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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement at a meeting with the permanent representatives of the member countries of the Arab League, Cairo, 24 July 2022

Dear Secretary General,

Dear President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your Excellencies,

It's a great honor to address the Arab League' representatives on the issues of the cooperation between the Russian Federation and your organization. The relations are based on a Memorandum, which will be 20 years old in 2023. This would be an important anniversary. Today with the Secretary General agreeded to take talks on where we are and what additional plans we can introduce to promote our relations in various fields: be trade, investment, culture, education, and of course cooperation on international issues. This would be one of the important tasks of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum. It met already five times. And we are planning to have a sixth meeting soon.

I'm grateful for the interest the Arab League is paying to the situation in and around Ukraine. We appreciated balanced, fair, responsible position taken by the Member States and by the League as such. In April we received the Contact group of the Arab League. It was a useful discussion which allowed sides to ask questions and to give answers. We are very open to continue this dialogue with our friends in the Arab League and in other parts of the world, as it were, we have nothing to hide.

We have explained the reasons why we started the special military operation, the reasons being many years of neglect, which our Western colleagues showed towards the legitimate concerns of the Russian Federation about our security. Starting with NATO expansion closer to our borders in spite of the promises given to the Soviet leadership before the Soviet Union disappeared and, of course, pulling countries of the former Soviet Union, including first of all, Ukraine into NATO.

Ukraine was chosen to be anti-Russia, as we say. It was pumped with weapons, naval and other military bases were planned to be built on Ukrainian soil. The organizers of the illegal coup d'état in February, 2014 were not called to discipline by their Western sponsors. On the contrary, the West supported this thing. While the coup leaders immediately, when they took power, announced their intention to cancel the status of the Russian language in Ukraine, announced the intention to wipe out Russians from Crimea. They sent armed groups to storm Crimean Parliament. You know the rest – Crimean people stood against this and they held referendum on independence, and then they joined the Russian Federation.

In the East of Ukraine they also did not accept the coup. They said: “Guys, we can not recognize this illegal power which you took in spite of a deal on settlement and on early elections. You could not wait several months for the democratic process and you decided to use force”. By the way, when the coup leaders took power they violated the agreement the first line of which said “create the government of national unity to prepare national elections”. When they staged the coup, they went to the square with all these demonstrators and they proudly announced: “Congratulate us, we created the government of the winners”. This means that the other part of Ukraine, which did not support them, was supposed to be losers. I do not think this is the way to promote national reconciliation, national peace. Who else? I mean, you, your countries would know that better than many others, what is the price of this winner-loser situation when it comes to building national consensus.

Later, those territories of Ukraine, which did not accept the coup and just asked to be left alone were announced terrorists, although they never attacked the rest of Ukraine, they just said: “We do not want to be under the illegal government. They were announced to be terrorists. Anti-terrorist operation was launched with bombing cities by war planes, artillery, multiple launch rocket systems. That is how the war in the East of Ukraine started, which we managed to stop only one year later in February, 2015, when the Minsk Agreements were signed keeping Ukraine one-piece sovereign territorially integral with special status granted to these two republics, which agreed not to insist on independence, but to be part of the Minsk Agreements, to be part of Ukraine. Special status was not asking for too much: Russian language, which is fully in line with numerous international conventions on minority languages, plus local Police, the right to be consulted when judges and prosecutors are being appointed for these territories and some special economic facilitated regime between these republics and the adjacent areas of the Russian Federation. Something like Republika Srpska in Bosnia has with Serbia, something like what was promised to the Serbs in Kosovo – the deal was reached in 2013 with the help of the European Union. The deal is still not being implemented to the shame of the European Union.

Actually, the special status for Donbass in Ukraine was also negotiated with the assistance of the leaders of the European Union, Germany and France. And like in the case of Kosovo European Union failed completely to deliver on what was guaranteed by the signatures of its members. The Minsk Agreements were sabotaged by the Kiev regime for all these seven long years. In the meantime, instead of resuming economic relations with these two territories, they were in a blockade, economically and transport wise. And instead of getting in touch with them for a direct dialogue demanded by the Minsk Agreements, endorsed by the Security Council of the United Nations, they refused to meet with them. They said that everything must be decided by the Russian Federation, which is never mentioned in the Minsk Agreements. But the demand for the Kiev regime to talk directly to these territories is repeated several times.

It was clear that Germany and France and the EU in general are not willing to insist on something they guaranteed to be implemented. In this case as well. The gentleman who signed this Minsk Agreements on behalf of Ukraine, the then President of Ukraine Mr.Poroshenko publicly stated a couple of weeks ago: “When I signed those Agreements, I never intended to implement them. I did this to gain more time to get more Western weapons”. And he said they succeeded. For this purpose the Minsk Agreements fulfilled their role. Very cynically, but at least honestly.

In the process we have been repeatedly drawing the attention of our Western colleagues to the dangerous developments in and around Ukraine, especially when Ukraine was pulled into NATO. We proposed several times, starting from 2009, a treaty, which would do a very simple thing – codify the solemn political commitment, which was endorsed at the summits of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe several times, last time in 2010 in Kazakhstan. The commitment being about the adherence to the Concept of Equal and Indivisible Security, which clearly said, any country can choose alliances, but in doing so no country can increase its security at the expense of the security of others and no organization in Europe can pretend to dominate the security agenda. NATO was doing exactly that by expanding and insisting that NATO has the right to decide who is to join disregarding the interest of Russia and other countries.

Since this political commitment did not work, we proposed a treaty which would codify this commitment and make it legally binding. We were told “no way”, legally binding security guarantees can only be provided inside NATO, which is a violation of the principle itself that no organization can pretend to dominate security space. The last attempt we undertook was in December, 2021 when once again we updated this approach and presented treaties on security to the United States and another one to NATO, and again we were rejected. They said: “Well, maybe we can think of not placing some of the dangerous weapons on Ukrainian soil, but as regards NATO membership it is none of your business, we will decide it together with Ukraine without asking you and without taking into account whatever concerns you might have”. And in the meantime, the bombing and shelling of those territories, which should have been given special status under the Minsk Agreements, continued and the weapons continued to be pumped into Ukraine. When we understood that there would be no implementation of the UN Security Council resolution on the Minsk Agreements, when we understood that Ukrainian government is clearly opting for plan B, we did not have any other choice, but to recognize the independence of these two republics, to sign treaties on mutual assistance with them and to provide military support to defend their population from the Kiev regime.

The regime evolved during the period after the coup in a very specific direction. Just like the President Poroshenko regime its successor, the regime of President Zelenskiy has been adopting law after law prohibiting Russian language in education, in the media space and then prohibiting it in regular life. They introduced administrative penalties for those who, for example, might use Russian language entering an office of local government or even a store. At the same time, legislation was promoted to encourage Neo-Nazi practices and theories. Those who were found guilty by the Nuremberg tribunal, who collaborated with Hitler, served in Waffen SS, who were guilty of killing and murdering Russians, Jews, citizens of Poland and other nationalities were pronounced national Ukrainian heroes. This was another indication that the regime was going in a way of racism, very aggressive and Neo-Nazi direction. We have been drawing the attention of our Western colleagues to these facts during all these long seven years as the Minsk Agreements were sabotaged and Russian culture and everything being Russian was eroded from Ukrainian life. We got very cold shoulder from the Western partners who totally ignored the interests of the Russian population in Ukraine as well as they ignored the interests of the Russian speakers in Latvia, Estonia and other parts of the European Union.

So we announced the special military operation. We are determined to help the people of the East of Ukraine to liberate themselves from the burden of this absolutely unacceptable regime, to be able to freely use their language, to practice their religion, their culture, their tradition, their family values. And this is exactly the wish of the people who live there. You only need to go to those territories and see how they feel on the territories not controlled by the Ukrainian government. By the way, we have invited all foreign journalists to go there and see for themselves to be able to learn the truth. There is not very enthusiastic response from the key media outlets. Some people admit to us privately that their governments categorically prohibit them from going there.

The operation continues. We are not closing door to negotiations. Actually, when few days after it started Ukrainian government asked for negotiations, we agreed. For almost one month there were several meetings, which led nowhere because Ukrainian delegation could not present its position. Eventually at the end of March in Istanbul they did produce a paper, which contained the principles on which they wanted to settle. And we supported this without any caveat. We suggested to put these ideas in a form of a treaty and propose this draft to Ukrainians in mid-April. Since then we have not heard from them. But what we did hear publicly, what the statements by president Zelensky and his countless advisors saying: “We can only negotiate when we fully defeat Russia, take back all our territories”.

By the way, in the process they shell those territories, leaving quarters, residential areas, schools, kindergartens and people whom they believe must come back under their government. Not to mention the methods of military operations. They apply using civilians as human shield, deploying heavy weapons in schools, hospitals and other civilian sites and territories.

Back to negotiations. Since mid-April we have not heard any response from them to the draft treaty, which was written on the basis of their concept, exactly on the basis of the principles, which they themselves proposed. And the statements we hear from Western capitals certainly are very belligerent and aggressive. The West insists that Ukraine must not start negotiations until Russia is defeated in the battlefield. That is the official statement repeated by Berlin, Brussels, London, Washington and some other Western capitals.

What does this mean at this particular stage? This means that we cannot wait forever. We cannot just watch how the people living on the territories controlled by the Kiev regime suffer. We cannot watch the continued efforts to use Ukraine as a stairhead in the war against Russia.

When Russian troops took some positions in Ukraine, we discovered dozens of laboratories, which were involved in military biological activities, experimenting with very dangerous pathogens with a clear indication that this was not just scientific experiment, but was oriented towards creating biological weapons. We initiated the process under the Biological Weapons Convention under Articles four and five to start investigation and we will insist on transparency of anything United States and its allies are doing in the area of military biological activities, because they have hundreds of laboratories all over the world, including regions of Central Asia, Asia, Latin America. It is a very dangerous development. And another indication which is worth mentioning is that when our military take Ukrainian battalion fighters prisoners, we immediately see what they actually are. They are all tattooed with swastika symbols, within insignia of Waffen SS divisions, with Hitler, "Mein Kampf". The headquarters, which our military take after the Ukrainians flee, are full of propaganda materials coming from the Third Reich, praising Nazi collaborators, praising those who have been subject to the Nuremberg Tribunal verdict. So this Neo-Nazi education of the population, if you wish, is very deeply rooted in the day-to-day life of Ukraine and especially of the Ukrainian army.

We are sorry for the Ukrainian people who deserve much better. We are sorry for the history of Ukraine which is being ruined in front of our eyes. And we are sorry for those who yielded to the state propaganda by Kiev regime and its Western supporters, trying to make sure that Ukraine becomes eternal enemy of Russia. This would not prevail. This would not succeed. Russian and Ukrainian people would continue to live together, we will certainly help Ukrainian people to get rid of the regime, which is absolutely anti-people and anti-historical, if you wish. It is on a very wrong side of history, a side of history, which was accused at Nuremberg Tribunal forever. The attempts to revive in the modern world those absolutely criminal illegal practices, which were applied by Hitler are doomed to fail. I have no slightest doubt.

Having said this I would like to, once again, mention the discussions on this issue with our Arab friends and with our friends in other parts of the world. We want to listen to you. We want to understand what you think, what is of concern to you, what kind of questions you have. We would always be ready for this dialogue and ready to satisfy your interest. There are so many fakes in the situation in Ukraine and around Ukraine as it is presented in the Western media, that explanations clarifications, regular dialogue with the real facts in the hands are very important.

One fake story, which I would like to mention here, which is important to this region is the so-called world food crisis, which is being blamed bluntly unconditionally on Russia as if the food crisis started on the day when we launched our special military operation in Ukraine. If anybody wants to be objective, they could read statistics from the World Food Program, from the Food and Agriculture Organization, which describes the difficulties in the food market beginning with coronavirus pandemic, when some contacts and supply chains were affected. Then the Americans and the Europeans started printing money by trillions of dollars and euros using this money to buy food, medicines and other stuff. Of course, the drought during four years in succession in this region also played a role. And yes, the crisis was aggravated by the illegal Western sanctions against the Russian Federation. They were trying to pretend that sanctions do not cover grain food and fertilizers. If you just take a look at the list of sanctions, you will see that, yes, food was exempted, but what was not exempted was the possibility for the Russian ships to call on the Mediterranean ports as well as the possibility of foreign ships to call on the Russian ports to take grain and other food cargos. What was not exempted, either, was the insurance of the Russian supplies of grain and what was not exempted was the payment mechanisms, which were under sanctions. And this lie has been repeated again and gain only to culminate in a deal which was eventually signed in Istanbul on the 22nd of July. It obliged the Secretary General of the United Nations, who initiated the process, to persuade and to get the decision from the Western countries to lift all those limitations, which I listed, and to stop preventing the Russian grain from being delivered to the buyers.

In the process, there was also a decision on the Ukrainian grain locked in the Black Sea ports for more than two months. On a daily basis our Navy has been announcing safe corridors in the international waters in the Black Sea, provided the ships, which are being blocked in Ukrainian ports because the coastline was mined by Ukraine. There are still some 70 ships from 16 countries staying there as they could not leave because of the mines. So, we suggested that if the Ukrainian side organized demining or clearing some safe passages, then we would guarantee safety and security of the ships in the international waters to go to the straits and then to the Mediterranean Sea. We cooperated with Turkey, which agreed to do this together. But until recently Ukraine was categorically refusing to do this demining. Eventually, we managed, as I said, to agree in Istanbul. The second paper was signed. Ukraine demines and lets the ships out in the open sea. Russia and Turkey together with another participant, which is to be determined, accompany the convoys to the straits. In case the ships are coming to pick additional grain from Ukrainian ports on the way there, the ships would be inspected to make sure that they do not bring any weapons, which would only be detrimental to the continued conflict. This is just one example how the truth is being presented in a very distorted way to send the message that everything which is not good in the modern world is because of the Russian Federation.

The aggressiveness with which the West addressed this situation, both from the point of view of physical sanctions and the hate speech indicates one very simple conclusion. It is not about Ukraine, but about the future of the world order. Our Western friends stopped using the expression “international law”. They say: “Everybody must support rules-based world order”. And the rules are written depending on what specific situation the West wants to resolve in its own favor.

We are at the beginning of very serious changes in the multilateral settings. More and more countries are thinking about some alternative means to service their trade instead of dollars, more and more countries are moving towards using national currencies in servicing trade and other economic exchanges using supply chains, which would not be dependent on the capricious behavior of the United States and its allies. It will take a long time, but we are at the beginning of a new era, which would be a movement towards real multilateralism, not to the multilateralism, which the West tries to impose on the basis of the exceptional role of the Western civilization in the modern world. The world is much richer than just Western civilization. Who but not many of you representing the ancient civilizations should know this. And I think the movement is unstoppable. Trying to put it on breaks is going against objective process of history. This would only delay for some time the eventual formation of the true multipolar democratic world.

I always suggest to my Western colleagues when they raise the issue of democracy, rule of law and so on and so forth in this or that country while raising these issues to start applying the criteria of democracy to international relations. After all, the UN Charter says that the UN is based on the respect of the sovereign equality of states. If this is the case, democracy should be respected in international relations. One country believes that it has done the right thing, another country says it does not agree, but let all the others listen to one, then listen to another and then make up their own mind. Let us not support the practice of one country or group of countries running all over the world, demanding from countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America not to meet with Russians or the Chinese, even not to take pictures with somebody. I think it is beyond the dignity of those who are doing so. They do not respect themselves and those whom they try to threaten with punishment unless they do what they are told to. I do not think anybody can like this kind of treatment. And once again, I believe this treatment does not make credit to those who engage in such kind of activities.

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate our determination to promote partnership with the Arab League, our interest in promoting economic cooperation. Actually, since we signed the memorandum on our cooperation, the trade increased considerably reaching more than 20 billion dollars. Maybe next time we will count in other currencies, not in dollars. And, of course, this amount is not something overwhelming. Other countries' trade with the region in much bigger numbers, but we are on the right track. The steady increase of our trade and investment activities is a good indication that we are strengthening the foundation of our cooperation. And this cooperation extends also to international and regional issues. We cooperate on Palestine. This issue is in a very bad shape because of the unwillingness of the United States to revive the activities of the Quartet with participation of the Arab League representatives. We also discuss Libya, Syria and other issues in the region of responsibility of the Arab League. We highly appreciate the traditional interest shown by the League to get the position, the view of the Russian Federation. And for us, the advice of the League is very valuable.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you very much for your attention and please trust your Secretary General to continue sending right messages to the Russian Federation.



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