



**EMBASSY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION  
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**PRESS-RELEASE**

**Remarks of Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
of the Russian Federation, at the Munich Security Conference  
(February 17, 2018)**

**Sergey Lavrov:** Now that international relations have entered a period of radical change, which has overturned the thesis about “the end of history,” we should remember what happened in the relatively recent past. As Russian historian Vasily Klyuchevsky said, “History (...) punishes us for not learning its lessons.”

Eighty years ago, in 1938, an agreement on the division of Czechoslovakia was signed in Munich, which led to the Second World War. During the Nuremberg Trials after the war, the leaders of the Third Reich tried to justify the Munich Pact by saying that its aim was to push Russia out of Europe. For example, this is what Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel said.

The tragedy of the Munich Agreement highlighted the main pressure points of that period, including belief in one’s exceptionalism, disunity and mutual suspicion, reliance on sanitary cordons and buffer zones, as well as open interference in the internal affairs of other countries. This memory is especially alarming when superimposed on modern realities, the underhanded attempts to distort the truth about World War II and the events preceding it, as well as the rehabilitation of Nazis and their accomplices. Some EU countries have laws equating Nazis and their accomplices with those who liberated Europe and allow the demolition of monuments to those who defeated Nazism.

The experience of WWII and the subsequent polarisation of Europe during the age of bipolar confrontation should have shown European nations that there is no alternative to building a common European home where people will not be divided into “us” and “them.” The very integration project of the European Union is rooted in a desire of the founding fathers to prevent the revival of the logic of confrontation, which was the reason behind many disasters on the continent.

For many years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, in which Russia played a crucial role, we did our best to build a system of equal and indivisible security in the Euro-Atlantic region. We dramatically decreased our military capability on our western borders. We advocated the strengthening of common European institutions, primarily the OSCE, and the coordination of an international framework of treaties on European security.

Regrettably, our calls for an equal dialogue and for realising the principle of indivisible security fell on deaf ears.

Contrary to the promises made to us in the 1990s, as documents from the US National Archives have recently confirmed again, NATO continues its eastward expansion. NATO troops and military infrastructure are accumulating on our borders. The European theatre of war is being systematically developed. The implementation of US missile defence plans in Europe is undermining strategic stability. Purposeful propaganda campaigns are underway to engender hostility against Russia among the European public. It has nearly become politically correct in the establishment of many countries to say either bad things or nothing about Russia.

When people in the West speak about Russia's growing influence, they mostly do so in a negative way. The authors of a report for this conference encountered this as well. I would like to remind you that when Russia was weakened and facing historical trials, our partners said that they wanted Russia to be strong and that any actions by Russia's neighbours outside the region and other countries are not directed against our interests. We have been given promises regarding the EU Eastern Partnership project. We hope they will be fulfilled and that Brussels will cut short any attempts to transform this project into a Russophobic narrative. Looking at the situation in Europe from the perspective of a zero-sum game can have extremely dangerous consequences.

One such consequence is the internal conflict raging in Ukraine, which was forced to choose between the West and Russia during the preparation of the Association Agreement. It is highly regrettable that the EU, which subsequently agreed to act as guarantor for the February 21, 2014 agreement between the Ukrainian Government and the opposition, proved unable to ensure its implementation and actually supported the anti-constitutional coup. And now Ukraine, a country with huge potential and talented people, has been reduced to a situation where it cannot govern itself. Russia has a greater interest in the settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis than anyone else. We have the legal framework for this – the Minsk Package of Measures, which was drafted by Russia, Germany, Ukraine and France with Donetsk and Lugansk and approved by

the UN Security Council. This agreement must be implemented strictly and in full. However, Kiev is openly sabotaging this in the Contact Group and within the framework of the Normandy format. Moreover, Kiev officials are talking about a military scenario. I am sure that the EU is aware of the dangers of this U-turn.

Regrettably, fresh attempts are being made to force the countries that border Russia and the EU, be they in the CIS or the Balkans, to choose between the West and the East. The German newspaper *Die Welt* has recently published an item titled “The EU or Putin: Who Gets the Western Balkans?” [EU oder Putin – wer bekommt den Westbalkan]. And this is far from the only example of public indoctrination in keeping with the “us or them” philosophy.

The renunciation of collective Russia-EU cooperation mechanisms, such as summit meetings, the Permanent Partnership Council and industry dialogues, and reliance on pressure have not made Europe a safer place. On the contrary, the conflict potential has grown visibly, and the number of problems and crises is growing in Europe and around it.

The developments in the Middle East and North Africa have shown that the policy of replacing undesirable governments across the ocean and forcing alien development models on other countries not just creates chaos in vast areas but also strikes back with very real problems imported to Europe, primarily a spike in international terrorism, tidal waves of illegal migration and all other related problems.

All this must be taken into account to understand the genesis of the current relations between Russia and the European Union. The Russian authorities invested hard work and political capital in developing mutually beneficial relations between Russia and the EU. But the goal of a truly strategic partnership and a reliable and stable system of relations, which would enhance the joint competitiveness of Russia and the EU, has not been attained. But for this we are not to blame.

I believe that the EU has been unable to find the golden mean in relations with Russia over the past decades. In the 1990s, Russia was seen as a disciple who must be tutored in the Western ways consistently and contrary to its protests. The predominant myth now is the alleged “omnipotent Russian threat,” the traces of which they are trying to find everywhere from Brexit to the Catalan referendum. Both stereotypes are profoundly mistaken and point to the lack of common sense and understanding of Russia. We note that more and more people in the EU feel uncomfortable about the abnormal situation in our relations. Respected experts openly admit that diplomatic paralysis is the price they have to pay for demonstrations of illusory EU unity.

Russia has not changed its policy approaches to cooperation with the EU. We would like to see the EU united on the basis of respect for the fundamental interests of its member states. They must be free to determine how to develop their economies and foreign economic relations, for example, whether to meet their energy needs based on pragmatic, commercial approaches or under the influence of political and ideological considerations.

We proceed from the assumption that the EU can play an active, responsible and, let me stress it, independent role in international affairs. I have taken note of Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger's interview with the Bild newspaper, in which the respected Chairman of the Munich Security Conference speaks about the need for the EU's higher foreign policy profile. We welcome his idea of cooperation between Russia, the EU, the US and China in creating a security architecture for the Middle East. A similar approach could be applied to the Persian Gulf.

It is in Russia's interests to have a strong and predictable European Union for a neighbour, an EU that would be able to act as a responsible member of international life in the polycentric world that is becoming reality right before our very eyes.

It is time to stop trying to swim against the tide of history and to start working together to renew the system of international relations on an equitable basis and with reliance on the central coordinating role of the UN, as stipulated in the UN Charter. Russia is open to an equal partnership with the EU based on mutual respect and a balance of interests in order to find effective responses to modern-day challenges. We are also willing to promote our relations with the United States and all other countries on these principles.

It is important to make good use of the potential of Russia-EU cooperation so as to create a common space of peace, equal and indivisible security and mutually beneficial cooperation in the area from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. At the strategic level, I would like to draw your attention to the initiative of President Vladimir Putin on promoting a greater Eurasian project that would combine the efforts of all members of the integration structures within the CIS, the SCO and ASEAN. I see no reason why the EU could not join in this work, for example, by starting with the establishment of professional contacts with the EAEU. I hope this day will come very soon.

**Question:** What can you say about the information published in the US media yesterday to the effect that \$1.25 million of the Russian taxpayers' money was used on a monthly basis to try to influence the outcome of elections in the United States. Do you think the investment paid off?

**Sergey Lavrov:** I have nothing to say about this, because one can publish just about anything. We can see growing numbers of accusations, allegations and statements. However, I also had the chance to read the statements by Assistant Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Jeanette Manfra, who dismissed reports with allegations that any particular country influenced the election results. As I understand, US Vice President Mike Pence said the same thing either here, or in one of the neighbouring capitals. So, until we have the facts, everything else is bunk, pardon my not too diplomatic turn of phrase.

**Question:** You claim that the EU has confronted the countries participating in the Eastern Partnership with a choice between Russia and the EU. Do you agree - if you look at the facts - that we have different levels of relations with these six countries? Azerbaijan and Belarus are reluctant to sign a comprehensive agreement with us. Under your pressure, Armenia is sacrificing its membership in the Eastern Partnership in favour of the Customs Union, and we have to consent to a lower-level agreement. Three other countries also decided against the comprehensive option. Do you agree that we are just trying to meet them halfway and are not imposing anything on them? After all, if someone refuses to sign an agreement with us, we are not sending tanks there.

**Sergey Lavrov:** This is one way of conjuring up the “Russia threat.” You started your question by stating that I allegedly said that the Eastern Partnership is used to tear these countries away from Russia. What I said was that when the Eastern Partnership was being created, we received assurances that it would not be directed against Russia. I held out hope that these claims would be honoured, as some of the countries you mentioned would like to see the Eastern Partnership used precisely that way. That’s all there is to it.

**Question:** You mentioned my Bild article about cooperation between Russia, the United States and other countries in the Middle East. From Russia’s perspective, what needs to be done in order to create a more systematised security architecture in a region plagued by such a large number of crises? What does it take to make this happen?

**Sergey Lavrov:** To recognise that all countries of that region - Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, other countries of the Persian Gulf, including Iran - have their legitimate interests there, and not to approach these issues solely from the standpoint of geopolitical games where it is either the West against Russia, or the West against Iran, or everyone wants to be together with Turkey provided it behaves differently.

Of course, there is another, even more dangerous two-pronged approach to these problems (I’m referring to differences within the Islamic world) of seeking to

try to address regional issues through fomenting discord between Sunnis and Shiites. I think this is fatally dangerous.

The group of people, which Wolfgang mentioned in his interview, who represent the United States, Russia, the EU, and China, are probably a combination of external players who, to a certain degree, may have influence on all sides. Some speak to one group of protagonists, while others talk to other participants of this drama. If we add the Arab League leaders to this equation, combined, they represent an external mechanism capable of influencing the situation on the ground. If we could achieve this, then, I think, we could come up with proposals which would, to a large extent, rely on the experience of the Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Helsinki process. There's no need to invent anything new here. They may include confidence-building measures, military transparency, invitations to exercises, briefings, and much more. I believe these are not too complicated things to start with. The most important thing now is to convince the antagonists that external players will not support conflicts along ethnic or confessional fault lines. We will be ready for such contacts at any time.

**Question:** You mentioned trends in Europe that may be described as Nazi revisionism. Could you clarify what you had in mind? Who were you talking about?

**Sergey Lavrov:** What I mean is that the minions of Nazi criminals who were convicted by the Nuremberg Tribunal continue to be celebrated in a number of countries, including the EU. We are aware that marches honouring neo-Nazis are occasionally held in a number of northern EU countries. We are aware that even neo-Nazi symbols are widely used, in particular, in Ukraine, such as the emblem of the Azov battalion which is a replica of SS symbols. It's not just about emblems and symbols, although torchlight processions are symbolic, and I think many in Europe still remember what they are connected to. However, the behaviour itself involving the destruction of everything that is non-radical, the demand to Ukrainise all spheres of life, or to outlaw the teaching of children of ethnic minorities in their native languages, the attempts to outlaw unwanted media, or to attack Orthodox temples of the Russian Orthodox Church, and much more represent hallmarks of radical nationalism which, in many respects, smacks of neo-Nazism. That's all there is to it. I think that all those present here are following the developments in Europe and are perfectly aware of what I'm talking about.