

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



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Transcript of Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Before the Russia-EU Troika Session Held in Vienna on February 15, 2006

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Foreign Minister Lavrov: Our visit to Austria has begun. Yesterday evening was devoted to bilateral talks with Austrian Federal President Heinz Fischer and with the Foreign Minister, Ursula Plassnik. A working meeting also took place, but now on international affairs with Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel and the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker, who is currently in Vienna.

Of bilateral issues, our trade and economic cooperation was discussed; it is evolving very well. The prospects for political engagement in world affairs were discussed, primarily from the vantage point of Austria's EU Presidency in the current half year. We also considered the theme with which the Luxembourg Prime Minister is currently concerned on the Council of Europe's instruction - engagement between the Council of Europe and the EU. This is a very important question, since as the European Union develops a situation sometimes arises where the EU member countries want to exclude themselves from the Council of Europe's legal field. It is clear that this would be a new dividing line and that different standards would be applied to human rights observation in the Council of Europe space. Most states understand that this is inadmissible. Therefore Luxembourg Prime Minister Juncker at the Council of Europe summit in Warsaw last May was directed to prepare his considerations on how to avoid a dividing line that nobody needs and is potentially dangerous.

Talks directly with the EU Troika are to be held today.

Question: Will Iran be discussed? What stand will Russia take?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Of course it will. Our position has not changed. We are convinced that the question of the Iranian nuclear program can be resolved only with the help of professionals, experts from the IAEA. And of how to tactically ensure just this course of events, we shall be thinking together with our EU partners, the United States, China and other members of the IAEA Board of Governors, which will gather at the start of March for its next session.

Question: Please comment upon yesterday's statement of Mikhail Saakashvili?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Georgian President Saakashvili has been making many statements. I do not think that I need to comment on each of them. I want to say that what is happening there, in respect of the peacekeepers, is going beyond all bounds. The facts are being distorted, ignored, juggled with, provocations are being regularly carried out against the peacekeepers, all the agreements are being violated. They have begun to demand visas of them, which previously was never the case. The peacekeepers were always there precisely as peacekeepers under a CIS mandate supported by the OSCE. Vehicles and cargoes that come in for their supply are being seized. All of this resembles an attempt to create a situation where it will be necessary to blame the Russian Federation for all the troubles stemming from the inability of the Georgian leadership to arrange a direct dialogue with South Ossetia.

Remember the story of the Igla man-portable surface-to-air missile system which at first was allegedly found tied to a tree in the area over which helicopters carrying Georgian leaders fly. Then this system turned out to be thrown into the river. I now do not even know how it is possible to react to each of this kind of statements. The way to settlement is but one - through negotiations between the parties. South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity has backed up the initiative of Georgian President Saakashvili, which the latter put forward in the United Nations back in September 2004, the initiative for stage-by-stage advance to settlement, starting with the most essential thing: restoration of trust, which was seriously undermined from that time when at the end of the 80s-the beginning of the 90s the Georgian leadership abolished all the autonomies in the republic. Then came the sanguinary war, and the summer events of 2004 in Ossetia. So trust needs to be restored. When the Georgian President suggested advancing stage by stage towards settlement through the restoration of trust, through economic cooperation and only then switching over to the determination of issues of a political character, the leaders of South Ossetia backed this up. But it took more than a year before the Georgian side returned to this initiative. We managed at the OSCE Ministerial in Ljubljana to record in the OSCE Ministerial Council's statement on Georgia precisely the need for gradual advance towards resolving this crisis. After the OSCE Ministerial the Joint Control Commission gathered in Moscow on this basis with both the South Ossetian and the Russian side in attendance, where the President of South Ossetia proposed to start jointly elaborating a concrete plan for settlement based on the concept of stage-by-stage approach. At the last moment the Georgian side refused to do so and rejected the insistent suggestion from the OSCE to adopt a Joint Statement of the sides on the inadmissibility of a military solution to the conflict and on the necessity of resolving it solely by political methods. So that's the real state of affairs, which we can comment upon. As to the statements being voiced, I leave them on the conscience of those who are making them.

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A video recording of the remarks is posted on the Russian MFA's website in the Video section (<http://www.mid.ru>).

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