

## **Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Interview on the Prospects of Russian-US Relations, Rossiiskiye Vesti, April 1, 2009**

**Question:** How do you assess the first moves of the new US administration and the prospects of Russian-American relations?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** We sincerely hope that with the coming of the new administration to power in Washington positive dynamics will prevail in our bilateral relations with the United States.

The first contacts with the representatives of the administration of Barack Obama and the signals we have been receiving from Washington are encouraging. The presidents twice communicated over the phone, and exchanged messages on a broad range of bilateral and international issues. Agreement was reached to hold on April 1 in London the first personal meeting between the top leaders of our countries. We hope that it will set a constructive tone for our dialogue and help outline the basic priorities and the near-term schedule of work and convert the positive signals into practical deeds.

It seems to us that the new US president is really interested in redirecting Russian-American cooperation onto a qualitatively new track and in taking advantage of the possibilities opening up in terms of developing a mutually beneficial and equal partnership between our countries. Of course, it would be an exaggeration to say that our views fully coincide. But there is a common understanding that the relations are acquiring an extra chance which must not be lost, as was the case under the previous administration.

It is important that getting into the swing not drag out; we need to at once shift to concrete deeds. I've established normal working contacts with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, with whom we held a good meeting on March 6 in Geneva; ties are being fostered under the auspices of other agencies.

I am convinced that if we act based on pragmatism and coinciding interests, it will be possible to move forward seriously and to bring our approaches to a common denominator in addressing a number of major strategic stability and international security issues.

We will of course pay the main attention to these problems. Serious, painstaking work is ahead on the preparation of a new accord on strategic offensive arms to replace the Treaty expiring this year. Here it is necessary to move forward as quickly as possible. We are waiting for the earliest approval of an American negotiation team.

On March 7, at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, I voiced the statement of President Dmitry Medvedev "On the conclusion of an accord with the USA to replace the START Treaty." All of our approaches are concisely set out there. Without going into detail, I will emphasize the chief point, which is that limitations should cover not

only nuclear warheads, but their carriers as well. This is a principled moment. We also consider it necessary to exclude the possibility of deploying strategic offensive arms outside national territory and to take full account of the interconnection between strategic offensive and defensive arms.

Potentially we can also come to an agreement on missile defense issues. On more than one occasion, we have publicly stated our assessment: we regard the unilateral plans of the George Bush administration to deploy a third GMD site in Europe as a threat to our strategic deterrence force. We will have, in case of their realization, to factor this into our defense building. Our reaction is not a phobia, but the result of an expert military-technical analysis of the third-site project.

During the last two years we tried to explain to the American side the absence of objective reasons for deploying elements of their national strategic missile defense system in Europe and the destabilizing nature of the United States' unilateral moves, both for Russian-American relations and for international security as a whole. In an attempt to find constructive solutions we proposed a clear-cut alternative: together, inviting all concerned countries, to analyze what real missile threats we may encounter in the foreseeable future and how we should – again collectively – react to them. Such cooperation, if embarked upon, could help qualitatively change the strategic context of relations between Russia and the United States.

A promising area of collaboration is strengthening European security. The American side apparently recovers from the allergy inherent in the previous administration to the very idea of beginning a serious conversation on this topic. In this regard, a multilateral dialogue essentially has already been launched, and we would be interested in seeing the United States actively join in.

Naturally we are ready for constructive engagement with the United States on the entire spectrum of issues in counteraction against the new threats and challenges, including antiterrorism and antinarcotics problems.

A broad field for joint work is opening up in the nonproliferation sphere, where we traditionally cooperate with the United States quite well. The priority thrusts here are to reinforce the NPT regime, to increase control over the prevention of WMD falling into nonstate actor hands, to combat nuclear terrorism and to engage in peaceful atomic energy cooperation.

We also intend to continue to work in a partner-like manner with the American side in promoting our ideas on all topical foreign policy themes, including the reinforcement of European security, the situation surrounding North Korea, and the state of affairs in Iraq and Afghanistan. As to Iran's nuclear program, we have long since been advocating the need for US involvement in dialogue with Teheran – directly, on the full range of problems existing in their relations. The recent message of President Barack Obama to the people and leadership of Iran on the occasion of Navruz goes in this direction.

**Question:** How do you assess the present state of international relations as a whole?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** The present-day world is changing fast, and this process, having begun with the end of the Cold War, has been acquiring ever greater acceleration recently. Furthermore, we're in fact witnessing a systemic crisis of international relations which affects all states – big and small. To a significant extent it is due to the fact that an efficient international system has not yet been formed to replace the bipolar world arrangements now gone. The existing system is unbalanced and prone to serious setbacks – not just in politics, but in the economy and finances as well.

The international situation is primarily characterized by the fact that the formation of a polycentric world order, based on international law and multilateral diplomacy, is picking up speed. The phenomena of globalization, having actively grown in the last fifteen to 20 years, lead to an ever greater interdependence of states, including in the face of common challenges and threats. It is obvious that not a single country can today ensure a sustainable solution to major international problems alone. What is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan is an eloquent proof of this. Hence – the invalidity of the claims of anyone to selectedness, the possession of an exclusive right to dictate solutions on a global or regional scale. Another obvious conclusion is that contemporary conflicts and crisis situations have no force-based solutions and require the involvement, not isolation and containment, of all parties and regional actors in the settlement process.

In conditions of the crisis of the system of global governance a strengthening of its regional level takes place, when states and regional structures assume the responsibility for dealing with their own problems. The tendency towards consolidation of regional politics is observable across the world, including in the Asia-Pacific Region, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. The CIS space and Eurasia do not constitute an exception, steps are being undertaken to strengthen further the Commonwealth, EurAsEC, the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The overwhelming majority of states are beginning to reckon with the new reality by shifting in their actions to pragmatic and multivector politics. We see the growing role in tackling international problems of flexible coalitions which are created to further the coinciding interests of the sides. The consolidation of new centers of economic growth and political influence exerts an ever greater influence on the evolution of the international situation.

Against the background of the crisis phenomena in world affairs a kind of return to the traditional system of international relations and their basic values, such as the sovereign equality of states, their independence, and noninterference in internal affairs, occurs. Collective efforts on the financial and economic front will objectively set a more realistic system of coordinates in international relations and contribute to the formation of a positive agenda in world politics. In this mainstream a “critical mass” of reciprocal trust has to be amassed in order to jointly overcome the

differences and achieve necessary shifts in resolving the most acute problems of security and development.

**Question:** What are the most significant threats to peace and stability in the world at this stage?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** As was noted in the response to the previous question, unfortunately it is too early to speak of equilibrium in the system of international relations. The spectrum of threats to peace and stability remains fairly wide. Among them: international terrorism, the danger of the spread of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, especially drug trafficking, sea piracy, ecological problems, the energy security situation, climate change, depletion of natural resources, epidemics, the food crisis, regional conflicts and many other issues. The 21st century challenges and threats common to all countries bear a transfrontier character and can only be neutralized by acting together.

Each of the aforesaid threats is dangerous in its own way, and bears considerable destructive potential. We regard combating international terrorism as a paramount foreign policy task. Russia has been making efforts to consolidate a broad antiterrorist coalition under the aegis of the UN, to intensify measures to carry out the Global Counterterrorism Strategy – a comprehensive plan of international antiterrorist cooperation on priority issues – and to universalize global conventions in this field. Urgently required is the soonest completion of the negotiation and adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism which would contain a universal definition of terrorism. We do everything we can to facilitate the realization of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, the expansion of the range of its participants and the enhancement of its practical benefits.

Within the framework of the antiterrorist work, we attach priority significance to improving the international legal basis for the struggle against this threat, suppressing the ideological expansion and financing of terrorism, promoting inter-civilization dialogue and stimulating interregional collaboration. To counter terrorism is not just the task of states, but of civil society, scientific, educational and religious institutions, the media and NGOs as well. This is the aim of the well-known Russian initiative for an antiterrorism partnership of state authorities, civil society and the business community.

Illicit drug trafficking is another threat the danger of which must not be underestimated. Its chief source remains the narco-situation in Afghanistan. We pay much attention to the formation of antinarcotics, antiterrorist and financial security belts around that country on the basis of the international antinarcotics Operation Kanal being conducted under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. We are interested in raising the effectiveness of international antinarcotics cooperation. The special conference on Afghanistan convened under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, held in Moscow on March 27, was meant to impart a new impulse to efforts in this direction.

One of the most burning issues today is the struggle against sea piracy, which is becoming increasingly widespread, particularly off the coast of Somalia. There are casualties among our seamen and the security of Russian commercial shipping stands in danger. We are actively involved in the elaboration of the appropriate resolutions of the UN Security Council. The recently adopted resolutions give a clear signal of the need for urgent measures, particularly those of a practical character. We are interested in fostering effective operational collaboration with partners. This is in our common interests.

**Question:** What are the chief challenges for Russia and its foreign policy?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** The above-mentioned threats have an impact upon all states. Russia is no exception. In line with the renovated Foreign Policy Concept, as approved by President Dmitry Medvedev in July 2008, the international activities of our country are aimed at establishing favorable external conditions for the accelerated development of Russia and at ensuring its security and strong and authoritative positions in the world community.

Among our foreign policy priorities are the tasks of bolstering international security, particularly through consistent efforts in such key areas as the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, strategic offensive arms reduction, and the prevention of space weaponization and a new stage in the arms race, and generally – the demilitarization of international relations and their de-ideologization.

We are striving to facilitate positive changes in international politics, the formation of a unifying agenda, and the elimination of the distortions that have arisen in the realm of security, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic area. This is what the initiative of President Dmitry Medvedev for concluding a legally binding European Security Treaty aims at. The essence of this proposal is creating in the Euro-Atlantic space a truly open system of collective security based on the principle of its indivisibility, when no one will secure himself at the expense of another.

Of course, for Russia, as for all states of the world, one major challenge today is to overcome the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis, the first crisis of the era of globalization. We see it as a key task to construct anti-crisis collaboration involving the widest possible range of states and multilateral associations on a basis of real equality and the mutual consideration of interests. Moreover, that cooperation in restoring the governability of world development should in parallel be carried out in the political, commercial, economic and financial spheres at global, regional and national levels. Whatever the crisis scenario, Russia will proceed from the objective of forming a new sustainable and effective international system through ensuring the universal application of the “rules of the game” common to all.

The crisis is another dramatic evidence of the fact that challenges bearing a transfrontier character are moving to the fore for all. Herein lies their fundamental distinction from the previous threats to national security. Countering the entire spectrum of challenges and threats is now possible only by joint efforts, with the

engagement of every actor possessing the potential and resources necessary for carrying out the concerted decisions of the entire world community. Russia is ready for participation in such collective work.

**Question:** Where do you see the positive and negative aspects of our relations with the European Union?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** This year we're observing a round-figure anniversary – December 18, 1989 saw the signing of the agreement on trade and commercial and economic cooperation between the USSR and the European Economic Community, which laid down the juridical basis for our relations with the European Union.

The world has markedly changed in the two decades and so have we – Russia and the European Union. But the chief thing I think is that we have managed to construct relations based on mutually advantageous cooperation, which grows deeper year after year. It was during this period that an extensive toolbox for strategic partnership has been amassed: in particular, the Russia-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed along with setting the task of creating four common spaces: economic space; space of external security; space for freedom, security and justice; and space for research, education and culture. The appropriate roadmaps were formulated and the sectoral or branch dialogues to deal with everyday practical problems were launched. Russia now has no economic partner equal to the European Union. Our cultural and humanitarian ties are rapidly growing. And then also in the political sphere, our cooperation, aimed at ensuring stability and security, has principled significance not just for the old continent, but on a global scale as well. Intensive talks are currently under way on all sections of a new agreement on strategic partnership between Russia and the EU.

All of this, as well as the common cultural and civilizational roots create a firm basis of our relations for the long term. At the same time I would like to note that we have become not only partners, but also competitors over this period, primarily in the economic field.

We are ready for competition, but it must be fair and not allow situations like the one that manifested itself during the course of the preparation of the conference on Ukraine's gas transit system on March 23, when Brussels and Kyiv, behind Russia's back, sought to solve matters directly affecting us.

It seems that occasionally a number of problems in our relations are an upshot of the internal restructuring of the EU after the last two waves of expansion and of the slow adaptation of the European Union to the fast changing multipolar world. In relations with the surrounding world the European Union sometimes becomes hostage to the so called principle of "Euro-solidarity," when in dispute situations between an EU member and a third state the EU presents a united front in support of the selfish interests of its "own" country.

**Question:** How are the integrative processes in the post-Soviet space going to develop, in your opinion?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** The regional integrative processes, for all the complexity and contradictoriness of the situation in the post-Soviet space, are an objective reality and a necessity brought about by the requirements of our countries and peoples, who are bound by a myriad of ties. Integration is our natural competitive advantage without the use of which it will be difficult for the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States to occupy a worthy position in the present-day world. It is by no chance that the deepening of cooperation in a regional format has become a characteristic feature of contemporary international relations, a component part of the processes of globalization in its own way and a response to failures in the system of global governance. An additional impulse to the integrative processes in the CIS area comes from the present financial and economic crisis, which has clearly demonstrated the need for collective action.

On the other hand, the peculiarities marking the internal development of the CIS countries and the differing extent of their interest in cooperation among themselves determine what we call the various-speed and various-level integration in the Commonwealth area. In practice this attitude, which also occurs, by the way, in the European Union, has found embodiment in the creation of several regional formats of collective interaction. The Commonwealth of Independent States is the most widely constituted unit with the broadest functions. We regard it as a regional organization whose value consists in that it provides member countries with a platform for political dialogue and with mechanisms of practical cooperation in different fields.

Within the CIS format, the chief work direction today is the implementation of the Concept for Further Development of the Commonwealth, adopted in October 2007, and the related Plan of Principal Measures. The Concept assigns a priority role to the intensification of economic cooperation. For this purpose, at the end of 2008, the Council of Heads of State and the Council of Heads of Government adopted a CIS Economic Development Strategy to 2020. Humanitarian collaboration, the provision of security and counteraction against both traditional and new challenges and threats remain the key guidelines for CIS interaction.

The nucleus of economic integration in the CIS space is the Eurasian Economic Community. Within its framework a customs union is being established, initially made up of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. Over the long haul the other member states of EurAsEC are expected to join it. In February this year the EurAsEC Interstate Council at the level of heads of state took decision to set up the Community's Anti-crisis Fund worth the equivalent of \$10 billion, and a High Technology Center. These measures are directed at overcoming the negative consequences of the world financial and economic crisis.

Russia has been consistently pursuing its line on strengthening the Collective Security Treaty Organization as the key instrument for stability and security in the CIS space. Collaboration within the CSTO framework occurs along different lines, including

military and military technology cooperation, counteraction against the new security threats – terrorism and drug trafficking – and the coordination of the foreign policy moves of member states. I would like to mention the decision taken in February this year at the extraordinary session of the Organization's Collective Security Council to create a Collective Operational Response Force of the CSTO. Its functions will include repulsing military aggression, conducting special operations to combat international terrorism, violent manifestations of extremism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking, and eliminating the consequences of natural or man-made emergency situations. The Force is designed to carry out its activities on the territories of the CSTO member states only and decisions to use this Force will be taken by consensus by the presidents of the member states of the Organization.

The main thrusts for integration in the CIS space are thus clearly defined and are being implemented in practice. They derive from the objective requirements and interests of the states involved and are predicated upon equality, voluntary association and mutual benefit.

**Question:** How do you assess the policy of discrimination against national minorities that is being pursued by Latvia and Estonia?

**Foreign Minister Lavrov:** The situation of human rights in Latvia and Estonia remains complicated. As before, the problem of mass noncitizenship is acute. After 17 and a half years of independence about 360000 permanent residents of Latvia, or 16 percent of the population, and more than 110000 permanent residents of Estonia (10 percent of the population), half of whom were born in the country, are deprived of citizenship. Yes, the number of noncitizens is being reduced, even if at a slow pace, but what makes us cautious – the reduction is through the natural attrition of the Russian-speaking population rather than on account of acceleration of citizenship acquisition procedures. It is obvious that with the continuation of the present pace of naturalization the removal of this problem will stretch into decades.

The Russian-speaking minority resident in Latvia and Estonia cannot fully enjoy the provisions of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, since it has been ratified with reservations, in accordance with which its sphere of application extends to the citizens of these states only.

The abnormality of the situation has been confirmed by the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, whose materials still exhibit critical comments on the human rights situation in Estonia. Even Amnesty International, which does not entertain any great sympathy for our country, has paid attention to the infringement of the rights of the Russian-speaking population in these states.

We also cannot fail to be concerned by the character of the education reforms being carried out in Latvia and Estonia that actually aim to eventually oust the Russian language from this sphere. As part of the so-called optimization, schools are being closed where the instruction was conducted in the Russian language.

By and large we observe a toughening of the linguistic policy of the authorities. Even persons who have obtained citizenship continue to face being kept down – now as a language minority. For example, despite the possibility fixed in the Estonian Constitution to conduct clerical work in the Russian language in places where Russian speakers live compactly, this rule is not being observed. Disproportionately stern sanctions are applied against people who, in the opinion of the Estonian side, do not have a sufficiently good command of the state language.

Of course, the theme of national minority status is being raised by us, internationally and at the bilateral level as well – in contacts with the Latvian and Estonian sides and with partners. Russia isn't putting any special claims against Latvia and Estonia in this regard, but supports the recommendations of specialized international organizations for broadening the rights of the national minorities and for a European solution to the problem of noncitizenship. We are going to continue to work persistently towards the complete fulfillment of these recommendations, both in the work with Riga and Tallinn and through the appropriate multilateral structures.