syrians themselves must decide their future. But we also know that there are many ethnic, religious and other groups in Syria. Therefore, our goal in this very difficult period for Syria is to create certain conditions and share our advice and ideas regarding the re-establishment of the Syrian state by the Syrians.

Question: Russian and Chinese officials have recently announced in Beijing that their countries would promote the Northern Sea Route, or the Ice Silk Road, together. Will cooperative use of the Northern Sea Route help strengthen bilateral cooperation? Will this alliance be promoted by the EAEU and One Belt and One Road initiative?

Maria Zakharova: Yes, I can say that it will. Actually, your question incorporates an answer. I can confirm that this is an additional form of integration that should and can strengthen our bilateral

cooperation still more. I believe it would be best to provide detailed expert views on the future of this initiative. I will do so as soon as possible.

Question: I would like to receive additional information about the Syrian National Dialogue Congress. When will it be held? Is it going to convene on November 18, or will it be held later? At which level will Russia be represented at it?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to say that the Syrian National Dialogue Congress is still at the preparation stage. I said so at the previous briefing, but you probably missed this information. Over the past week since that briefing, we received many additional questions regarding this conference. We pointed out that we are still making preparations, and that we are still discussing the date and venue of the congress, its format and participants, as well as representatives from the organisers. As soon as we have the complete picture, we will make all the details public. The dates you mentioned have not been officially confirmed by any of the Russian executive agencies that are responsible for interaction with Syria. These dates have been provided by sources other than official Russian sources. I would like to draw your attention to the comment made by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a news conference in Moscow just a few days ago where he said that the date, the format plus the list of participants in the congress are being coordinated. We have announced the idea of the congress and published the list of possible participants as we saw it at the time. After that, we started working on this matter in detail with due regard for the response to it. We will share specific information with you as soon as we have it. Please, ask us for any information you need and rely on the information provided by the congress organisers rather than on comments from people who are not directly related to this event.

Question: After the air crash that happened near Smolensk seven years ago, an international commission chose the design for a monument upon instructions from the presidents of Russia and Poland. This monument has not been put up to this day. It transpired several days ago now that the site where the monument was to be put up had been sold to a private individual. Does this mean that there will be no monument? Is this your response to the Polish parliament's decision to dismantle all communist-era monuments in the country?

Maria Zakharova: I will request information from our experts. You will receive an answer to this question by all means as soon as possible, and we will publish additional information on this on the ministry's website.

Question: How much attention was given to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at a meeting between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger?

Maria Zakharova: Complete information about these talks has been posted on the ministry's website and provided by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a news conference following the talks.

Question: Can you say a few more words about the Russian list that was compiled last week in response to Canada's "Magnitsky Act?" What names does the list contain, and for what reason? Is it possible to obtain the entire list of names?

Maria Zakharova: In the Foreign Ministry's comment, made in response to this decision, we said that, unfortunately, we were forced to once again respond to an unfriendly act by Canada that has compiled new lists with regard to Russian citizens and to introduce similar, reciprocal measures. To the best of my

knowledge, that comment also explained the principle for formulating the list.

This is basically the same methodology, rather than something new. The list includes those who have been purposefully and methodically aggravating relations between Russia and Canada, who have made extremely anti-Russian and Russophobic statements, who have been involved in anti-Russian acts, campaigns or various events, and who have even organised them. This was the methodology for this action.

Regarding the publication of a complete list, we have never published one. I believe that, considering their anti-Russian hysteria in the past few years, these people are perfectly aware of what names the list contains. The methodology of informing them is not new; they will receive a rejection with an explanation when applying for visas. There is nothing new here.

We would like this faulty practice to stop, at long last. In our opinion (and we have repeatedly emphasised this), we need to discuss some truly serious matters with Canada. These matters need to be discussed by the foreign ministries, civil society and representatives of various government branches. This includes a number of political and humanitarian issues, such as counter-terrorism efforts and cooperation at international venues. Unfortunately, the attention of media outlets and the entire potential of the Canadian establishment are being wasted on maintaining and attracting attention to these kinds of acts. We are forced to respond to this, and we will respond.

I repeat, the methodology of making these decisions and their implementation is nothing new.

Question: In its report, the US Senate Committee on Armed Services notes that the US defence budget, now being coordinated by the US Congress' Senate and the House of Representatives, might contain the so-called "McCain Amendment" implying that cable television distributors don't have to broadcast content being controlled or financed by the Russian Government. Therefore Russian television channels might later be officially banned in the United States. What is your response to this?

Maria Zakharova: We always respond to official and draft documents that are being published. As I understand, now we are talking about specific plans. We will act accordingly in any event linked with pressure against or harassment of Russian media outlets in the United States. We will do this under the Law on Media, passed in the mid-1990s. We have never resorted to implementing the relevant clauses of this law. The relevant clauses of the Russian Law on Media will be implemented if the US authorities ban Russian television channels, in particular Russia Today, in the United States, or if everything is done to make their broadcasts impossible.

Again, we have clearly reaffirmed our position more than once.

Question: According to media reports, in late September Russia proposed mediating the restoration of relations between North Korea and the United States, but Pyongyang allegedly rejected this offer. What can you say on this matter? Does Russia intend to offer its mediation again?

Maria Zakharova: Russia is actively involved in the efforts to settle the situation on the Korean Peninsula. We are working at the bilateral level and also on international venues, including at the UN Security Council. We believe in the relevance of our views that form the basis of our efforts to settle the problem, because these views have been formed following a serious analysis of the situation. We will continue to apply this approach in the future.

Question: I would like to thank you for your assistance in settling the conflict between the Federal News Agency and Google.

Maria Zakharova: This is very pleasant, but there is nothing to thank us for. We did not do anything; we only answered your question. The only thing you can thank us for is for putting forth our position of principle. We have not done anything else. Everything that happened after that was in the framework of your relations with the company in question.

Question: The new UK Defence Secretary has said they will send four fighter jets to Romania to patrol the airspace over the Black Sea. He said the UK has significantly stepped up its commitment to European security “in the face of an increasingly assertive Russia.” Would you like to comment about this?

Maria Zakharova: I see this as a Freudian slip: they are no longer talking about Russia’s aggressiveness or potential threats, but about Russia’s self-confidence. Confidence, aggression and potential threat are three different things. I don’t understand why they equate self-confidence with aggressiveness. These are two different things as applied to individuals, agencies, organisations, associations and countries. You can be self-assertive yet not aggressive but quite peaceful and pacifistic. Can’t you imagine a self-confident pacifist?

Actually, the efforts to present Russia as a bogeyman are rooted in anger at our self-confidence and also confidence in the actions we take in many spheres, as well as in our support for continued advocacy of bilateral cooperation and multilateral interaction on international platforms. For example, we have advocated the resumption of dialogue with NATO on Afghanistan many times.

As I said, you can now see the real underlying reasons for the decisions of our Western and NATO colleagues to build up their military presence on the border with Russia. This is not their response to the potential or real threats coming from Russia but a demonstration of their anger at the fact that Russia is becoming an increasingly confident player in many spheres of the international stage, including foreign policy. We should and do remind our colleagues that even though we may be a self-confident player, as they claim, we nevertheless always urge them to play by the rules. This is what distinguishes us from them. The rules have been clearly defined and set out in the UN Charter.

Question: The US Congress has coordinated a Department of Defence budget for 2018 that stipulates the allocation of \$4.6 billion for “detering Russian aggression in Europe.” Any comments to make about this?

Maria Zakharova: I have said everything on this matter in my answer to the previous question. You can ask our colleagues from the Defence Ministry for more details and expert views on the proportionality of defence allocations as well as potential threats.

We will make official comments when the transition from a draft budget to approved allocations is complete. As for now, please ask the Defence Ministry for expert views.

Question: When commenting on the words Syrian Foreign and Expatriates Minister Walid Muallem said about the readiness to conduct a dialogue on the federalisation of the country, adviser to the President of Syria Bouthaina Shaaban said that he was misunderstood and that Damascus doesn’t consider this possibility. Damascus has also asked the Kurds to leave the territory, which they liberated from ISIS. What is Russia’s position on this matter?

Maria Zakharova: As I have already said, we speak in favour of a broad dialogue between representatives of various ethnic and religious communities in Syria both between each other and with official Damascus. Initially we were talking about the need to involve all Syrian forces into this broad

national dialogue. You know that we supported it and worked actively to promote the “Geneva platform”, were among those who initiated the establishment of the “Astana platform” and now begin working on the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, which we have discussed today. This is our contribution exactly into providing an opportunity for the Syrian people to decide their fate themselves.

Our principled assessment is that all ethnic and religious communities in Syria should be involved in working on the country’s future, its constitution, state organisation, its restoration and revival.

Our principled assessments on this subject have not changed. I understand that some phrases can be pulled out of the context, or they may be distorted in translation, this is why I am asking you to look at our principled positions on this matter.

Question: Today a call to deprive the most active anti-Russian US media of accreditation in Russia was sounded at the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of Russia. Is the Russian Foreign Ministry ready to refuse accreditation to US media or to recall the accreditation that has already been provided as a response measure for the constantly increasing pressure on Russian media in the United States?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the meeting you mentioned was attended by a representative of the Foreign Ministry, Deputy Director of the Information and Press Department, who was set to speak and answer all the corresponding questions. Everything has been said during the discussion at this meeting, including publicly. Please take note of this.

As for the form and methods of responding to the actions of the US authorities (US security officials, to be exact, who are behind these efforts to squeeze the Russian media out of the US), we will work on it, taking into account the development of the situation concerning the Russian media.

Let me stress that we will not make any problems for journalists from the United States or other countries, not on our initiative, not unilaterally, nor to fulfil the wishes, ideas or hopes of certain groups of our population. I can confirm that we receive many letters and petitions from non-governmental organisations in Russia, which are indignant with the way the Western media, in particular US media, present the information about Russia; with US journalists’ behaviour on air; and with the fact that Russia takes no strict measure to stop the activities of US media in our country, which, as many people believe, provide openly false information. People were outraged by the Western media coverage of the Olympic Games in Sochi. We often receive letters from angry people, when they read reports about the parade on Victory Day, which is not just a public holiday, but a date related to the lives of every family in Russia. All of this is distorted and the motivation for holding parades is misinterpreted: they are shown as militaristic, as if they have nothing to do with the victory over the Nazis. There are many complains like this.

We receive e-mails, faxes and ordinary letters written by hand, in which people ask why we take no measures. However, we have never used the legal resources we have to influence the work of the media, US media in particular, or other countries’ media, via administrative tools. We have always believed that it is not the administrative tools or even laws that can restrict the activities of the media that should be used in response to fake news and the flow of unreliable information distorting reality, or the materials, which do not distort events but give a biased assessment. We believed the right reaction is to build up our information potential, to provide a larger volume of information promptly, and to cooperate more actively with foreign journalists. We have always stuck to this concept. However, when we are talking about a Russian television channel, which is not only pointedly restricted in its activities (it is not only Russia Today, but also RIA Novosti, Sputnik, TASS and other media outlets, and not only in the United States), but is trying to withstand the pressure of the huge potential of opportunities at the disposal of US security services to stop the activities of this channel, which works legally and transparently, and which was not

presented with any facts or charges of its illegal activities, in this case we will provide a mirrored and symmetric response, with some nuances. Let me repeat it: only as a response measure.

Question: I would like you to say a few words more about the desecration of monuments in Europe. In the past week since your previous briefing, people in Bulgaria were discussing who had really helped save Bulgarian Jews from Nazis during WWII. The Bulgarian President even said that what the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson had said on this issue is “either deep ignorance of history or an attempt at provocation.” What can you say to this?

Maria Zakharova: Has the President of Bulgaria said anything about the desecration of Russian monuments?

Question: The Bulgarian media have reported only recently the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry’s statement regarding measures taken to apprehend and punish those guilty. Have any of those guilty of these crimes ever been found, according to your information?

Maria Zakharova: As you know, we monitor the issue of monuments routinely and systematically. We see what is being done to the monuments to WWII heroes who liberated Europe and the world in general, including Bulgaria, from fascism and Nazism. Regrettably, they are being desecrated and vandalised increasingly often. But we have not seen an appropriate response to these acts, even though it is true that there are vandals in all countries. This is what I can say about the prompt investigation and administrative or criminal punishment for these crimes. We see that people are becoming more and more aggressive with regard to these monuments, that they are acting outside the historical context and their actions are illegal in terms of the Nuremberg Trials’ decisions, and that the authorities do not react appropriately.

We have taken note of the debates on this subject in Bulgaria. Why does nobody hear us when we ask for these monuments to be protected? The point at issue is not to protect stone or metal effigies with words written on them but the memory of those who died in defence of a foreign rather than their own country. We are trying to protect their memory in a variety of ways, including at talks, through bilateral contacts, as well as in the public space.

The debates [in Bulgaria] have highlighted the attempts to divert the issue from facts and honest assessments of the situation regarding war memorials towards history. History should be better left to historians to comment. We are talking about respect for the memory of those who gave their lives to liberate and protect nations and individual lives from fascism and Nazism.

As for historical matters, they are for historians, as I have said. I have seen the online reply of the Russian Military Historical Society to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry’s statement. I think you should quote this reply so as to attract the attention of the Bulgarian media to it.

We want to be heard, so that our monuments are maintained in proper order and so that the authorities react accordingly if these monuments are vandalised.

Question: The Russian media, or more precisely, Kommersant newspaper, has reported a scandal with the Russian submarine on lease in India. They write that the Indian authorities allowed US Navy representative on board, which provoked a scandal between Russia and India. Is everything as the media write, and if so, is the Foreign Ministry doing anything about this?

Maria Zakharova: I can ask our experts, but I still think that you should ask the Russian Defence Ministry.

Question: The Russian revolution took place on November 7, a hundred years ago. Only left-wing political forces in Russia celebrated the date. The Russian authorities chose to disregard it. But France, for example, has kept the anthem and the flag of the French Revolution. Have your officials any views on this historical event, which had a tremendous influence on the world?

Maria Zakharova: I would like to point out the holiday we officially celebrated on November 4 and the statements made on this occasion by the country's leaders and other officials. I think you will find answers to all your questions in these statements. I only want to emphasise the name of this holiday – National Unity Day. The name is self-revealing.

Question: Why has the Foreign Ministry criticised the Austrian OSCE chairmanship so sharply in recent time?

Maria Zakharova: What particular issue do you mean?

Question: The case of Crimean journalists and, I think, Transnistria. I would like to understand if there are more profound reasons for displeasure. My second question is about the OSCE Ministerial Council in early December. We know that Moscow is not quite pleased with how the OSCE is operating today. Could you be more specific on reforms that Russia will suggest to the organisation?

Maria Zakharova: With regard to preparations for the Ministerial Council, I will be ready to reply directly to you shortly. I will request an expanded brief on preparations for the OSCE Ministerial Council. As for criticising the chairmanship and the likelihood of more profound processes that, as you said, may be related to some displeasure, I would like to say that whatever is causing incomprehension or misunderstanding on our part is a working process and we voice this in the course of relevant OSCE events. This refers not only to the Austrian Chairmanship. This is a normal practice of holding talks and working within the framework of any OSCE chairmanship.

You have mentioned two points. I will be willing to request information on Transnistria from experts. As for the Crimean journalists, I am ready to inform you on my own.

First, Crimean journalists (real Crimean journalists, not some mythical figures who give online interviews and no one knows whether they are really from Crimea or not; nevertheless, relevant materials are later included, among other things, in OSCE documents), who lived and continue to live in Crimea both as part of the Ukrainian state and, after the 2014 referendum, as part of the Russian Federation, who were born and educated there and worked as journalists in Crimea for decades (many of them hail from the Soviet Union), have been trying to be heard or at least talked to for a number of years. The OSCE as a venue and OSCE events, conferences, congresses and symposia on media subjects offer a fine opportunity for this. Crimea is constantly referred to and human rights are discussed. Some unnamed journalists are constantly quoted and the information they provide is used in relevant documents. It is not the first time that the Crimean journalists try to reach the OSCE, but they are denied visas. Each time we lodge protests and speak with partners who deny them entry visas. This year, we decided to offer assistance and suggest that the Crimean journalists participate in the forum via a satellite TV link-up or in the form of a video conference.

What was our surprise (because we were assured that they could not be issued visas for well-known reasons), when the Austrian chairmanship, among others, told us that even this remote participation by the Crimean journalists, when they didn't have to cross borders or request visas and could attend the forum with the help of modern technologies rather than physically, was impossible too. Why? And here

we come to the prime cause: it is not a matter of visas, or where they are received, or passports; it is just that certain representatives of the Western world do not need to hear the voice of real Crimeans, of real Crimean journalists.

You can't even imagine how much effort it took the Russian delegation to circulate the Crimean journalists' video address in the OSCE. The most phenomenal thing is that the Ukrainian delegation can bring whoever they want and circulate whatever they want when it comes to discussing human rights of the Crimean Tatars. And no one asks any questions. All of this is encouraged. People come, who have not lived in Crimea for a long time, who are not associated with present-day Crimea's Tatar diaspora, and who in many respects play the role of agents provocateur. But they are given the floor, the rostrum and time.

So why can't the people described in reports participate in discussions on their own behalf, rather than on behalf of the Kremlin or the Russian Foreign Ministry?

Do you know that we held a satellite TV conference with the Crimean journalists from the Foreign Ministry's press centre? I regret that you have missed it. There were the Crimean journalists themselves, TV channels, and representatives of public organisations and the Crimean administration, who are trying to get through to the Western information space, where they are mentioned so often. Tell me, how can they do it?

Do you know what is paradoxical? During the Cold War and superpower confrontation, one of the main points of criticism was that Soviet people were not allowed to leave the USSR. Now it is the Western world that is doing whatever it can to prevent residents of Crimea, among others, from travelling to the West, because they are appalled at the prospect that their real voice, not one mediated by NGOs or reports, will be heard, for example, in Europe (let alone the United States).

This is one concrete example. It is not related to any deep-down contradictions but a concrete element of our work. As we publicly indicate what causes our misunderstanding, so we will continue to do this in the future. We are publicly airing grievances that we have. There is no need to look for any antagonisms or global problems. There are concrete detailed issues that we come across. This is a normal process, and we are looking forward to the main idea underlying the OSCE, among others, i.e., one about freedom of expression, views, ideas, and the media, at last coming into effect.

Are we against anyone speaking at the OSCE about, for example, Russian problems? Have you heard or seen anything of the kind? There are all sorts of people speaking about Russia, including those who are totally unrelated to it or pose as representatives of large population groups. OK, they have a view of their own and they make speeches. But can real journalists, Crimeans, who are constantly discussed at OSCE venues, be heard as well, at least in some form? What the OSCE fears is absolutely incomprehensible. After all, an absolutely normal form of an online dialogue was suggested. They wouldn't show their passports or speculate about global politics. They were ready to answer the questions that were posed at the OSCE, in particular by our Ukrainian colleagues, who could learn something from them directly. Yet again, they were not allowed to have this opportunity.

Question: Regarding the upcoming APEC summit. In what areas does Russia expect results?

Maria Zakharova: Comments on summits and attendance by the head of state are provided by the Presidential Executive Office.