



Moscow

Speech and replies to questions by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the meeting with heads of the member companies of the Association of European Businesses in the Russian Federation, Moscow, 14 October 2014

Mr. Chairman of the Board of the Association of European Businesses,
ladies and gentlemen,

I'm happy to have one more opportunity to speak before the AEB members. Our regular meetings have become a good tradition.

Apart from entrepreneurs, this meeting is attended by many diplomats and journalists – our friends who are always with us. This reflects an interesting trend of the last few months – now diplomats are watching closer those who do business in Russia. I hope diplomats will draw the right conclusions from these observations with a view to supporting the interests of national business.

Regrettably, today we are meeting in a far-from-favourable environment. During our past contacts, we said that relations between Russia and the European Union had approached the moment of truth when it was necessary to decide on the future course of cooperation and determine whether we were strategic partners for each other or still remained geopolitical rivals.

Our European partners – and we continue to consider them partners, no matter what statements are made in Brussels – made their choice at this crossroads. They sharply jacked up the political stakes on Ukraine's future without any objective grounds. This was an attempt to compel Ukraine, a large European country with serious domestic issues, to play the friend-or-foe game. Ukraine was supposed to make an unequivocal choice between the East and the West as regards the development of trade, economic and political ties.

Mr. Philippe Pegorier, you represent Alstom in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Apparently, your company appointed you to this position with good reason, realising in full how closely knit our economies are. An attempt to undermine these ties will not facilitate business success. I hope the majority of other representatives of business structures not only in Russia but also in neighbouring countries know this from their own practical experience. It is important to explain to diplomats and bureaucrats who write different agreements that such games are inadmissible because the economy does not tolerate them.

In an effort to force Ukraine to make a choice in favour of the European Union and to the detriment of Russia, Brussels supported an unconstitutional and ultranationalist coup d'état, contrary to its own democratic values, and resigned itself to the termination of the national reconciliation agreement of 21 February that was concluded with the direct involvement of the foreign ministers of leading European countries. The EU facilitated the illegal seizing of power in Kiev by forces that openly proclaimed a striving to ignore the legitimate interests of a considerable part of their own population and to rely on ideas and slogans rooted in the gloomy Nazi era. It turned out that, in the opinion of Brussels, Ukraine is just about the only country where, for some reason, generally accepted

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European principles, including respect for the rights of minorities, efforts to combat extremism and a peaceful resolution of conflicts, do not apply.

Since February 2014, European capitals virtually supported the “party of war” in Kiev for several months. Political and economic resources, including anti-Russian sanctions, were used for this purpose. Incidentally, this was done contrary to the interests of Europeans themselves. Of course, we realise that the EU made all these decisions under strong US pressure, as openly stated by US Vice President Biden not so long ago. But it is all the more important that we clarify issues regarding prospects of Russia-EU cooperation and Europe’s place in the modern world.

It is impossible to defend various motives used to plunge Ukraine into the abyss of a civil war and a profound political crisis, from the positions of reasonable logic. I am confident that everyone has already comprehended this. On 12 September 2014, the EU agreed, after much deliberation – and we consider this to be a step in the right direction – to delay implementing the Ukraine–EU Association Agreement that served as a pretext for overthrowing Viktor Yanukovich. So, what was the reason for killing thousands of people and crippling dozens of thousands of human destinies and perpetrating horrendous destruction in southeastern Ukraine? This can be considered a rhetorical question. The real motives of Western decisions regarding Ukraine are highlighted by the fact that the largest package of anti-Russian economic sanctions was introduced already after the attainment of a ceasefire agreement in southeastern Ukraine.

During all the stages of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia has invariably striven to voice a reasonable stance aiming to achieve mutually acceptable compromises. As far back as last autumn, we supported the idea of holding trilateral consultations in the Russia-Ukraine-EU format, so as to help the Ukrainian government find a balance between obligations before its neighbours in the East and the West. Brussels rejected this idea. We supported the above-mentioned agreement of 21 February that was rejected by the EU a couple of days later. On 17 April 2014, we approved various principles in Geneva together with the United States, the EU and Ukraine. These principles called for an immediate inclusive dialogue on the Ukrainian constitutional reform that would involve all its regions. And this document also remains on paper, and our attempts to approve it at the UN Security Council and the OSCE have met with resistance from Washington, Brussels and Kiev – our coauthors of this (Geneva) document. In other words, our partners have missed a turn leading to peace at every stage.

An honest and objective position makes it impossible to claim that Russia has caused damage to the system of international relations in the Euro-Atlantic area, if of course this system is not understood as an arrangement where some countries can impose their will on others and decide when they should or shouldn’t obey international law and who they should pardon or punish.

Russia has taken a position of truth and fairness, coming out in support of a political settlement in Ukraine, based on a regard for the best interests of all its regions, political groups and ethnic minorities as well as for the legitimate right of Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine to their

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language, culture, traditions and lifestyles. We have also supported the free will of the people of Crimea, who were dead set against a reenactment of the bloody "Maidan" scenario on the peninsula. To be sure, sanctions are harmful. Unilateral sanctions are an illegal tool, whose use has been condemned by the UN General Assembly. We regard the EU-introduced restrictions as unlawful actions that facilitate neither conflict de-escalation, nor the protection of Ukrainians' rights. And of course, we will not discuss any criteria for lifting the sanctions. They should be withdrawn by those who introduced them. We will not meet someone's far-fetched demands.

We don't know, whether it is Russia or the EU that stands to lose more economically. The EC estimates for last summer indicate that the EU-introduced economic restrictions could cost EU taxpayers 40 billion euros this year and another 50 billion in 2015. It is likely that right now these figures are even higher. There is even talk about an "unexpected weakening of the German economy." Russia is also experiencing damage. But at the same time the situation is strengthening our resolve to concentrate our resources, upgrade our industries and infrastructure, and on the whole work more efficiently in all areas. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly spoken about this and the Russian Government has adopted the relevant resolutions.

Sanctions are not our choice. We have been forced to respond in a fitting manner to our partners' unfriendly actions. I'd like to stress that Russia transitioned to economic retaliation only after the Western countries imposed financial restrictions on the major state banks that are the main providers of industrial and agricultural credit in Russia. By hampering Russian access to European credit resources, Brussels has, in effect, created more favourable conditions for European commodities on our domestic market. It should not be forgotten that EU subsidies per one hectare of cultivated areas are 500% higher than Russia's. Accordingly, measures to restrict food imports from the EU are not sanctions. They are about our right to defend national economic interests and fight unfair competition.

I would like to dwell separately on the energy issue. We are proud of our decades-old reputation as a reliable energy supplier to the EU. We are ready to continue to build up cooperation. The EU states also have a stake in reasonably-priced and stable energy supplies, which is of much importance for keeping their economies competitive. In a word, Russia and the EU are natural energy partners and our cooperation has undoubted advantages for both sides.

We are in favour of contributing to the EU's energy security by diversifying energy transport routes, in particular with the help of building the South Stream gas pipeline. This project will make it possible to minimise transit risks arising in the path of Russian gas deliveries to consumers in the EU, something that is in full conformity with Brussels' European energy security goals.

We hope that the European Commission will renounce its politically motivated approaches to this gas pipeline project and will proceed from the vital interests of the people of the EU and the business community, given the position of the countries participating in the project that have repeatedly called for its implementation. This problem grows even more pressing in view of the approaching cold

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season. We appreciate the evolution of EC approaches and the fact that the European Commission has joined the search for compromises. Hopefully we will be able to find a mutually acceptable solution through a joint effort.

President Vladimir Putin stressed that we are well aware of the concerns of foreign businessmen who have invested hundreds of billions of dollars in Russia, earned an excellent reputation and operate successfully in this country, but now have to incur losses or surrender to competitors because of the politically motivated decisions of their governments.

There is no doubt that the current situation in our relations with the EU is affecting the scale and rates of Russia's cooperation in other geographical areas. We are actively promoting a strategic partnership with China and other countries in the Asia Pacific Region, including India, as well as with countries in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. But it should be absolutely clear that cooperation in these areas and the multi-vector promotion of ties with all of our partners is the same stable course we have been on. We will build up economic interaction with the East in any event. At the same time, we would prefer to do that in parallel with strengthening our ties with the EU rather than as an alternative to them.

We have been tipped off, by the way, that some EU representatives are trying to bring pressure to bear on Latin American and Asian leaders so as to warn them against supplying their products to Russia. I don't think this is an approach that should be practiced by WTO members who advocate the principles of free trade.

Today a "window of opportunities" for overcoming the Ukraine crisis is open again. Practical measures based on southeastern Ukraine ceasefire agreements reached at the initiative of presidents Vladimir Putin and Petr Poroshenko are being coordinated and implemented. The question is whether the opposing Ukrainian sides succeed in achieving a stable peace by following this road, or if they will be prevented from doing so because someone wants to take advantage of the Ukrainian people's tragedy in order to show Russia its place. I am sure that, as people who work in Moscow, you can clearly see that these calculations are an illusion.

The right honourable chairman said in his opening remarks that there was always room for diplomacy and that it was wrong to impose a choice between sanctions and doing nothing. He illustrated his point with an example from August 2008, when then president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, came to Moscow and "brought about peace between Russia and Georgia." Let me remind you of an important fact: the document coordinated by the Russian and French presidents in Moscow in August 2008 was called the "Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan." It was neither a plan between Georgia and Russia, nor a ceasefire agreement between Georgia and Russia. It was a "Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan," whose preamble said in part that "the Presidents of Russia and France propose to the opposing sides [i.e., Georgia and South Ossetia] the following"... Following below was a six-point plan and its first point was indeed about imposing a ceasefire.

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This obvious fact is familiar to everyone who has at least some knowledge about the crisis in the Caucasus. Some people today mistake the "Medvedev-Sarcozy Plan" for an "agreement between Russia and Georgia." This is wrong. In the same way, the Minsk understandings underlying the effort to overcome the Ukraine crisis are not agreements between Moscow and Kiev but agreements between Kiev and representatives of the LPR and DPR self-defence forces, mediated by the OSCE and the Russian Federation. The document was signed by a representative of the Ukrainian president and the heads of the self-proclaimed republics, as well as by representatives of the OSCE and the Russian Federation.

Henry Kissinger writes in his latest book that in the final analysis the vector of international events depends on our idea of the future (Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, pp. 371-372). I think that no clear-headed people in Europe will contest the fact that there is no alternative to mending Russian-EU relations, all the more so against the background of instability and armed conflicts, extremism and terrorism surging to the south of our borders. In trying to intensify cooperation, we will run into obstacles again and again, unless we chart a clear and long-term goal.

Moscow continues to believe that this natural goal is a step by step process for a single economic and humanitarian space stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, a space based on the architecture of equal and indivisible security. Russia came up with this initiative many years ago. This is not an easy goal, but it is quite feasible, if everyone proceeds from the principles of mutual respect, mutual advantage and regard for each other's interests and if no one wastes time and effort to foment geopolitical confrontation.

The Eurasian Economic Union, an open, developing and very promising business project, is kicking off on 1 January 2015. While promoting Eurasian integration, we remain open to interaction with other countries and regional unions. We are ready to discuss prospects for establishing a free trade area with the EU and are open to a consistent implementation of the "integration of integrations" model. Some current developments indicate that the EU is also reevaluating its former negative approaches in this area.

I would like to say in conclusion that against the backdrop of a marked decline in the intensity of contact and economic cooperation with the EU (induced by parties other than Russia), the European Business Association remains one of the mechanisms that continues to operate efficiently, facilitating mutual understanding between Russia and the EU countries and creating important springboards for our future relations which, I am sure, still have huge potential.

Question: What do you, an experienced diplomat, think about the importance of personal contact between the heads of state and talks between diplomats? Do you think that more frequent personal meetings and talks between President Putin and his European colleagues could have helped settle the crisis?

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Sergey Lavrov: I believe that nothing is better than personal contact, not telephone conversations, or videoconferences or correspondence. We think this kind of contact should not be simply continued but intensified.

But actually, you are asking the wrong man: Russia has never proposed delaying planned meetings or reducing the number of personal contacts for whatever reason, especially not a very convincing one. You probably remember that some important meetings were delayed, and that it happened shortly before the crisis broke out in Ukraine. For example, when Edward Snowden landed in Russia out of nowhere, the United States decided, for some reason, that we were to blame, and President Barack Obama cancelled his visit to Moscow ahead of the upcoming G20 summit in St Petersburg. I'm sure this did not help improve Russian-American relations. We also strongly believe that a revision of meeting plans with Europe's leaders in the past few months has not helped but has prevented us from discussing problems openly, like serious people should. When you attend a news conference by EU representatives, ask them this question. It would be interesting to hear their answers.

Question: Mr Lavrov, thank you for your attention to European business. A year ago, we pinned our hopes on the proposed common economic and cultural space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, but we see that you don't share our vision. Evidence of this is the illegal actions in Crimea and the destabilisation in Ukraine, which have undermined the trust and relations between Russia and the EU. The EU is willing to work with Russia to implement this ambitious project. We are open to competition and free markets based on international standards and regulations, including respect for territorial integrity of our neighbours, as well as WTO regulations, which hinder the development of comprehensive relations with the Eurasian Economic Union. What do you think about the potential for [Russia-EU] relations within the framework of a common economic and cultural space from Lisbon to Vladivostok?

Sergey Lavrov: I see why the floor has been given to my colleague, the head of the EU delegation in Russia, Mr Usackas – he needed to say what he has said.

I believe that in this informal situation we shouldn't exchange fixed and solid views and formulas, but try to get down to the core of the matter at hand. Thank you for your question. We should not forget that this will only work if we agree on a firm foundation that can ensure common, equal and indivisible security for this space.

First, a year ago this project made no progress; worse still, it was not even launched. We advanced our proposal, which the Brussels officials considered and to which we attracted the attention of the leading EU countries. In the autumn of 2013, Jose Manuel Barroso said we should create a common economic and cultural space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast. We hoped the project would get off the ground. We should proceed deductively – from the general to the specific – or inductively – from the specific to the general. When then-President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich postponed the signing of the association agreement with the EU (the same happened later, but the consequences were completely different), this allowed us to proceed from the specific to the general.

The Ukrainian government proposed holding trilateral consultations between Russia, Ukraine and the EU, to consider ways to harmonise plans set out in the association and free trade agreements with the EU with Ukraine's involvement in the free trade zone of the CIS. During these consultations, the

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situation in Ukraine, the largest member of the Eastern Partnership and an important partner of Russia and the EU (their share of trade with Ukraine is roughly equal), could have been used as an example for considering de-escalation methods, because the situation there had not deteriorated into violence yet. Also, we could have used these consultations to discuss the principles of comprehensive efforts to creating a common economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean that would be equally comfortable for the member-countries of the EU and the Eurasian integration project, as well as the countries that are not directly involved in either integration process.

You probably remember that Brussels flatly refused to hold such trilateral consultations in late November or early December 2013, when unrest on Maidan Square could probably have been calmed. But they chose differently. They said that EU-Ukraine relations were not Russia's affair, and that we should negotiate with Ukraine however we wanted, while they would continue to pursue their policy. Moreover, those on Maidan who wanted to bring the situation to a head saw that statement as a signal and evidence that the EU would stand by Ukraine and would not give it away to Russia. I don't know who thought that Ukraine could be taken. Brussels did nothing to calm the passions, and it did not admit that Ukraine could have interests – primarily economic, but also cultural– both to the west and to the east of its borders.

Second, regarding one-on-one contact and meetings: A regular Russia-EU summit was planned for December 2013. These summits are usually held in a comprehensive format and address all areas of cooperation. Our European partners asked us to postpone it until January (2014) and reduced its format to a working lunch with limited attendance. We agreed, because, as I said, we are interested in personal contact, and we understand when our partners want to make a point of their grievances out of misguided solidarity, or for some other reason.

We met and talked not only about Ukraine but also about the system-wide issues that the Ukrainian crisis has revealed; lack of actual discussion on a common economic and humanitarian space. President Vladimir Putin got an understanding from the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission that it is time to make practical steps in this area. As the first step, the Russian President announced at the meeting in Brussels last January that we are going to initiate talks on a free trade area between the EU and the Customs Union with the actual agreement to be reached by 2020. We got neither a "yes" nor a "no." So the issue is still on the table. We believe that this idea is now even more important than before. We heard from the EU commissioners responsible for related issues that the EU would like to improve its ties with the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Commission. It took several years for this realisation to actually be expressed in a public statement. We have always supported this idea and have been open to cooperation. At that point it was another missed chance.

The cancellation of the Russia-EU summit in June 2014 that Russia was going to host also didn't help maintain personal contacts nor discuss forming a common space. Speaking of which, after refusing to hold the summit, Herman Van Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso asked in May to be received individually for negotiations. If you feel and understand the need to speak with the Russian leaders on behalf of the EU, why did you cancel the summit? It requires a mature approach and not an attempt to sacrifice one's own interests in order to gain some hypothetical geopolitical advantage. I was very surprised to hear from many European leaders and officials in Brussels that they realise that the sanctions against Russia have resulted in business losses; however, it is important to let

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Moscow know that the EU puts politics over the economy. This statement is almost anti-Marxist. Karl Marx taught something very different and he is a product of German scientific thought. Even if we forget Marxism, our European partners have always focused on pragmatic values. Now something has changed.

My response is simple. We can only fill this space by actually doing something. We have already begun talking about how to harmonise or at least remove major contradictions between Ukraine's convergence with the EU and its commitments related to the CIS free trade area. The process has begun and we appreciate the postponement till the end of next year of the most risky – for Russia's economic interests – provisions of the Association Agreement. We need to make sure that this step, even if taken later than required, would not just remain on paper but would prompt an actual dialogue on relations between Ukraine and Russia, Ukraine and the EU.

At the same time, it is high time to launch a dialogue on the principles underlying a wider and more comprehensive system of common spaces. It must by all means be open to all states here.

Therefore, we need to think of a consultation framework. Thinking aloud, I admit that the Eastern Partnership programme must be taken into account, which, in turn, should take into account the fact that, judging from your statements, we have mutual interest in shaping a wider and comprehensive concept of common spaces. To achieve this goal, we need to sit down, lay all the pieces of this puzzle on the table and begin an expert review of the issue. There is no other way. We can only do it together.

Question: The situation in business is not very optimistic and we shouldn't expect too much improvement in the next 18 months. What political steps could make a positive effect? How could business people assist politicians in resolving the crisis?

Sergey Lavrov: I don't think I can give any specific advice. Businesses should set out and protect their interests. They should also explain to politicians that increasing investment and a presence in a particular country will help strengthen political relations with a respective partner.

It is hard to recommend something specific. If you are ready to follow political orders and suffer losses until a certain time, that's your decision. If not, and you believe it's wrong to be "knocked out" of the promising projects in the Russian or any other markets for the long term, you should fight for your interests as has been done in other, less complicated times, and especially in more complicated times. Businesses must clearly specify their interests and intentions. After all, the politicians must protect their people and businesses. It is true for every country.

Question: How will the sanctions influence innovation development and the modernisation of the Russian economy? Aside from the sanctions, there is political rhetoric, including as regards import replacement. For Russian and European businesses that make substantial investments into the Russian economy and pay large taxes it is important that import replacement do not entail replacement of our own production and information centres already established in Russia. How do you see the involvement of the AEB and European businesses in general in innovation development in this situation?

Sergey Lavrov: It is a difficult question for me. Again, you are trying to put the decision on our shoulders. You must decide what you are going to do. If there are direct bans you have to follow

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them because, even though they are unlawful from the point of view of international law, they are part of EU legislation. If you do not agree, then, as in any democracy, you must set up opposition to this approach of putting emotionally charged geopolitics over economic interests.

As far as Russia is concerned, we can see the negative effects of the sanctions on cooperation in the hi-tech industry. This was discussed at a presidential meeting, at a meeting of the Russian government – many such meetings were covered in detail and broadcast live. We'll be taking all the necessary measures to protect ourselves from unlawful restrictions. You know about the resources allocated for these purposes. Clearly, it will be a long-term programme that is already under way. We are not just working to make it through a couple of years but to prevent any possibility of finding ourselves in a similar situation in the future. This does not mean that when this unfortunate period in our relations with the EU is over, we will refuse to cooperate in innovations and high technology. Absolutely not. But at the same time we will continue to expand our own capacities in the key sectors of the economy and defence industry in order to avoid any dependence that our partners are clearly taking advantage of. You must decide for yourself what you are going to do.

Question: After a number of crises, some countries started noting the need to reduce overall gas dependence and dependence on Russian gas, in particular. How, in your opinion, can the gas industry restore its popularity?

Sergey Lavrov: I am confident that you are a professional in the area of energy. Those seriously addressing the history of this issue (not for the sake of political statements and public opinion manipulation) have a clear idea of the factors that have been disrupting Russian gas deliveries to Europe over the past 10 years. Gas transit countries, rather than Russia, were to blame for disrupted deliveries. This is why a number of leading Western companies – German, French and Italian companies – actively supported the Nord Stream pipeline, and they will also support the South Stream project. This is the real stance of professionals and business persons, which differs from the stance of politicians who first tried to torpedo the Nord Stream project, and who are now trying to do the same to South Stream. But, as I see it, people are already coming to understand that this counter-productive and politicised line has nothing to do with the real and specific interests of European energy security.

I don't think that any special actions are needed for rehabilitating gas, Russian gas included, as a fuel and commodity. Everyone realises that Europe will be unable to manage without Russian gas in the long-term. They, including the United States, are trying to convince you that you should convert to US shale gas and liquefied natural gas. Let's assess the economic aspects of these proposals and the economic aspects of what Europe has today. Most importantly, we should do away with politicised attitudes and prevent politicians from taking decisions that focus on politics, rather than economics. We are not asking anything else from our partners. Please assume a stance that would guarantee your real economic interests and the energy security of specific countries and Europe in general.

Question: Italy opposes the overall EU stance regarding Russia. Last week, Italian members of the European Parliament visited Crimea. Many Italian regions consider anti-Russian sanctions to be unfair and inappropriate, and these sanctions tend to backfire, to a certain extent. They are trying to

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convince us that the 50 years of friendly relations should be revised. We understand what a blow would be dealt against the entire European economy and that of Italy, in particular. We are suffering no less than Russia is. To my mind, Europe should wake up and say that its interests do not necessarily need to coincide with those of the United States. We have our own perception. EU-Russia trade amounts to over 400 billion euros, and that between Russia and the United States totals \$18 billion.

The business community has high expectations in connection with Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Milan. Europe should not lose its historical and friendly relations with Russia. Other countries, including Far Eastern countries, would occupy the Russian market segment that has been lost by us. Could you comment on the upcoming visit to Italy by Russian President Vladimir Putin?

Sergey Lavrov: There is little to comment on because I agree with you that it is important that Europe should, first of all, care about its own interests, rather than someone else's interests, and that it should act in line with these interests. I also agree that we hope to understand the mood of our European partners during the visit to Milan. I am confident that Russian President Vladimir Putin will again explain to them (just like he has repeatedly done) the motives of our actions, and that he will be ready to update our colleagues on the latest developments and our efforts to assist the Kiev authorities and self-defence forces in implementing specific agreements reached by them with the support of Russia and the OSCE. I hope that this will help reasonable people in the EU leadership finally voice their strategic perception, which is lacking so much.

Question: If a foreign company maintains friendly relations with the Russian Federation, then does the Russian Government stipulate any privileges or preferences for such a company? Is it possible to establish a certain club?

Sergey Lavrov: I know that Italy and Austria are voicing similar ideas. Representatives of the business community in Veneto, Italy, have suggested that their region should not implement EU sanctions, and they hope that Russia's measures to protect its food market will not be applied against this region.

I believe that there can be no exceptions for separate companies. You should better convince your Government to move in the right direction.

Question: Please comment on the statement of Russian politicians on the ousting of foreign law and auditing firms and consultancies from the Russian market.

Sergey Lavrov: Frankly speaking, I have heard nothing about these statements, and I am not an expert in this area. I don't think there are any political directives to move along this road. On the contrary, we would like people to stay and work profitably here. Currently, the issue of profits is linked with the EU stance that stipulates restrictions.

Question: Do you believe that the Northern Dimension can become a possible communications channel, including for the purpose of improving the current state of relations with the EU?

Sergey Lavrov: The Northern Dimension, which is a good example, has its own history. Before becoming a good entity, it passed through difficult stages of its assertion. The Northern Dimension was conceived as an EU project for non-EU Nordic countries – Russia, Norway and Iceland. (And I

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would like to congratulate Iceland's football team on its brilliant performance). All three countries voiced their readiness to cooperate in line with the project's concept, but requested that it be filled with collective content. They did not want to fulfil specific mandatory EU directives. President of Finland Tarja Halonen, who actively lobbied for a collective Northern Dimension project, played a major role here. Talks were launched, the text was clarified and a concept coordinated, which was jointly conceived by the European Union, Russia, Norway and Iceland. This is the main secret of the Northern Dimension's success. Unlike the EU's Black Sea and Baltic strategies, this project continues to function on the basis of consensus for charting generally acceptable approaches. Currently, the European Union is drafting the Arctic Strategy, a programme for Central Asia and the Eastern Partnership. All projects that I have just listed are being formalised by the EU alone and subsequently offered to potential partners. This approach is slightly arrogant and not very open. Therefore, I believe that it would be appropriate to treat the EU's partners as equals in the context of specific regional programmes.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for your kind attitude and attention, and to wish you good luck, no matter what.

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