

Interview of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov on Russian Foreign Policy, Rossiiskaya Gazeta, April 6, 2009

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Question: A meeting between the Russian and US presidents took place in London on April 1, at which you were also present. What impression did Barack Obama make upon you? He is said to have joked a lot?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: In principle the president of the Russian Federation already gave an assessment of this meeting as he spoke to the media immediately after meeting the US president. The two presidents shared their impressions. In addition, also at the final press conference after all the London events Dmitry Anatolyevich told about his impressions of this meeting and emphasized the main point: on both sides there had been the desire to start an equal, mutually respectful dialogue.

The Russian president particularly emphasized the American side's willingness to listen, as also the willingness to give heed to the things heard. The previous administration's behavior was different. They preferred to first take decisions, and only then place everyone before the fact. Strictly speaking, that's how the problem of missile defense came about. Even the closest allies of Washington learned about this idea post factum. And only retrospectively did they mobilize something like NATO's support of this project.

A different situation is now evolving. Take the very same missile defense. Although in the two presidents' joint declaration on the general framework of our relations it is stated that we differ on this problem, the readiness is emphasized to have another look at this situation and try to make collective decisions which would really aim at tracking possible risks of missile proliferation.

I do not want to say that we have a guarantee of an effective resolution of this problem, much to everybody's pleasure. But that there is the willingness to once again look at this problem collectively, along with the acknowledgement that alternatives exist to this project conceived by the Bush administration – this is already a positive fact.

I likewise consider it a positive fact, the willingness fixed in the same joint presidential declaration to hold a serious dialogue involving other states on European security issues, particularly President Dmitry Medvedev's initiative to work out a new treaty on security in the Euro-Atlantic area. This is also an indicator of the preparedness of the US administration to discuss the most complicated problems on the basis of a joint and equal dialogue.

So the atmosphere is now certainly different. As the Russian president stressed at his press conference in London on April 2, very good personal relations had been established. At the same time personal relations are not everything when it concerns relations between states. There happen to be good personal relations, he said, but

interstate relations do not feel that, as was the case in recent years between Moscow and Washington.

But there are grounds to hope now that the personal relationship will help deal with interstate issues. The personal factor is accompanied by a striving to advance on the substance of the issues being discussed. The feeling is that Barack Obama's administration has that desire.

As to the personality of Barack Obama, this is indeed a man who evokes sympathy by his manner of communication, by his ability to listen and by his desire not to avoid complicated issues, including those on which he differs with his interlocutor. He is ready to at once, unequivocally, respond. It evokes equal sympathy, his wish to come to an agreement, move forward and try to bring positions closer.

With regard to humor, I think it was present in the conversation. Right now I cannot cite any aphorisms that will go down in history, but the very tonality showed that the presidents want to maintain kind, good relations.

I can recall as an example the phrase of Barack Obama that he was learning Russian, but that his Russian was, of course, much worse than President Medvedev's English. All of this triggered such a normal human reaction. In my opinion, that's the atmosphere you need. Not to start telling jokes for jokes' sake. But it always wins people over when there is good humor, including making fun of oneself, in a conversation.

Question: What must be done on the Russian and American side before July this year, when the US president comes to Moscow? And can the date of the start of substantive talks on a new treaty to replace START-1 already be named?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: As to the substance of the upcoming Moscow meeting in July, all those questions that are set out in the joint documents adopted in London constitute a plan of work for the next few months before the summit on the territory of the Russian Federation. The process of the preparation of a new document to replace the START-1 Treaty, which elapses in December, is separately highlighted. The instructions contained on this theme in the declaration suggest an immediate start of the appropriate negotiation work. We are ready for this and wait for when a US negotiation team is conclusively shaped, given the procedure of Senate approval of these State Department officials.

By the way, without even waiting when they will be formally approved, negotiators from the Russian foreign and defense ministries already visited Washington at the end of March. There they met the people who will be appointed to these posts. So I hope for many meetings of the negotiation teams to take place during the course of the next several months. In addition, we have agreed that already in May I will travel to Washington where US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and I will look at how things are going in the preparation of documents for the Moscow meeting.

The joint declaration on the general framework of relations has a clear-cut instruction of the presidents to think about how, at the intergovernmental level, we can support the dialogue of the business communities of the two countries. This is one more objective. I hope that we will succeed in forming the proposals toward the Moscow summit. The April 1 declaration also contains the clearly defined positions of both leaders on the need for a more systemic approach to every area of our relations. This, of course, concerns military-political problems and economic and commercial issues and investment matters and a regular and productive dialogue between business circles.

It also concerns such questions as environment protection and climate change, on which Russia and the United States will cooperate not just within the appropriate multilateral mechanisms, but also via bilateral channels. We have common territories on both sides of the Bering Strait. We have common interests regarding environment protection in the Arctic. So that this theme I think will likewise be furthered more actively, more tangibly than until now.

And then, of course, it is about cultural cooperation – promotion of the theme of our joint history, if you like. Right now, by the way, an exhibition dedicated to the friendship between Lincoln and Alexander II is being held in different US cities with great success. Very interesting exhibits are on view there. I hope that this exhibition may one day appear in Russia too.

So the questions are quite a few, the top priority from the chronology viewpoint certainly being the preparation of a document to replace the Treaty on strategic offensive arms. But neither will we shelve any of the other important themes, I think – including economy, European security, and the missile defense talk. Because the joint declaration on the general framework of relations clearly affirms that both governments will draw attention to the interconnection between strategic offensive and defensive arms.

Question: There have been press reports that the US is prepared to make concessions on missile defense in exchange for Moscow's support of the American position on Iran. Is this really so?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: On this theme the Russian president has already said that there can be no tradeoffs here. Both these themes must be considered on their own merits. We are cooperating with Iran and want to continue this cooperation.

The joint declaration of the Russian and US presidents has a detailed paragraph formulated which reaffirms the preparedness of our countries to seek a peaceful, political solution to this problem based on the decisions that are taken in the UN and IAEA. It confirms the right of Iran to access nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Along with this it confirms that Iran as a non-nuclear member of the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons must fulfill the obligations that this document contains.

In this regard, the declaration underlines the important role of Iran's cooperation with the IAEA to clarify the Agency's remaining questions, because many have already been closed.

As to missile defense, we have already showed to our American colleagues more than once and then also, as a matter of fact, publicly explained why we consider that the national security of Russia will stand in danger if, under the pretext of responding to the Iranian problem, the third GMD site is deployed where it is supposed to be deployed.

If we are to speak of the interconnection, missile defense is connected to strategic offensive arms. Because until recently, before the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty, all the arrangements regarding strategic arms had been based on an acknowledgement of the interconnection between strategic offensive and defensive arms. But after the US withdrew from the treaty, this connection was disrupted. And we want that in the discussions to be held this year there should be fulfilled the instruction of the two presidents to the two governments to consider this interconnection in the new conditions.

As to missile defense in principle, our president said we want this problem to be considered, but not in a unilateral way and not in the context of covering just one area of Europe, in a manner that creates security risks for Russia, but in the context of a global approach. Naturally this must occur on the basis of the participation of all concerned countries through the creation of a risk tracking system which would make it possible to identify them in good time and to jointly respond to these risks without creating in anyone a feeling of insufficient security.

Question: US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has virtually completed the formation of her team. Did anything surprise you about her choice of the diplomats who will be responsible for specific areas of US foreign policy? How productive do you think cooperation between the Russian diplomats and the new Clinton team may turn out to be?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: In the US State Department very many officials are approved in the Senate. For the most part, we know the new team. Hilary Clinton has picked up a team of professionals. With her enormous political experience the US Secretary of State can undoubtedly make this team effective. Hopefully that will come to pass.

The first substantive negotiations will already be held very soon. We'll see how things start moving. But the fact that we were able to prepare two documents toward the presidents' meeting in London suggests we are dealing with the professional people who are ready to seek a common denominator in articulating positions. For it was not about merely sending each other signals, this was joint work. And it ended successfully. Hopefully such will be the case in the future.

Question: With a difference of just a few days, two international conferences on Afghanistan were held in Moscow and The Hague. You took part in both. In The Hague, within the framework of the international conference, a meeting between US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke and Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mahdi Akhundzadeh took place, which Hilary Clinton called “brief and warm.” Did it come as a surprise to you? What is your forecast regarding the further development of American-Iranian negotiations?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Both Afghanistan conferences, even though they vary in some ways, are united by a striving to find not just a solution to the problems of that country, but also to the problems that have accumulated around it in the region as soon as possible.

The Moscow conference was prepared by a SCO summit decision; carefully prepared, with a whole series of expert consultations preceding it, both among the SCO members and in the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. The conference in Moscow was dedicated to two most topical themes for the SCO countries: “Combating the drug trafficking” and “Combating the terrorist threat.” The preparatory work resulted in the documents agreed upon whose authors are the SCO members and Afghanistan. I mean the Statement of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group and the Action Plan to implement the common tasks that are formulated in the statement.

These are very concrete documents which presuppose invigorating cooperation in practical areas of the antinarcotics and antiterrorist struggle. That involves a joint analysis of the situation, joint measures, including the conduct of joint exercises, the training of personnel for the needs of the Afghan law enforcement bodies engaged in antiterrorist and antinarcotics activities and many other things, including the creation of collective mechanisms in the sphere of improving the qualification of the appropriate services.

All the questions mentioned by me are formulated in sufficient detail. At the Moscow conference these documents received support in the declaration that was adopted on behalf of all participants in the event. Apart from the SCO members and observers, the representatives of the leaderships of the foreign affairs agencies of the G8 countries, of Turkey and Turkmenistan, and a whole array of international organizations that are engaged in addressing Afghanistan’s problems: UN, CIS, OSCE, CSTO, NATO, European Union and Organization of the Islamic Conference came to Moscow. A concrete task was set for the Moscow conference – to devise some additional steps on the antinarcotics and antiterrorist track. This task was fulfilled.

The Hague conference, by contrast, was convened primarily to mobilize political support for the international community’s efforts. The US colleagues, who initiated it, made no secret of the fact that it was important for them to demonstrate that support on the eve of the NATO summit where the Afghan problem as a priority matter for the Obama administration would be one of the central.

In this regard, the range of invited countries turned out to be much wider than the one in Moscow. No joint documents of all participants in the Hague meeting were adopted. There was adopted the statement of the co-chairs there, namely the Netherlands as the host country, the UN as the coordinating body for all efforts on the Afghan track and the United States as the conference's initiator. The statement lists all the areas in which Afghanistan needs support. In other words, the Hague conference became a general political mobilizing event.

I think that the conferences in Moscow and The Hague mutually complemented each other. Practically all major actors participated in both events anyway. It is important that the central role of the United Nations Organization in coordinating the efforts of the world community was stressed in both Moscow and The Hague. We, by the way, when inviting our US colleagues to the Moscow conference, had agreed that we would help each other in convening these events. That occurred in Geneva at the beginning of March, during our meeting with Hillary Clinton. Also there, she announced that the US would participate in the SCO conference and was suggesting that another Afghanistan conference be held in The Hague. It seems to me that the assistance we rendered to each other in organizing these conferences was useful cooperation.

Now as regards US-Iranian relations: we consider the contacts a positive signal. We welcome the position clearly formulated by President Obama in his message to the Iranian leadership and the Iranian people, which speaks of an intention to normalize relations in all fields. We have been advocating this in the last several years.

We expect the United States to take decision on its full-fledged participation in the process which was started by Group 'Three Plus Three' or 'Five Plus One,' as it is also called, since the Bush administration avoided physical presence in the proposed contacts with Iran after all. I hope that, in their new policy, the Americans will be prepared to sit down at the negotiating table with Iran full-fledgedly and on an equal basis with all of us. I also expect the Iranian side to positively respond to the offers that were made quite a while ago and presuppose commencing full-format negotiations on nuclear problems, economic and commercial cooperation and regional security. It is necessary to start a substantive conversation on how to help the IAEA remove the still-outstanding questions and to restore trust in the exclusively peaceful character of the Iranian nuclear program. In this case Iran, as was stated by the Three Plus Three Group, will enjoy all the rights that the nonnuclear members of the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons do.

Question: About ten years ago the Russian MFA was often criticized for Russia having actually relinquished its positions in the Balkans. An opposite tendency has become clearly apparent in the last three years. Moreover, for example, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov considers that the Bulgarians have managed to combine on their territory the practically uncombinable – Russian pipelines and US military bases. Such "cohabitation" does not trouble the Russian MFA?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Well, we have never said we have a monopoly on this or that country, on this or that geopolitical space. But we have always said the lawful interests of Russia that meet with the reciprocity of our partners in any region of the world must be taken into account. The Balkans are a part of Europe where Russia historically was not just present, but took a direct part in solving the problems in which the peoples of the region had a vital stake. Such was the case in the 19th century and during World War Two and at other periods.

We want to develop our traditional ties with the Balkan states and peoples that are deeply rooted in history. They want the same thing. And we are going to realize this interest in joint projects, be it energy, investment projects, trade or other forms of economic cooperation. Also, don't forget about cultural ties, where we likewise have mutual interests.

As to the NATO membership of states with which we develop relations, our position is well known. We believe expanding the alliance in present-day conditions makes absolutely no sense and we are convinced that security for the countries of the European region can be effectively provided by non-bloc methods which would give no rise to suspicion or questions.

We are, of course, concerned by the fact that the appearance of military bases on the territory of new NATO members – Bulgaria and Romania – does not square with the assurances and political commitments that were given at the junction of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. They first promised us not to expand NATO eastward. Later, when this did happen, at a high and at the top level, the pledges were assumed not to deploy any “substantial combat forces” on the territories of the new members.

But the bases are being established. When asked about this, our partners would invariably say, it's “non-substantial” combat forces. Since the notion “substantial combat forces” was not prescribed at the adoption of this political pledge, we have been trying to get it concretized for several years now. So far our partners have been reluctant to do that, and we will continue to seek clarity within the framework of the Russia-NATO Council (RNC) and our dialogue with the Americans.

And yet there is a whole array of countries which, having joined NATO, did not succumb to the example of some of their colleagues, did not engage in anti-Russian policies to suit circumstances, but are guided by their national interests. Bulgaria, mentioned by you, holds such a position. I hope rather than the logic of membership in a military-political bloc, the logic of a contemporary world which must not be fragmented by dividing lines will prevail in the position of all European countries. It is worthwhile to recall another commitment enshrined in RNC and OSCE documents, that no one should secure himself at another's expense. So far, unfortunately, the plans of further NATO expansion really risk breaching this commitment and creating new dividing lines. In our endeavor, we will persistently work to ensure that this does not happen.

Question: Of late we have quite often been hearing the argument, from different European capitals, that maybe it's time to admit Russia to NATO? In your opinion, why has this idea surfaced exactly now and what stands behind it?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: It's hard for me to judge. We haven't filed any application, for either membership or candidate membership. The Russia-NATO Council format would fully suit us if it began to work as intended, notably on the basis of respect for the above principle of equal security, when none of the participants of this Council seeks to secure himself at another's expense. It is equally important that the RNC should, at last, start working not in the format "NATO members plus Russia," or even "NATO members versus Russia" (which also sometimes happened), but in the format of each country in its national capacity. That's the exact format agreed on in the Russia-NATO Council founding documents, but it is not being realized in practice.

Now NATO suggests that the RNC's work be resumed. It was interrupted in August last year not on our initiative. We, on the contrary, wanted to convene the Russia-NATO Council at the height of the military actions to halt Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia. But then our NATO countries somewhat shamefacedly avoided discussing things.

Now they suggest that the work of the Russia-NATO Council be restored. We are ready for this. But we still want to find out why this mechanism failed to be activated in the August days of last year. We want to have a frank talk about the principles on which we are going to work after all. If on the principles that lie at the core of this mechanism, which were endorsed at the highest level, then we stand ready for close cooperation. If, however, these principles now do not suit our partners for some reason, then, naturally, we'll have to sort out the future of our joint endeavor.

Question: France's return to NATO's military structure does not disturb you?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: This is, of course, an internal matter of France, a sovereign decision which was adopted by its leadership and formalized in accordance with the French laws.

Honestly speaking, I see no particular reason for worry. Russia has very close relations with France. Ever since Soviet times, these relations have always been called privileged. Incidentally, for some reason this term, when it was in September last year used by President Dmitry Medvedev, caused so much noise and commotion. So now a privileged relationship between Moscow and France has been evolving for decades. France actively champions taking Russia's security interests into account in further military-political building in Europe. It has been France that has consistently stood for the identity of Europe in Euro-Atlantic cooperation. All these factors combined, I think, give no grounds for any fears.

Question: A few days ago Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said he was determined to create qualitatively new armed forces with US assistance and added:

“Let no one have any illusions.” Moreover, of the now existing Georgian army he said that its preparation “of course, was not designed for the conduct of a full-scale war, it was designed for peaceful police operations.” Of what illusions, in your opinion, did Saakashvili speak? And do you consider that the Georgian president has actually declared that he is preparing for a new serious conflict with Russia?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: We have no illusions regarding Saakashvili. We strove to foster normal cooperation with Georgia for a very long time, in virtually all the years of his stay in office. On Vladimir Putin’s instruction I traveled to Tbilisi at the beginning of 2005. Following the talks with Saakashvili and the foreign minister a decision was taken on the accelerated removal of the two remaining Russian military bases from Georgia. Further, Saakashvili agreed to a package arrangement: we remove the bases (which we did even earlier than agreed), create a joint Russian-Georgian antiterrorist center, emphasizing our striving to cooperate in security issues, and Georgia adopts a law that there will never be any military bases of any state on its territory.

We fulfilled our part of the agreement. Saakashvili did not fulfill anything. There were only timid contacts on the creation of an antiterrorist center, which the Georgian side later ceased. Already then this man’s treaty incompetence manifested itself.

Well, as to the August events, there is no shortage of facts, which have been abundantly provided by the Russian side, by the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, by western experts and journalists. Everything is published and well known.

On the European Union’s initiative, a commission was established to investigate these facts. We are cooperating with it. Moreover, we want all those who were connected with the August events one way or another to cooperate with this commission so that the commission really takes up clearing up the role of the states that armed Georgia, looking at what kind of weapons those were, via what channels they were delivered, whether only legally or also covertly. At what prices. How does this square with the codes that are adopted in the European Union and the OSCE and which presuppose that no supplies of offensive arms should be allowed into conflict zones.

And then, before August 8, there were two conflict zones within Georgia which were acknowledged as such in United Nations and OSCE decisions. Furthermore, everybody was ready to settle these conflicts in the framework of respect for Georgia’s territorial integrity, which, by the way, President Medvedev told Saakashvili, when they met in St. Petersburg on June 6 last year. At the end of this meeting they agreed to move forward in the settlement, and in particular that Tbilisi would conclude agreements with Tskhinval and Sukhum on the nonuse of force.

All these issues were discussed, but in the middle of July last year the Georgian side again showed its treaty incompetence and simply ceased to respond to our messages. And then the attack on South Ossetia occurred. The quantity and quality of the arms which Georgia used indicate that this was by no means a police, but a real army operation, which acquired the form of aggression.

It is worrying that bellicose rhetoric goes unabated in Tbilisi to this day. There are serious grounds to suspect the preparation of new military provocations. It's deplorable that against this background certain friends of Tbilisi have again started arming the Saakashvili regime.

Question: UN reform options were quite actively discussed before the outbreak of the economic crisis. Now the world has entirely different priority problems, primarily of a financial character. Does this mean that UN reform has been shelved?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Quite the opposite. UN reform is in progress. By UN reform it is customary to understand the reform of the Security Council in the first place. However, although this is the most acute issue of concern to everybody, the UN reform is actually considerably broader.

Within the framework of the reformation process, the Peacebuilding Council has been established to ensure a smooth transition from the stage of conflict settlement in a country to the stage of post-conflict recovery.

In addition, instead of the Human Rights Commission, which was subordinate to the UN Economic and Social Council, a new body has been established – the Human Rights Council, subordinate to the General Assembly, which enhances its status. Its mandate lays down that all countries without exception are subject to human rights assessment. A mechanism has been devised which guarantees that each country will, with certain periodicity, undergo an impartial international analysis.

There are other reform directions. I will not dwell on them now. But the Security Council reform is, of course, the most topical theme. Many states are convinced of the necessity to enlarge its membership, and to make it more representative primarily by correcting the imbalance, as a result of which developing nations are represented in the Security Council much less than developed countries.

For a long time negotiations went within the working group that was created in New York. From this year it was decided to hold them in the format of intergovernmental negotiations. They have already begun. There is a whole array of proposals on concrete reform options. They need to be treated seriously. A decision can't be delayed indefinitely. It is necessary to seek compromises between extreme positions, between those who necessarily want to add permanent seats to the Security Council and those who are categorically against the creation of new permanent seats and are ready to agree to the creation of additional nonpermanent seats only.

Furthermore, it is important to do so that the compromise, which we are ready to help find, should enjoy the widest support possible and to arrive if not at consensus then at the broadest possible agreement. Otherwise rather than strengthening its legitimacy, an enlarged Council may, on the contrary, weaken it, which would be counterproductive both for the functions and for the authority of the main international body responsible for the maintenance of peace and security. But the

reform process goes on. And we favor not only its being actively continued, but also accelerated as far as possible.

Question: From dozens of readers' questions we chose one: "Good morning, Sergey Viktorovich. Firstly, we would like to thank you for the example which by your work you set for the young generation. Firmness and determination, subtly bordering on readiness to make a compromise in solving issues of state importance, are important qualities which need to be fostered in oneself. Secondly, we would like to ask you the following question. How would you advise a young specialist from a region to build his career so he could become a staff member of the MFA of the Russian Federation in the future? Saratov. Pavel Rodin."

Foreign Minister Lavrov: We now employ young men and women not only from MGIMO, but also from many other universities. In Soviet times MGIMO was practically the monopolist for the supply of young cadres to the Ministry.

In recent years up to 40 percent of the new recruits have come to us for work from other tertiary education institutions and not only from Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities of the European part of Russia, but also from Far Eastern State University and TEIs in Siberia.

Some difficulties for those who are not MGIMO graduates do exist, because the rudiments of knowledge concerning international problems and the diplomatic service are built into the very education process at MGIMO. But MGIMO, we must do justice to its leaders, does not behave like a dog in the manger. Several years ago, with our concurrence, MGIMO opened the so called winter school where students from other universities and from other Russian cities who want to join the Foreign Ministry can during the winter holidays take an intensive course in order to acquaint themselves with the specifics of the training of personnel for international activities.

Housing is, of course, another difficulty. We have limited service accommodation spaces. However, we try our best to solve these issues with support from the country's leadership and with Moscow City Government assistance. There is some definite progress, but so far we cannot satisfy all those wishing. And the third aspect which is important when seeking employment at the MFA is that an applicant needs to know two foreign languages and secure a position in competition with other applicants. Our website has information on that score.

Question: In his latest appearance in the Verkhovna Rada, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko once again promised to do everything possible to restore full-value relations between Kyiv and Moscow. To what extent today, from your viewpoint, can the Ukrainian politicians be believed altogether? Especially after the clamorous gas declaration that Kyiv and Brussels signed recently.

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Our relations with Ukraine are relations of enormous importance. The two brother peoples who are tied and will, I am convinced, for long, long years ahead, be tied by a huge quantity of bonds must, of course, live in

maximally comfortable conditions for communication at all levels – from economy to purely human, family relations. That's the way we endeavor to develop our ties and very much do not want them to be burdened with artificially created problems.

We do not want that the agreements that are concluded with the Ukrainian colleagues should then be retrospectively reconsidered. There are not a few examples of this, unfortunately. In particular, I mean the so called zero-option agreement, when all ex-Soviet republics agreed that the Russian Federation would assume all assets of the former Soviet Union and repay all its debts for this. Russia, by the way, has already repaid all the debts, paying inter alia 14 billion dollars to cover Ukraine's share in the debt of the Soviet Union. But the Ukrainian parliament has not ratified the zero-option agreement.

Another example: the Azov and Kerch accord, which calls for devising mechanisms for joint use of the Kerch Strait. Now our Ukrainian colleagues insist on delimitation in the strait, although this runs counter to the accord on the joint use of this water area, vitally important for the Russian Federation.

Well, an entirely fresh example – January of this year. After long negotiations, zigzags, and arrivals/departures the long-term agreements were signed for the supply of Russian gas to Ukraine and transit of Russian gas through Ukraine. Of course, the declaration that was signed between the European Union and Ukraine in Brussels on March 23 does not square with these accords.

This declaration was prepared without our participation. We learned about its preparation at the last moment, and then also by chance. Nobody was going to inform us. To the questions which we began to ask even before the signing of the declaration, no answers followed. We, by the way, later found out that most European Union member countries had also learned about this declaration after it was signed and proclaimed (and not to mention the West European energy companies that are the principal partners of Gazprom). As a result we had to postpone the meeting scheduled for this week of the Committee on Economic Cooperation, which the Russian and Ukrainian prime ministers head, in order to sort things out.

I have cited only three examples, but there are many more. In such conditions it is hard to negotiate and seriously agree on something. We hope that the Ukrainian side understands the need to avoid such situations and still be guided by what we agree upon. Otherwise it's very hard to plan joint work in the framework of relations between such two major partners for each other, which Russia and Ukraine are. We very much want these relations to be friendly, mutually beneficial and based exclusively on the interests of our countries and peoples.

Question: Among the generally known abbreviations, such as UN, SCO, NATO and EEC, a new one appeared not so long ago: BRIC. In what direction will this association develop? What is its further evolution?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: The uniqueness of this abbreviation in comparison with all the others that you have mentioned is that nobody created this structure. It arose, well, generally, in the big picture, from statistical handbooks.

Some time ago an auditing firm, presenting its regular analysis, called Brazil, Russia, India and China the most promising economies. A while later the natural idea arose to meet and look at how each of our countries perceived this forecast and whether we had some common themes for discussion. Especially as in the quadrangle very close contacts are established between each of the two sides, and a dense fabric of interaction is created in the economy and in the political, humanitarian and other spheres.

Such meetings began to be held first on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Three years ago there was the first such meeting at the level of ministers of foreign affairs. We got together without any agenda. It turned out that the conversation was interesting. Then another such meeting took place. Later during the G8 summit in St. Petersburg, where the four leaders participated in some or other formats, the first brief meeting of the BRIC countries at the top level took place. There were some additional meetings between the foreign ministers after this. And in the context of the financial crisis our finance ministers also felt they had something to talk about in preparation for the G20 summits in Washington and London. Now in the BRIC format cooperation is being fostered under the auspices of the security councils and antimonopoly services and at the level of municipal authorities. A joint approach towards ensuring international food security is being worked out.

In June of this year, when a SCO summit will take place in Yekaterinbug, it is planned to hold a BRIC summit also there.

We'll see what comes next. We have both identical views on international politics and the possibility to coordinate our actions in the G20, in the United Nations and in other forums, where our countries are represented one way or another. We will act on the promptings of life.