Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, December 30, 2021

Russian-US talks on security guarantees

Talks in the format of interdepartmental delegations of Russia and the United States, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman are scheduled to take place in Geneva on January 10, 2022. This date has been fixed and there are no alternatives for the time being.

The agenda includes discussion of two fundamental draft documents that Russia presented to the US on December 15 of this year – the Treaty between the

During the talks, we will seek from the US firm legal guarantees of the security of the Russian Federation, specifically NATO’s non-expansion to the east and non-deployment of arms systems threatening Russia on the borders of our country.

**Statements by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell**

Yesterday brought a flurry of statements by Josep Borrell regarding Russian initiatives on security guarantees. We saw his interview. Lately, EU officials have made many comments on the recently submitted Russian proposals. The most interesting thing is that each time we see different statements on this issue. In other words, our Western partners do not have a uniform, streamlined and unanimous attitude to them. They have not worked out any consensus position within the framework of the EU, NATO or other structures. This is total cacophony. Everyone is doing his own thing and making statements to the extent of his abilities. We are hearing from our partners that they will discuss our initiatives only in the Russia-NATO Council but then they mention the OSCE as the platform for this.

I would like to emphasise the main point. The issue of European security is nothing new. Since the early 1990s, we have repeatedly proposed ensuring its indivisibility and preventing attempts of some states to achieve security at the expense of others. We were the only ones that insisted on the inclusion of these key principles in the Russia-NATO and the OSCE fundamental documents that were signed at the top level.

Joint documents between Russia and the EU contain similar provisions. Thus, in the Roadmap for the Common Economic Space (CES), endorsed in 2005, Russia and the EU assumed commitments to contribute “effectively to creating a greater Europe without dividing lines.” With this aim in view, they agreed to “give particular attention to securing international stability, including in the regions adjacent to the EU and Russian borders.”

So what is sensational about our proposals? Commenting on them, representatives of the Western political establishment are pretending to be hearing
them for the first time and that they are unworkable, impossible to implement. But all the fundamental principles have already been written down in joint documents and, moreover, were supposed to be guiding the process this entire time, because they are written down in order to become reality, to turn into practice.

It would be natural to ask against this backdrop what the EU has done in the past years to facilitate the implementation of these principles that are vital for European security. It is simply impossible to be so inconsistent, blind to the absence of logic in one’s own actions, and unable to see the difference between words and deeds. Did the EU help turn our common region into an area of mutually beneficial trade and economic ties with Russia? Did it tailor the policy of EU expansion to preserve the high level of the candidates’ relations with Russia? Did it develop a dialogue with the governing bodies of the Eurasian economic integration? Did it agree to establish a joint Russia-EU committee on foreign policy and security, as we suggested in the past? Those who are trying hard to analyse Russia’s “sensational” proposals (sometimes wide of the mark) could try to list such questions and make an effort to provide specific answers to them. This is no longer statistics, but an analysis of practical steps in this area.

Unfortunately, they will be unable to answer any of these questions in the affirmative. Let them try but we think everything will be done the other way round. The EU has done much to escalate tensions in Europe. Let me explain what I have in mind. In 2009, it invented the format of the Eastern Partnership aimed at countering Russian integration initiatives and establishing a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. Despite our concerns and the doubts of the then Ukrainian authorities, it was stubbornly promoting the draft EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Let me recall that it became a real trigger for protests that developed (with the blessing of the West, primarily the EU and US) into an anti-constitutional coup in February 2014. It took place with the tacit and sometimes active consent and support of our Western partners. They did not denounce or even attempt to denounce it. The EU unilaterally curtailed a versatile system of cooperation and dialogue with Russia and subjected our country to unlawful unilateral restrictions. All of you remember our numerous comments on this. Brussels did all this unilaterally. All talks were reduced to zero. Meanwhile, they were successful and the parties quickly moved to the implementation of their economic goals. On top of all that, Brussels imposed on the EU countries demands of unconditional anti-
Russia solidarity and put the West Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries on the horns of an artificial geopolitical dilemma: “side either with Russia or with the EU.” They did not try to analyse or predict what would happen in the future with the countries, economies and nations if they had to make this choice to the detriment of the integration processes that supplemented rather than contradicted each other. In addition, the EU described Russia in its doctrines as a country that cast a “strategic challenge” and was all but the main source of “hybrid threats” to EU security. This is my brief account of what Brussels did in this area.

I would like to emphasise again that if Brussels had sincerely wanted, it could have done much more to prevent developments in Europe from following a scenario that Russia could not accept. It could have done much more not only for Russia but also for developing Russia-EU cooperation in general but did nothing.

Josep Borrell’s claim concerning the EU’s hypothetical contribution to the discussion of security guarantees in Europe looks very strange against this background. Probably, the head of European diplomacy simply forgot what was said about the 21 EU countries that are NATO members: “Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation”. This is a direct quotation from article 42.7 of the Treaty on the EU. In the two joint declarations with NATO signed since 2016, the EU even agreed to use its defence capabilities in the interests of NATO. EU Brussels has ceded the lion’s share of its military sovereignty to NATO Brussels. This sacrificial offering of its own sovereignty was done not only to NATO. The US also received such a gift. In this context, it is difficult to understand the emotional stress of the head of European diplomacy, which is caused by the EU’s non-participation in the discussion of security guarantees in Europe. You did this of your own free will. Nobody was forcing you to do this. You voluntarily agreed to lose your sovereign rights to allow the US to make decisions single-handedly or under NATO’s umbrella where the US is the primary decision-maker anyway.

According to Borrell, this is the first time Russia has put its agenda in writing, something which he claims “only winners” have the right to do. This remark is telling. One gets the impression that the EU itself has never tried to impose on Russia its positions with its ultimatums and arrogant attitudes. It is enough to recall an episode from the previous era of our cooperation when Brussels
persistently tried to reduce Russia to the status of follower in any crisis response measures. In May 2011, Brussels gave us a relevant draft framework agreement. It simply rejected our counter proposals to make the agreement more equitable. The EU did not move one iota from its uncompromising and patently unrealistic positions. I won’t even mention the thousands of statements over these years which looked very much like ultimatums. This was a position that was documented and endorsed by one side alone, and that was it. Moreover, it even included demands on our country on how we must conduct ourselves even though we had never been part of these integration mechanisms that demanded so much from us.

Take, for one, the well-known five principles of Federica Mogherini, which contain a set of unconditional measures for normalising relations with Russia. First, she demands that Russia should ensure the fulfillment of the Minsk agreements on reaching a settlement in Donbass, which the Kiev regime has been subverting for years with the EU’s tacit support. The way Brussels talked for many years sounded very strange and was completely unacceptable in many cases. It is pointless to make demands of us and nobody has the right to do so. In the meantime, officials from the Borrell-led diplomatic service keep peppering the Russian authorities with all sorts of demands: “Russia must do,” and we “expect Russia to,” as if we are members of the EU, NATO or some other group. What kind of talk is this? It turns out that we did not have the right to present a draft for joint discussion with our Western partners. It appears this was not the right thing to do.

Josep Borrell said in his interview that he wanted “to discuss all violations since the Helsinki Final Act was adopted in 1975.” So, we guess the EU is ready to discuss in detail how NATO, a defensive alliance according to its Charter (with which the EU intends to continue promoting partnership) was destroying Serbia with cassette bombs and ammunition with depleted uranium for 78 days in 1999 in violation of all norms of international law. Its actions killed 2,500 people, including 89 children. Brussels representatives did not take part in any marches with the portraits of these children. Do you want to discuss this? Please do. We have repeatedly talked about this issue, in part, while explaining our public position, not to mention what we said at the talks.

We urge the European Union not to engage in this rhetoric but direct its efforts toward promoting security in Europe, thereby fulfilling its direct responsibilities, primarily by encouraging the Kiev authorities to implement the Minsk Package of Measures.
As for the discussion of our draft international legal documents on security guarantees (a bilateral treaty with the US and an agreement with the NATO countries), it will take place as part of the high-level Russian-American dialogue in Geneva on January 10, 2022 (we started our briefing today with this reminder) and then at a meeting of the Russia-NATO Council in Brussels on January 12, 2022. At the session of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on January 13, 2022, Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau will become the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. He will describe the priorities of the Polish Chairpersonship and Russian officials will describe in detail their assessments of the current intolerable situation with military security in Europe. We will decide on our subsequent steps depending on the willingness of the US and NATO to have a practical conversation of our legitimate concerns.

**Main foreign policy results of 2021**

Please allow me to draw your attention to this published document that deals with the main foreign policy results of 2021.

This analysis was drafted by the Foreign Ministry before being posted on the website and on social media. I invite all who study this subject to take a look.

**Ukrainian Armed Forces' failure to maintain Donbass ceasefire**

A week ago, on December 22, at the final meeting of the Contact Group for 2021, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valery Zaluzhny and Minister of Defence Alexei Reznikov issued a statement in which they committed to comply with the Measures to Strengthen the Ceasefire, agreed upon by Ukraine, Lugansk and Donetsk as early as July 22, 2020.

We made a separate comment about this, noting an improvement in the situation along the contact line. If before that statement, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine was recording hundreds of ceasefire violations every day, then in the 24 hours after the above-mentioned meeting of the Contact Group, the numbers decreased significantly, making a case for cautious optimism.

This state of affairs proved unstable with the tragic figures sadly growing again from the evening of Thursday, December 23, 2021. After a lull at the weekend, the average daily number of shelling incidents rose to a higher level than
in either the previous month or the previous year.

Meanwhile, hypocritically, Kiev has been trying to portray itself as the broker and champion of the Donbass ceasefire. Please note, it was Donetsk and Lugansk that repeatedly suggested to their so called opposite numbers in Kiev that they reach agreement on new steps to implement a ceasefire as early as 2019.

Allow me in this connection to give your the true timeline of the Measures to Strengthen the Ceasefire and their implementation by the parties.

### 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 7</td>
<td>Issue discussed over the telephone by aides to Normandy Format leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 3</td>
<td>Draft Measures considered at personal meeting of aides to Normandy Format leaders in Berlin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 22</td>
<td>Measures approved and signed (remotely) at videoconference of the Contact Group attended by Dmitry Kozak and Andrei Yermak, and mentioned in a letter by OSCE Special Representative Heidi Grau to OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Edi Rama.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 26</td>
<td>Measures Discussed by Vladimir Putin and Vladimir Zelensky in a phone conversation.</td>
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<td>July 26</td>
<td>Donetsk and Lugansk publish orders to all units to implement ceasefire beginning July 27, 2020.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 27</td>
<td>The orders take effect at 00:01 Kiev time.</td>
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Ministry of Defence of Ukraine fails to publish the exact wording of its ceasefire order instead choosing to simply announce it on the website beside a distorted text of the Measures.
March 27  The Defence Ministry of Ukraine republishes the order announcement with a distorted text of the Measures while using this as proof of their implementation.

April 8  The Defence Ministry of Ukraine responds to our persistent calls by publishing the authentic text of the Measures as they were presented in the OSCE Special Representative Heidi Grau’s letter, but it still fails to publish its ceasefire order.

September 28  Commander-in-Chief Zaluzhny makes a statement that field commanders can open fire based on the situation at hand without higher authorisation and use any weapons necessary, thus de-facto withdrawing from the Measures.

October 5  Joint Forces Operations Commander Alexander Pavlyuk makes a similar statement.

December 22  The Defence Minister and Commander-in-Chief issue a statement following a Contact Group meeting committing to "consistently and strictly" observing the ceasefire stipulated by the Measures.

We would like to once again emphasise that Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk must continue to strictly observe the Measures to Strengthen the Ceasefire in order to bring about the long-awaited truce in southeastern Ukraine and contribute to the implementation of the whole of the Minsk Package of Measures.
We continue to be amazed at the unbelievable level of state support for a revival of National Socialism, a reincarnation of Nazism, neo-Nazism, and fascism in its most terrible forms in Ukraine.

The Ternopol Regional Administration hung a giant banner with a photograph of war criminal Stepan Bandera on its building, complete with a quote from the unofficial anthem of Ukrainian neo-Nazis, Our father is Bandera, Ukraine is the mother. What’s more, the banner is designed in red, black and white in an uncanny resemblance to the visual style of the Third Reich, an amazing continuity of tradition. I would like to emphasise once again that this has been done at an official level.

At the same time, city residents’ attitude towards Bandera is also well known.

The state and local authorities obviously act like they have an order to impose such heroes on their own population. For the most part, this policy runs counter to the wishes of Ukrainians who know their history even though it is being rewritten before their very eyes, with different values and interpretations of historical events imposed on them.

For our part, we will continue to remind Kiev – and not Kiev alone, but also its Western patrons – that any attempt to rehabilitate National Socialism’s inhumane ideas or glorify Nazism are unacceptable, which includes laudation of Nazi criminals, as they do, and turning them into heroes of our time.

**Freedom of speech situation in Ukraine**

On December 28, the President of Ukraine enacted a decision by the National Security and Defence Council that applied sanctions, for a period of five years, to media companies reorganised from the television channels 112 Ukraine, NewsOne and ZIK TV, previously closed by the authorities. I am referring to Pershyi Nezalezhniy and UkrLive.

The restrictive measures include freezing assets, restricting commercial operations, suspending the fulfillment of their economic and financial obligations, and revoking licences.

This new batch of sanctions is a continuation of Kiev's hardline policy to establish total censorship and conduct a thorough cleanup of the country's
information landscape, removing any undesirable media and denying the right to speak to dissidents and anyone who disagrees with what is happening in Ukraine.

Earlier, when such things happened, Ukrainian journalists, the mass media never rallied in unison like this, condemning such actions. There was a clear division of loyalty. But today, this is an idea that has rallied Ukrainian journalists together regardless of their views on other political events. This topic has really become a connecting link – I am referring to the developments in the Ukrainian information space. What is happening is actually a cleansing of the information space – a crackdown with no choice to appeal to any branch of government – the judiciary, the executive or legislative authorities. All this has been made null and void. The slightest disobedience, even any attempt to legally protest these decisions or express one’s attitude towards them is punishable by financial sanctions, intimidation, and legal prosecution.

I would like to remind you that at the beginning of this year, on February 2, President Vladimir Zelensky issued an order taking the television channels 112 Ukraine, NewsOne and ZIK TV off air for having dared to broadcast views that differed from the official line. In April, the Kiev authorities went further. They deplatformed those channels on the internet as well. As a result of such actions, millions of Ukrainian citizens were restricted in their right to access information. What is most interesting, the American tech giants supported them; they did not see any problem. Block channels? No problem, block them.

We see this as an open and cynical violation of the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and a complete disregard for the European Convention on Human Rights.

On December 29, journalists from the illegally closed television channels published another open letter addressed to the international community, including European politicians, officials and multilateral human rights organisations, asking them to influence the situation with freedom of speech and the government’s attempt to introduce censorship in Ukraine. The first such appeal was published on September 14, but no proper reaction from the addressees followed. In a new letter, the journalists pointed out the illegal use of the Ukrainian NSDC as an instrument of censorship and bluntly stated that the Ukrainian government considers disloyal media a main enemy.

I don’t know what else the Western community needs, or what more the
OSCE needs. The problem is that if they try to acknowledge this, it will make our competent position fully obvious, just like our confirmed analysis from 5-6 years ago when we warned the international community about what was happening with the information space in Ukraine and where it would lead.

If even this does not make the respected ombudsmen for human rights and freedom of the media from the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe change their policy, if they continue to turn a blind eye to this ugliness, pretending it is none of their business, pretending they are doing some “quiet diplomatic work” with Kiev, they will lose whatever is left of the trust in their impartiality and professionalism. That trust will be undermined. We would like to point out that the OSCE’s “quiet diplomacy” has failed miserably on this track. It is not working and it gives the Kiev regime a false sense of permissiveness. Apparently, that diplomacy is so quiet that no one can hear it. I am sure Vienna cannot hear it either. The continued absence of any adequate response on the part of international human rights bodies to Kiev's unceremonious attacks on freedom of speech and pluralism turns them into tacit accomplices to these atrocities.

Until recently, there have been minor incidents; there have been obvious general trends, but what is happening now with freedom of speech in Ukraine was unthinkable even a few years ago. It has never happened on such a scale. There were cases in the context of an internal conflict, which targeted the media outlets that represented the point of view of Donbass residents. But the media and journalists who were loyal or at least tolerant of the Kiev regime’s policy in southeastern Ukraine were safe. Now any alternative point of view is being edited out. Why? Because the OSCE is silent and is not working or responding to this. Where are the OSCE representatives on freedom of expression now? Quiet diplomacy is not working. This is vivid confirmation of this.

**Statement by 12 EU countries, the UK, Norway and Canada on the deployment of private security units in Mali**

We have noted a collective statement signed by a number of European countries and Canada regarding the planned deployment of the so-called Wagner group in Mali. I would strongly recommend that the writers of this statement read the corresponding communiqué that the Transitional Government of Mali issued on
December 24. In this document, the Malian authorities extend their regrets regarding the above statement, officially deny the accusations it contains, and demand evidence to confirm the claims in the statement as cited from independent sources.

The Malian authorities emphasise that the Europeans and Canada have chosen to make their demarche at a time when Bamako has to make significant efforts to address a range of acute problems facing the country. Indeed, amid preparations for a planned general election, the Malians are also busy putting up an uncompromising fight against several terrorist groups, which naturally had a chance to become more active after Mali’s European partners, primarily France, began to limit their antiterrorist assistance. Representatives of Mali have repeatedly commented on this situation at length. Due to the recent closure of three French bases involved in Operation Barkhane in the north of the country, there is a real threat that the current authorities will lose control over part of their territory. The Malian authorities have never tried to hide this; yet, for some reason, the Europeans’ statement does not mention this.

We are confident that the international community, including the EU, should be effectively helping the Malian government deal with the country’s current problems, rather than inventing non-existent ones or, worse still, hindering efforts to overcome the crises they are struggling with. We fully support the message the Government of Mali expressed in its communiqué – that it is ready to continue a dialogue and cooperation with all its partners provided they respect its sovereignty, in order to achieve lasting stability exclusively in the interests of the Malian people. We believe that the Malian authorities have every right to choose reliable partners to ensure their country’s territorial integrity. Any attempts to forcefully influence their choice are a typical manifestation of interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

In their communiqué, the Malian leaders refer to Russia as Mali’s longstanding partner, emphasising that the two countries maintain cooperation exclusively at the interstate level, including in improving the national armed forces and law enforcement’s combat capabilities. For our part, we intend to continue to provide the Malians with the necessary military assistance and military technology at the state level, to strengthen the country’s potential for countering terrorism.

One gets the impression that the signatories of this collective statement had...
not read any of our explanations on the matter at all before commenting on our interaction and cooperation with Mali; numerous explanations have been given. Just as they have overlooked the Malian government’s public statements. They do not seem to be interested; therefore, they do not understand the actual situation or the political rationale behind our actions.

We have noted their call urging Russia to pursue a responsible and constructive policy in the region. It is surprising to hear such comments from the collective West countries whose prior efforts have destroyed several countries’ statehood, security and stability in the region, in particular Libya. We are talking hundreds of thousands of victims as well as the destruction of civilian, economic and military infrastructure. These same countries have contributed to destabilisation in Mali and the Sahel by destroying Libya’s statehood. It is amazing to hear such statements from these countries. It would seem more appropriate to let the African states comment on Russia’s policy in Africa themselves. That is, the former colonial powers, now striving to preserve what’s left of their former influence on the continent at any cost, had better read the official explanations.

With regard to Mali, we would like to underscore that the Russian vision of ways to overcome the crisis there enjoys the full understanding of our Malian partners. If certain Western states do not like this, they might need to adjust their conceptual approaches, which rest on the long-obsolete postulates of colonial thinking. Instead of pursuing a policy of expelling Russia from its traditional zones of influence in Africa under far-fetched pretexts, the West should think about joining the efforts to fight the terrorist evil in Mali and the Sahara-Sahel region. Is anyone objecting to this? Not us. African countries would not be opposed to this either; what they are opposed to is the violation of the fundamental principles of international relations – interference in others’ internal affairs, disrespect for their sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is what they do not want, but they always, if anything, welcome a joint effort. Russia has advanced such proposals more than once, but they have remained unanswered.

In short, the situation is unfolding the way our Western partners always do things – they promote their own selfish goals, never hesitating to pose as infallible and exceptional leaders while arrogantly neglecting others’ legitimate interests. This leads to predictable results, which then surprise them for some reason. They ignore the situations on the ground, refuse to admit their own responsibility for the degradation of the security situation, and deny the Malian authorities their
legitimate right to make sovereign decisions. At the same time, they unashamedly use pressure and blackmail. This toolkit is well known to us and is outside the framework of international law.

**Estonia’s refusal to grant visa to RIA Novosti journalist**

On December 29, 2021, Estonia was reported to deny a visa to RIA Novosti journalist Anatoly Samokhvalov, who was planning the trip to cover the 2022 European Figure Skating Championships. The Estonian embassy explained Tallinn’s decision as follows: “One or more member states of the Schengen Area believe that you (the RIA Novosti correspondent) pose a threat to public order or national security.”

By the way, on December 20, Anatoly Samokhvalov received an official invitation from General Secretary of the Estonian Skating Union Jana Kuura, who seems to have been unaware of any national security issues in her country.

This baffling and absurd episode is another manifestation of the Estonian government’s unlawful practice to disguise Tallinn’s system-wide violations of the right to free access to information with imaginary security threats. All of these factors combined amount to contempt for the 2020 International Skating Union Code of Ethics. This document stipulates countries’ obligation to ensure the protection of all participants in ISU events from abuse and discrimination, including based on political views. What threat to national security can there be here if the journalist received an invitation to cover the sports event?

Anatoly Samokhvalov has been covering exclusively sports events for many years and has visited a number of EU countries for this. In particular, he covered the World Junior Figure Skating Championships held in Tallinn in March 2020. He is a sports correspondent whose work has nothing to do with political coverage. So, my question for Estonian authorities is how he could possibly pose a threat to Estonia’s security? There is no logic to this. We consider this decision to be highly biased, prejudiced and dictated by the instinctive Russophobia which is deeply ingrained in the neighbouring country’s official authorities. We call on the relevant international bodies, first and foremost the International Sports Press Association to give an official assessment of Tallinn’s actions and help resolve this highly frustrating situation.
On January 1, 1942, our country, together with 26 other nations, signed the Declaration by United Nations, which secured the establishment of the Anti-Hitler Coalition on paper and laid the foundation for the United Nations Organisation.

The idea to establish a universal international body that would be a cornerstone of the new global system was first formulated by the USSR, China, United States and the United Kingdom in the Declaration of the Four Nations on General Security, which was signed at the Moscow Conference in 1943. This initiative was further developed and later supplemented at the Allies’ conferences in Tehran, Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta.

The final post-war world order was shaped following the San Francisco Conference, when representatives of 50 states signed the UN Charter on June 26, 1945. It reflected the fundamental principles of international law, including the sovereign equality of states, non-interference in their domestic affairs and settlement of disputes by political and diplomatic means.

For more than 75 years, the UN has been an uncontested platform for working out efficient ways to ensure global stability, security, sustainable social and economic development, and protection of human rights.

At the same time, we are witnessing increasing attempts to revise the universal standards set forth in the constituent document of the global Organisation. Initiatives to defend its goals and principles are becoming especially relevant in this context. The Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, aimed at engaging all opportunities to help strengthen the coordinating role of the UN in world affairs, was officially launched with Russia’s active participation in July 2021.

We remain committed to the development of equal inter-state dialogue with all nations and regional associations based on the international law. I would like to remind you that this year, in his speech at the UN General Assembly, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov proposed the hashtag #UNCharterIsOurRules, which spread all over the world in all official languages of the United Nations.

#UNCharterIsOurRules
The Battle of the Caucasus lasted for 442 days and was one of the longest and bloodiest chapters of the Great Patriotic War. It went down in military history as a series of defensive and offensive operations across a vast area whose success despite challenging conditions went a long way towards tipping the balance in favour of the Soviet Union.

The campaign was fought in two stages from July 25, 1942 until October 9, 1943. In July 1942, Wehrmacht’s Army Group A, supported by Slovak and Romanian units, launched a massive offensive and quickly took Stavropol, Armavir, Maykop, Krasnodar, Mozdok and a large part of Novorossiysk, with heavy fighting continuing in the central part of the Caucasus Ridge.

The Caucasus, where before the war the Soviet Union produced nearly 90 percent of its oil, was a priority in the strategic plans of the Nazi political and military leadership. Hitler was aware of the limited supply of raw materials and oil in the Third Reich. During a meeting in Poltava in June 1942, he declared that “we will have to end the war unless we capture Maykop and Grozny.” He also understood the importance of Kuban and the Caucasus as a source of food and grain and for their reserves of strategic raw materials.

The Nazi command made several attempts to launch a powerful attack towards Tuapse and Grozny, but by the end of December 1942, the enemy advance was halted outside Mozdok and Ordzhonikidze, in the southeastern part of Novorossiysk and on the Greater Caucasus Ridge.

Soviet defensive operations in the Caucasus dealt a serious blow to the enemy shifting the initiative to the Soviet Union. Although Nazi forces occupied a significant part of the North Caucasus, they were not able to push through the stout Soviet resistance and capture the oil fields in the Grozny and Baku districts and other sources of valuable strategic raw materials. The Nazi leadership was equally unsuccessful in its plans to break through to the South Caucasus and draw Turkey into the war against the Soviet Union before uniting with the Nazi troops in North Africa and advancing to the Middle East. Despite difficulties, the Soviet command kept several naval bases that supported the fleet and was able to set the stage for its troops to mount a decisive offensive. The plans of the Nazi command to capture the Caucasus were thwarted by the Soviet Armed Forces, which were assisted in their
effort by the entire Soviet people, including the peoples of the Caucasus.

On January 1, 1943, the Northern Command of the South Caucasus Front launched the liberation of the Caucasus. In a rapid manoeuvre, the Red Army liberated Mozdok, Pyatigorsk and Stavropol, and by early February the enemy was pushed back from the Caucasus foothills to the lower reaches of the Kuban.

On September 10, 1943, a paratrooper landing marked the start of the Novorossiysk Offensive. The 18th Army pushed forward at the same time, followed by the 56th Army three days later. On September 16, Soviet troops liberated Novorossiysk, while the 56th Army continued to pursue the enemy, cleared the northern part of the Taman Peninsula, and reached the Kerch Strait on October 9, 1943, driving all occupying forces from the region.

On May 1, 1944, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR established the medal "For the Defence of the Caucasus" to commemorate the defeat of the Nazi troops in the Caucasus. The medal has been awarded to more than 870,000 people.

In 2020 the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation passed a law to make October 9 a new day of military glory called Day of the Defeat of the Nazi Troops by the Soviet Troops in the Battle of the Caucasus in 1943.

**Donation of the Sputnik Lite vaccine to Vietnam**

Pursuant to the agreements at the highest level that were reached during the visit to the Russian Federation of President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Nguyen Xuan Phuc (November 29 - December 2, 2021), an official ceremony was held at the Ministry of Health of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi on December 29 to mark the donation of 100,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik Lite vaccine to Vietnam. The event was attended by the Russian Ambassador to Vietnam, officials from Vietnamese government agencies and institutions and journalists.

The Vietnamese representatives expressed gratitude to the Russian leaders for their help in fighting the coronavirus pandemic and reaffirmed their country’s commitment to strengthening cooperation in healthcare in the spirit of lasting friendship and comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.
The Foreign Ministry has been an enthusiastic participant in the New Year Tree of Wishes nationwide campaign. As an official body, we take part in many charity projects joined by our subordinate organisations, while our diplomats participate in numerous such events in a personal capacity.

New Year Tree of Wishes is part of the Dream With Me project. Many people have been known to work magic to bring a bit of wonder into the lives of others. With this campaign we aim to make sure that as many children with disability as possible, orphans, children left without parental care and children living in families with incomes below the subsistence minimum, will really believe in a miracle and it will happen for them.

As last year, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov made a dream come true for a youngster who shared his dream on the project’s website. This year, it was Stanislav from St Petersburg, who dreamed of meeting with world-famous director Nikita Mikhalkov. Sergey Lavrov talked to Stanislav via video link, wished him and his family a Happy New Year, and invited him to Moscow to visit the Ministry. He also made every effort to make sure that Stanislav had the opportunity to chat with Mikhalkov. They finally spoke yesterday, and a video of their conversation featuring many interesting details is available on the Ministry’s social media. I think it is a great joy to be able to truly turn someone’s difficult life into a fairy tale. We try to seize such an opportunity whenever it presents itself.

In a similar vein, our Ministry’s subordinate and public organisations have for the past 10 years sponsored the Georgy Chicherin Centre for Family Support and Assistance to Children, an orphanage in the village of Karaul, Tambov Region. In 2021 the students there asked Father Frost for gifts, and Father Frost delegated this responsibility to us. Through joint efforts, we made sure that each of the students received a gift.

**Questions to answers:**

**Question:** The Minsk Municipal Court has sentenced Yegor Dudnikov, a Russian national, to 11 years of prison. How would you comment on this verdict, the fact that the trial was held behind closed doors and that the Russian consul was not allowed to attend the sentencing?
Maria Zakharova: Yegor Dudnikov was detained by law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Belarus on May 4, 2021. On December 27, 2021, the Minsk Municipal Court found him guilty of committing crimes under Part 3 of Article 130 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (inciting a group of persons to social hostility and discord on the basis of social affiliation, which is punishable by up to 12 years in prison) and part 3 of Article 361 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (inciting by means of the Internet to harm the national security of the Republic of Belarus, which is punishable by up to 7 years in prison). The Russian national was sentenced to 11 years in prison. He has contested the verdict and is going to appeal to the Supreme Court of Belarus.

Since the Belarusian law enforcement agencies deemed Yegor Dudnikov’s actions to have been aimed, among other things, at harming the national security of the Republic of Belarus, the entire trial was held behind closed doors in accordance with the country’s legislation. The trial was open only to the parties involved. Consular officials were not among them.

The Russian Embassy in Belarus is monitoring the situation around Mr. Dudnikov, and is in constant contact with his lawyer and relatives. The Embassy will take all necessary measures within its ambit if any procedural violations of Mr. Dudnikov’s rights come to light.

Question: Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Kuleba said that Kiev is working on having restrictions on buying weapons from NATO lifted. What do you have to say about this statement?

Maria Zakharova: It is not their first statement. They are acting in step with their declared policy and providing confirmation about our concerns that the Ukrainian leadership is neglecting peaceful settlement and is planning the use of force against the civilian population in Donbass, which refuses to accept the nationalistic regime and agree with both the anti-constitutional mayhem there and the outcome of the Kiev coup-d’état.

NATO countries are active in the reclamation militarily of Ukraine’s territories, flooding them with arms and sending their military specialists there. They are doing this despite all the various agreements that have been reached, including the Minsk agreements, which are a part of a UN resolution making is mandatory for all states to abide by it. According to top Pentagon officials, Washington alone has spent over $2.5 billion on Ukrainian army’s needs since 2014. It is possible that the spending scheme is akin to the one in Afghanistan. We
remember reports of corruption. We see the practical supply of weapons and the provision of instructors to help the Kiev regime decimate its own population. Next year’s budget has $300 million more earmarked for that. Turkey sells them drones, France – helicopters and is set to ship military motorboats and other weaponry. Great Britain has also made a significant contribution to the militarisation of Ukraine.

This topic must not be ignored. We should ask the NATO member-states if they realise that the Kiev regime will use their weapons and their help to kill the civilian population of Ukraine. We can also ask Ukraine’s officials about their vision of military cooperation with NATO. The one which runs along the lines of killing Ukraine’s population? They have not been offered anything else so far.

**Question:** Belarus claims to have facts that were reported by a Polish serviceman, Emil Czeczko, who defected to Belarus and asked for asylum there, about his personal participation in the killing of refugees on Polish territory. Belarus is calling for international investigation. Does Russia support the necessity of an international investigation? Which international venues do you think may be used for that? How would you generally comment on the facts reported by the Polish serviceman?

**Maria Zakharova:** There is no other way. Emil Czeczko’s statements about the complicity of the Polish military in killing refugees are serious and require a thorough international investigation. Are there any other options possible? It is odd that the Polish side is attempting to discredit Emil Czeczko and distract attention away from the problem rather than provide grounded responses to the charges. It is especially alarming under the emergency situation introduced by Warsaw, which sealed the borderline area from media representatives and humanitarian organisations, as well as numerous instances of Warsaw’s open neglect of its obligations concerning refugee rights.

Instances of violent treatment of migrants by Polish border guards and the military have been recorded both by respective UN and Council of Europe bodies as well as the Frontex, European Border and Coast Guard Agency. There is nothing sensational here. What is new are just the details and the fact that there is now a person who is giving an insider’s perspective of the developments. The Polish military is committing complete insanity there. Regular army and law enforcement personnel do not behave like that towards civilians, especially during a horrifying humanitarian situation. It runs contrary to any regulation. I can’t find the words to
describe people engaged in such things on the Polish side. Special equipment, dogs, tear gas (with unknown ingredients), water cannons, flashes and stun grenades and stun bombs are used against refugees. But there are children and women – people there! We have to speak about it each time attracting attention to the most vulnerable categories of the population. One cannot use “all that” against people. Why should we reach the point when we have to draw attention to the presence of children there? Is it OK to use all these “measures” if there are only adults there? Those who break through onto Polish territories are beaten up and pushed back.

We share Minsk’s resolve to launch an international investigation of the November 16, 2021 incident when Polish forces sprayed pesticides on the border resulting in chemical burns and lung damage for 132 refugees, including 32 children. We would like our Western partners show us documents that permit such actions. Is it written in the EU or NATO documents, or in some supplementary interpretations? When signing international agreements, do they adopt some sort of interpretation at the national or regional levels? Maybe they have recorded somewhere, or did they put the human rights documents into the cold storage? Where is it written that this is allowed? If it is forbidden, they should not keep silent but condemn and bring to account. Meanwhile, the EU and respective international organisation yet again keep silent, loudly and confidently. They pretend that nothing special has happened.

As concerns of our Belarusian partners launching an investigation on the outrageous facts disclosed by Emil Czeczko, we will give them our support including via our reciprocal commitments under the Programme of Concerted Foreign Policy Actions of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Creation of a Union State.

**Question:** In February, Belarus will hold a referendum on constitutional amendments. Is there communication with Russian on this issue? Do you intend to send observers?

**Maria Zakharova:** Organising a referendum is entirely an internal affair of Belarus. If we get an invitation from Belarusian authorities to send observers, the answer will be positive.

**Question:** What can you say about the first meeting of representatives of civil societies of Azerbaijan and Armenia held in Moscow on December 23-24, 2021, the first such meeting since the end of the military conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh? What is your assessment of its outcomes?
Maria Zakharova: We believe that the meeting of Azerbaijani and Armenian civil society representatives attained its goals: the restoration of friendly communication between representatives of the academic and arts communities of the two neighbouring nations and the establishment of a favourable background for a consistent normalisation of relations between Baku and Yerevan.

The participants were unanimous in their vision of the role that intellectuals can play in lowering the “degree of mistrust” between the Azerbaijani and Armenian peoples. The commitment to constructive dialogue was shown, among other things, during the discussion of such sensitive humanitarian issues as the return of Armenian POWs from Azerbaijan and Armenia’s handover of mine field maps.

We will continue to uphold this initiative. Such cohesive agenda is extremely important. It helps the parties move forward to substantive agreements and builds an atmosphere for making progress in other areas as well. We hope to hold such contacts regularly in future, including in Azerbaijan and in Armenia.

Question: How can you comment on the signals from the United States and NATO regarding the Russian proposals of December 17, 2021? Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said a Russia-NATO Council meeting should be held by the military. Was there a response to that?

Maria Zakharova: I have already commented on that today. We are preparing for talks. Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov spoke about it with minute details in his interview to Vladimir Solovyov. At present, the issue has been covered completely.

The inter-agency delegation comprises military representatives since specific issues of strategic stability and security are to be addressed.

Question: According to a TASS report, everyone at the Vienna talks is striving to restore the JCPOA in its original form, and they agreed to proceed this way. What are Russia’s assessments of that?

Maria Zakharova: We have repeatedly spoken about Russian assessments. It is an indisputable truth that restoring is always harder than destroying. That is why we called on our US partners to reconsider when they unilaterally “fled” from the agreement by violating the ways and forms of withdrawing from the agreement that they had devised themselves. I think the incumbent colleagues in Washington have multiple regrets about the previous administration’s fatal decision to break up the nuclear deal with Iran. We know what the maximum pressure policy can lead to.
The results are always known in advance. We sincerely hope and wish that our US partners will avoid such mistakes on other tracks in the future.

The key issue today is how to return the implementation of the JCPOA to a steady track in compliance with the parameters and conditions agreed upon in 2015 and fixed by the UNSC Resolution 2231. There is a clear and shared understanding that the path to achieving this goal lies through the United States mending all its violations and reciprocal steps by Tehran to unfreeze previously halted voluntary obligations on limiting Iran’s nuclear programme. It is in this vein that efforts are being made. Let me stress, it is not about concluding a new deal to replace the 2015 comprehensive agreements. We have to carefully, by bits and pieces, restore the balance of interests which initially was the foundation of the JCPOA and was lost due to US actions.

We note the shared commitment of the Vienna format talks participants to gain the result as soon as possible. We see no reason to claim that the Iranian side impedes the process. This is not in their interest since as long as JCPOA is stalled, illegal US sanctions continue.

Concurrently, Washington also needs to give a tangible confirmation to its repeated promises to rejoin the JCPOA. It is obvious that the status of a party that had violated UNSC Resolution 2231 creates an increasing discomfort for the Americans. For our part, we do everything necessary to help them rectify the situation: diplomatic efforts, specific work and interaction with the parties.

We hope the intensive negotiating efforts at the Vienna venue will go on regardless of the resistance from the opponents of the nuclear deal. We firmly proceed from the assumption that the JCPOA has no alternative. We strongly believe that its complete implementation will have a positive effect on the political climate in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf area, de-escalate tensions there and enhance trust among the region’s nations. Acute issues will be settled in the humanitarian field which emerged due to illegal developments caused by the US withdrawal from the deal.

**Question:** What does Russia think about Nikol Pashinyan’s statement that Karabakh Azeris should return to their historical homeland and Yerevan will not dispute their right to live in Karabakh?

**Maria Zakharova:** The answer to your question lies in the Statement of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia...
and President of the Russian Federation of November 9, 2020. Clause 7 in this documents runs as follows: Internally displaced persons and refugees shall return to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent areas under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

**Question:** What does the Foreign Ministry think of the recent statement by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock that Nord Stream 2 is a facility of geostrategic significance and cannot be considered a commercial project, which runs counter to a previously released statement by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz? Do such differences inside the German government evoke doubts about its capability to come to agreement? Will this issue be discussed during Annalena Baerbock’s forthcoming visit to Russia?

**Maria Zakharova:** I do not feel I need to comment on every statement and distinguish whether it is made by an official or by a representative of a political force. In this particular case we have no grounds to doubt official Berlin’s capability to reach agreements. I said at one of the recent briefings that if the German government has major disagreements, we shall rely on German law.

We have always stressed that the construction of Nord Stream 2 is a purely economic undertaking for Russia pursued by Gazprom to deliver energy to Europe, gain lawful profit and attract all interested countries to beneficial cooperation. Judging by the statement of the German Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock, she also attaches a geostrategic significance to Nord Stream 2. We will bear this in mind.

Concerning Annalena Baerbock’s visit to Moscow, it has not been scheduled as of today. Under the invitation from Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov during his talk with the German foreign minister on December 14, 2021, work is underway to set the date for her visit to Russia. The work is ongoing, and we will keep you posted.

**Question:** A protest rally to support women’s rights took place in Kabul on December 28. As far as we know, two women were injured when the Taliban opened fire on the protesters. Unfortunately, this is not the first time this has happened in Afghanistan in recent months. Has Moscow expressed concern about such incidents or the use of violence against civilians in its contacts with the Taliban? What is Russia’s approach to this matter?

**Maria Zakharova:** I would not have highlighted this specific incident like...
Maria Zakharova: I would not have highlighted this specific incident like you did because there have been many incidents that have led to civilian casualties in Afghanistan. It is inappropriate to talk about just one component of this problem without mentioning incidents with other segments of the civilian population.

All the incidents in Afghanistan that entail casualties certainly cause regret. The use of violence against civilians cannot be acceptable in any civilised country.

In our contacts with the new leadership of Afghanistan, we certainly point out that Kabul needs to observe fundamental human rights, including girls’ rights to education and women’s right to work. But we engage in an integrated discussion without leaving other problems out of the equation.

It is worth noting some of the efforts by the Afghan authorities in this respect: regular classes for girls have resumed in about one third of the country’s provinces. Higher education institutions are gradually opening their doors to women as well. The delay is due to underfinancing and the resulting lack of infrastructure to provide separate education in accordance with Islamic rules.

Once again, we call on the international community, especially the Western countries, which are responsible for the current depressing humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, to act quickly to unblock the country’s national assets (about $9.5 billion), which are vital to normalising the socioeconomic situation in Afghanistan.

Isn’t this amazing? According to the statements they make, Western representatives are truly concerned about a lot of things such as the problems of Afghan girls and women. They keep calling for this, demanding, urging, insisting and matching the national laws in Afghanistan against the current international legal framework.

No one doubts that Afghanistan has many problems. But there are doubts about the sincerity of those who use this rhetoric in the West. They are perfectly aware of the financial situation in Afghanistan; they know that the country’s funds are blocked. They know that once the money is unblocked, it will be used, among other things, to address these problems. Improvements in the humanitarian situation (once financing is available) will largely improve the situation regarding Afghan women and girls, which the West seems to see as the most important issue. While listing Afghanistan’s problems, Westerners seem to forget why these problems are not being solved or are getting worse, in the first place. They do not want to remember who is globally responsible for this. They continue to tell everyone, again and again, how they should live and what they should do, without even mentioning what they themselves could do in this respect.
Question: Earlier, President of Moldova Maia Sandu said she would not be attending the informal summit of the CIS leaders in St Petersburg because she had not received an official invitation. Can the Russian Foreign Ministry confirm this? What was the reason for this decision? How does the Foreign Ministry assess the current level of relations with Moldova?

Maria Zakharova: Questions on summits and other high-level meetings can be addressed by the Presidential Executive Office.

I can tell you about the current level of cooperation with Moldova. There has been a pause caused by the electoral processes in that country. Russia is gradually resuming the political dialogue with Chisinau. Our bilateral meetings are becoming more regular and consistent.

Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office Dmitry Kozak visited Chisinau in August 2021. In October, Moldovan Deputy Prime Ministers Andrey Spinu and Vladislav Kulminsky visited Moscow, and Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko met with President of Parliament of Moldova Igor Grosu in Athens.

On November 17, during the visit by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova Nicolae Popescu, the two countries signed a Joint Statement on the 20th anniversary of the 2001 bilateral Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the 2022-2023 Plan of Ministerial Consultations. Preparations are underway for the 17th meeting of the bilateral Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation.

We welcome the Moldovan leaders’ interest in maintaining constructive and pragmatic cooperation with Russia that includes resolving any outstanding matters or issues. At the same time, we expect their respective statements to be backed by practical steps. In turn, we are ready to continue our interaction based on pragmatism and a mutual consideration of interests. We regularly comment on any emerging difficulties.

I also recommend that you read Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko’s interview with Sputnik News Agency on December 27, where he commented on this topic.

Question: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu recently said Ankara was ready to make a positive contribution towards improving the troubled relations between Russia and NATO. How does Moscow see Turkey’s possible mediating role in this context?
Maria Zakharova: As far as I know, you are referring to Mevlut Cavusoglu’s statements during the news conference on December 27.

Let me remind you that Turkey is a NATO member. NATO makes decisions by consensus. This means the term “mediation” mentioned in the question is hardly appropriate here. Supporting Russia’s recent proposals on security guarantees could be a real contribution to improving NATO-Russia relations – in particular, the draft agreement on security measures for the Russian Federation and the NATO member states. That would bring Turkey’s significant role into focus – its role in NATO and diplomatic capacity. Again, decisions in NATO are made by consensus.

We intend to maintain contact with our Turkish partners in the interests of creating the right political and diplomatic atmosphere and promoting the dialogue on security issues in the Euro-Atlantic.

Question: Official spokesman for the Taliban Zabihullah Mujahid has announced plans to appoint an Afghanistani ambassador to Russia. At the same time, he expressed hope that Russia would recognise the Taliban government. What stage are the talks at now, and how does Moscow feel about these plans by the Taliban?

Maria Zakharova: We have not received any notification from the Afghan authorities about plans to post an ambassador to the Russian Federation.

We emphasise that Russia is not in talks on the official recognition of the interim government of Afghanistan at this time. The Taliban is well aware of Russia's approach and conditions, which include forming a genuinely inclusive government, ethnically and politically, and taking effective measures to combat terrorism and drug-related crime, as well as the observance of basic human rights.

Question: President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky has approved the strategy for the country's information security, which refers to Russia's information policy as a threat – and not only to Kiev, but to other democratic countries as well. What is it that Ukrainian colleagues see as a threat? Can you comment on such a statement by the Ukrainian side?

Maria Zakharova: It appears that Mr Zelensky himself has become a threat both to Kiev and to other European states, including in the context of preserving democratic principles and foundations. Numerous examples of this have been mentioned today; I do not want to repeat myself.
Everything issued by the Ukrainian president’s office and approved by the Kiev regime is an immediate and direct threat to the country’s statehood. These are not words disconnected from reality but a mere fact. The disunity of the Ukrainian people has already reached catastrophic proportions. The ongoing problems are becoming chronic; they are being aggravated in all areas of life. This is not about some kind of political dissatisfaction among voters, lower ratings or discussions going on in society, but about the fact that Ukraine has become unmanageable for its people, society and elites. This is a threat to the state’s national security. Who is in charge of this process? What does information security have to do with anything? Is this what they are actually concerned about? Have they been seeking the main cause of their failures? Well, they have found it.

The most important thing is that Western and European curators should understand this. Ukraine is indeed a European country; there are many Ukraine-related problems on the European continent. This is beginning to threaten our common space. They should be aware of this as they have undertaken to patronise, support and protect the young Ukrainian ‘democracy.’

**Question:** The Russian Foreign Ministry has previously stated that Moscow proposed to sign an agreement on interstate regulation of Internet governance. What is this project about? Are there any details you can share?

**Maria Zakharova:** Russia’s main approaches have always boiled down to a policy towards the internationalisation of Internet governance, equal participation of states in this process, and preservation of their sovereign right to regulate the national segment of the Internet.

We believe that the Internet should remain an open and integral global resource endowed with a fair and truly international governance mechanism that would ensure confidence, trust and universally equal opportunities for all users. We proceed from the fact that no country or group of countries can single-handedly establish regulations, rules and standards for the operation of the global network. This is Russia’s essential approach; it was developed a while ago. We have been promoting our approaches in this area. Back in 2017, Russia introduced relevant initiatives, with the idea of adopting the concept of a UN convention on institutionalisation of issues related to the safe operation and development of the Internet based on the global community’s equal participation in the governance of the global network.

These are the approaches and principles that were announced by Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya.
International Information Agency on December 29.

**Question:** Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu said that Moscow is preparing a meeting between Armenian and Turkish special representatives. There are no specific dates. Do you have any details? What will be the format of this meeting? Will Russia act as its organiser, mediator, or will it limit its role to technical arrangements for making this contact possible? What are your expectations for this initiative?

**Maria Zakharova:** There has been hardly a briefing where we did not comment on our approaches to bringing the relations between Armenia and Turkey back to normal and Russia’s possible role in this process. We have been paying a lot of attention to this topic.

We proceed from the premise that normalising relations between Yerevan and Ankara would improve the overall situation in the region and build an atmosphere of trust and neighbourliness there.

Let me remind you that we have gone well beyond commenting on this topic. From a historical perspective, as a country seeking to promote better relations between Armenia and Turkey, Russia has done a great deal to this effect. The fact that the two sides appointed their special representatives for this purpose is a logical and reasonable step to deliver on their shared commitment to better relations. Russia has said many times that it is ready to offer its good offices and to play a role in the settlement, and reaffirmed its readiness to make these contacts a reality. We will definitely update you once we receive any new or additional information.

**Question:** Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has recently made quite an important, lengthy and thoughtful statement for compatriots living abroad. This happened at the meeting of the United Russia Commission on International Cooperation and Support for Compatriots Living Abroad.

He said that the new version of Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept will be released in early 2022. Of course, Russia’s steady progress and Western attempts to undermine it create a new reality, requiring Russia to come up with new responses.

Will the latest developments and challenges our compatriots encounter be taken into account in view of the escalating conflict potential in the world? Are you working on these matters?

**Maria Zakharova:** We always keep a close eye on whether the rights and
legitimate interests of our Russian compatriots abroad are respected. We have a state monitoring framework to this effect, and we also do this in our day-to-day contacts with the representatives of the Russian diaspora. There are programmes to this effect, and the Foreign Policy Concept, as well as other core instruments, contains provisions to this effect. This has become part of the routine for the diplomats working in our foreign missions and the Foreign Ministry headquarters. We pay special attention to consolidating the Russian community, preserving its cultural and language identity, promoting ties with Russia, and resolving specific issues our compatriots face both within their diasporas and in their everyday lives.

We help them access Russian informational, educational and other resources, as well as encourage voluntary repatriation. We have done a lot on multiple fronts on this topic.

As for the way these matters factor into our work on a conceptual level, let me remind you that in 2020, one of the constitutional amendments approved during a national vote – I am referring to Paragraph 3 of Article 69 – put on paper the requirement to support compatriots for the very first time. Of course, we have factored this dimension into our work, including during the drafting of the Foreign Policy Concept, as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in his remarks at the meeting of the United Russia Commission you have mentioned.

We are working on all fronts.

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To conclude this briefing, I would like to wish you happy holidays and a happy New Year. From all my heart, I wish you wellbeing, good health and strength, both in body and spirit, in order to be able to overcome the issues and challenges we unfortunately have to face in our lives.

Let me assure you that being a federal agency and a true diplomatic family of foreign policy and international relations experts, the Foreign Ministry guards Russia’s interests, just as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said. We will stick to this vision moving forward, doing our best to promote Russia’s national interests.

Happy holidays! All the best to you and your close ones! See you in 2022.