

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at a meeting with representatives of Russian non-profit organisations, Moscow, June 15, 2018

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Colleagues,

I am happy to meet with you again. Our meetings have become traditional. They give us an opportunity to talk in detail and exchange views on the issues that are of mutual interest to the Foreign Ministry and our non-profit organisations dealing with problems that are on the agenda of international agencies.

This goes far beyond the traditional interpretation of foreign policy and actually embraces all areas of human endeavor, which require universal regulation and development of the rules of conduct in the era of globalisation. Naturally, our talk with you helps us better understand the feelings of people who are directly dealing with these issues, for whom this is not a pastime but a mission in life. It is very important for me to know that NGO representatives are interested people that are following the dictates of their heart and their convictions rather than just doing a job.

Regarding the situation in the world and the atmosphere in which we have to work, I probably do not need too many words. This was reviewed by President Vladimir Putin in his latest statements. The Foreign Ministry regularly comments on various events and analyses world developments. In brief, a new, more democratic and fair polycentric world order is taking shape. Needless to say, those that ruled the world for centuries, established rules for themselves and others, demanding that the latter abide by them without necessarily following them themselves (these are our US-led Western colleagues) are resisting these processes and looking for excuses and reasons to impede them. They are trying to uphold their dominant position, which, by and large, is receding into the past.

Searching for such excuses and rationales, they have been accusing Russia of many mortal sins (I will not give specific examples at this point) and continue to demand that we change our foreign policy and our conduct. They are saying straight that they favour cooperation with Russia but to launch it Russia needs to repent and acknowledge everything, in which case they will start talking with us.

Obviously, it is pointless to discuss these issues without discussing the grounds for their concerns. We asked them to present specific facts (we have never dodged an honest conversation) so that we could sit down and exchange our assessments and approaches in a bid to find mutually acceptable solutions. However, we are being told that they are not going to give us any facts, that we know everything ourselves. I am not exaggerating – this is how it has been.

Naturally, such attempts to influence our foreign and domestic policy have no prospects for progress. Our country is capable of upholding its sovereignty, ensuring its national security and protecting its citizens in any situation and any developments.

That said, unlike our Western counterparts, we will never seek confrontation with anyone, threaten anyone or impose our views on various issues on others. We never interfere with the affairs of others, unlike our Western colleagues for whom this conduct has become all but standard practice. Just think about the events of the Arab Spring that still have repercussions in the entire international arena, and, of course, the anti-constitutional coup in neighbouring Ukraine.

Defending our sovereignty, security and the interests of our citizens, we will simultaneously protect (and are currently doing this) the foundations of international law and the agreements on strategic security, arms control, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and will not agree with unilateral attempts to revise them (such attempts are being made today).

We remain open to a candid dialogue and cooperation. Of course, we prioritise our internal tasks and the goals of promoting integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union with the involvement of the SCO, ASEAN and all countries located in Eurasia. President Putin spoke of the need to develop, based on available opportunities, the capabilities of our common space, which we refer to as the Greater Eurasian Partnership or Project. It is objectively taking shape in reality, which was confirmed during recent meetings held as part of the EAEU and the SCO.

I think that in the end (better sooner than later), our Western colleagues will realise that state-to-state relations should be based on the principles of mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests. In this regard, one cannot but rejoice that green shoots of common sense have begun to show. We have seen this and continue to see it in our contacts with some EU member states. Such countries are growing in number. Importantly, of course, their understanding of how abnormal things are now should be transformed into concrete practical actions. We look forward to our partners becoming ready to resume full-fledged relations with us.

Clearly, interaction with our partners abroad through non-governmental organisations makes it possible for everyone to take a broader look at a variety of issues than within the framework of classical diplomacy. We are interested in our civil society actively participating in discussions held on multilateral platforms. So far, this participation is not as developed as we want it. Only 70 Russian NGOs enjoy consultative status with ECOSOC, at a time where it has over 4,000 organisations represented with it. Speaking about the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe, only four Russian NGOs are its permanent participants. At UNESCO, only three of our non-governmental organisations have attained partner status. Clearly, there are a number of factors which prevent a quick solution to the issue of expanding representation of our NGOs, including, of course, economic and financial aspects. However, with your active position and initiatives, the Foreign Ministry will do its best to make sure that these issues are resolved promptly. In any case, your work at the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other organisations is very much needed.

We understand your priority focus on strengthening interaction with civil society in CIS countries, including, of course, the CSTO and the EAEU. I believe it is important to support contacts between young people.

This is reflected in our agenda in the SCO and BRICS, where there are entities which encourage relations between the youth organisations of the participating countries. Of course, we see many positive examples, including, with President Putin's recent visit to the People's Republic of China in mind, fruitful contacts between the NGOs of Russia and China, which in fact help strengthen the humanitarian component of our comprehensive strategic partnership.

We will actively support your contacts with the authoritative political science centres in the countries of the East, participation in events organised at their venues, and your initiatives to invite experts to Russia. Of course, we are interested in ensuring that NGOs and informal structures communicate with each other and promote straightforward principles of mutual respect, mutual understanding and neighbourliness in Europe.

We still very much appreciate your work on combating the falsification of history, including, primarily, the history of the Great Patriotic War and World War II in general, and opposing the unscrupulous war on monuments to Soviet liberator soldiers. It is appalling to observe such activities in a number of European countries, and we are taking measures to curb them, including through collective actions of the member countries of the CIS and the CSTO in international organisations and submitting specific proposals for consideration at various venues, including the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

We highly value our relationship. We see you as our partners in promoting our aspirations on the international arena, where we want to see a positive, non-confrontational agenda that allows us to seek compromises and overcome the temptation to rely on diktat and ultimatums, which, unfortunately, some of our partners still succumb to.

Today, we have here representatives of non-governmental organisations from many Russian regions. We support NGO activities in the Russian regions which will help us to develop our international ties, all the more so as each Russian region has international partners. This is also an important area of focus. As the Foreign Ministry, we will be willing to provide informational and organisational support and, whenever possible, resource support to the regional NGOs' activities through our representative offices in the Russian regions, to help make better use of the possibilities available through state grants and provide other support, including through the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund created specifically for this purpose.

We will continue the practice of including NGO representatives, also from the Russian regions, in the Russian federal and regional delegations, when such delegations travel abroad for talks and contacts with their foreign partners.