

Transcript of Remarks and Response to Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Press Conference on 2008 Foreign Policy Outcomes at MFA, January 16, 2009

Thank you for responding to our invitation to participate in the press conference which is traditionally dedicated to the outcomes of the past year.

The year past was very complicated, at times dramatic, packed with major contradictory events which most gravely impacted the situation. Those were the global financial crisis, which undermined trust in the international financial institutions formed after the Second World War, with efforts now being aimed at restoring this trust on a new basis reflecting the realities of a multipolar world; the unilateral – contrary to international law – recognition of Kosovo's independence; and, of course, Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia, which did not achieve its goals thanks only to the actions of Russia, which fully in line with our international obligations suppressed this illegal move.

Regrettably, we entered the new year to the accompaniment of hostilities in Gaza and of the artificially created gas supply crisis in Europe.

I think that at the end of the day all these events will turn participants of international relations face to reality; will make everybody realize that contemporary conflicts do not have force-based or other illegal solutions. In conditions of globalization there is no room left for national egoism, for attempts to solve one's own economic-and-financial or security problems at others' expense.

I think that the accumulation of a critical mass of conflict potential in international relations should become a catalyst for their swifter and deeper transformation; a catalyst for creating a polycentric system of global governance, including its material foundation, and for understanding that there is no alternative to collective approaches towards solving problems common to all on the basis of universal application of international law.

In the elapsed year Russia acted on the world stage fully aware of its responsibility and its capabilities. At the base of our foreign policy line lay a clear understanding of national interests, multiplied by common sense and readiness for equal cooperation with international partners. President Dmitry Medvedev approved the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, thus ensuring continuity of our foreign policy course. A concrete strategy to implement this Concept was articulated by the President in a number of his appearances and, especially, in his first Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.

The main conclusion we draw for ourselves based on the 2008 outcomes is that Russia has basically completed a period of “inner concentration.” And the conclusion which probably suggests itself for the entire world community is that we are now dealing with a qualitatively new geopolitical situation; perhaps, as they say, every cloud has a silver lining – the global financial and economic crisis has focused everyone on urgent issues rather than virtual projects. It is equally important that the crisis spurs all of us towards collective actions. In particular, the actual reconfiguration of the financial G7 into a financial G20, as occurred at the Washington summit in November 2008, indicates this. The forum is sufficiently representative, both geographically and civilizationally, let alone the fact that the twenty countries account for 80% of the world economy. Russia acted in close contact with our partners and associates in the CIS space, in Europe, in the BRIC format and took an active part in the G20 Washington summit. Further efforts have to be made in this direction, efforts for rebuilding the world financial system. I think that these efforts must in principle help to accumulate a critical mass of trust, which will also allow for grappling with contradictions on certain political issues and must contribute to de-ideologizing international relations.

A good example of a constructive, pragmatic approach is Russian cooperation with the European Union, both during the crisis in the Caucasus and in overcoming the artificially created obstacles in the path of gas supplies to Europe. I think that we have never before cooperated so closely with the EU on truly significant issues for both sides. I shall note the active role of President Sarkozy as EU President in the past half-year. Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek of the Czech Republic is now very actively, responsibly and with proper initiative engaged in resolving the issues of gas supply to our partners in Europe. The past year has also shown the Euro-Atlantic security architecture to be patchy and inadequate to today’s requirements. I think that the relevance of President Medvedev’s initiative for crafting a European Security Treaty has become more understandable to many. We cannot fail to welcome in this connection the recent open approach of FRG Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier to the US President-elect with the proposal to return to the idea of creating a Euro-Atlantic security space from Vancouver to Vladivostok. It’s an old idea, but for a variety of reasons it was not realized immediately after the end of the Cold War.

Of course, we are ready for any development of events, but like many other countries we pin serious hopes on a change for the better in US policy and, among other things, a change in Washington’s policy on the international stage. We are ready for such changes and hope for close cooperation.

Our major priority in foreign policy remains the Commonwealth of Independent States area. In the elapsed year the CIS Economic Development Strategy to 2020 was adopted along with strengthening the nucleus of the CIS, as represented by EurAsEC and CSTO. The Federal Agency for CIS, Overseas Compatriots and International Humanitarian Cooperation set up at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is designed to become a tool for raising the effectiveness of our policy in the post-Soviet space.

Other thrust areas of Russia's multivector foreign policy were also boosted. I shall note interaction within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the development of relations with the partners in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Africa. Multilateral diplomacy under G8 auspices and in the framework of BRIC, APEC and other forums also contributed to securing national interests.

So we have very extensive foreign policy tasks before us in the year that has begun.

The events which have marred the year's start are further evidence of the necessity to combine efforts for systemic collective work. The prosperity and well-being of the entire world will depend on the success of this work. Russia is ready for this work and hopes for a similar approach of all our international partners. Thank you for your attention, and I am ready to answer your questions.