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Mikhail Kamynin, the Spokesman of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Answers Media Questions Regarding the Visit Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Will Make to the United States

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Question: What is, firstly, the status of the upcoming visit on March 6-8 of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov to the US? What does the visit's program envisage?

Answer: This will be an official visit. The program envisages talks with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and meetings are scheduled with US President George W. Bush and also with senior Congress officials and eminent American political scientists. It is the first official visit of Sergey Lavrov to Washington. The Minister had six working meetings with Secretary Rice before this. She herself twice in April and October last year visited Moscow in her capacity as Secretary of State. In addition, Sergey Lavrov on March 8 will visit New York, where, in particular, his meeting with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan will take place. The aim: to discuss topical problems in the context of our work in the UN.

Question: What is the agenda of upcoming talks?

Answer: Both sides expect to use them maximally for discussing a broad range of international problems and various aspects of bilateral cooperation. Apart from current issues, it is borne in mind to conduct a "review of horizons" in the Russian-American partnership for the long term.

Among the themes of the talks: the state of affairs in different regions of the world, primarily those conflict-afflicted, including the Middle East; issues related to counteraction against international terrorism and to the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including that in the regional dimension. Priority matters now being discussed in the context of the Russian G8 Presidency, including energy security problems, also will be touched on.

Within the framework of the bilateral agenda, attention will be focused on specific aspects of mutually beneficial Russian-American cooperation in such areas as economy, science and technology, and humanitarian programs, to which belong, in particular, questions of conclusion of Russian-US talks on Russia's accession to the WTO, of continued dialogue in the energy sphere and a whole array of others.

Question: What do the dynamics in bilateral relations look like today?

Answer: In recent years, Russian-American relations have been evolving along an ascending line. There have been 17 meetings at the highest level since 2001; five of them took place in 2005. At the end of these meetings, the Presidents gave joint instructions to the ministries and agencies of both countries to advance bilateral engagement on different issues. During Lavrov's visit the progress in carrying out those instructions is expected to be reviewed.

The active contacts at summit level are buttressed by an extensive network of reciprocal engagement in various fields - between foreign affairs, security, economic ministries and other agencies.

Question: How is cooperation evolving in the military-political field and in counter-terrorism?

Answer: In the military-political field, the focus of constant attention of both sides is the formation of new relations in the strategic area on the principles of partnership and consideration of the security interests of each other, as laid down in the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (came into effect on June 1, 2003) and the Moscow Declaration on the New Strategic Relationship, signed by Presidents Putin and Bush in May 2002. Work is being carried out to implement the accords with the US as part of the G8 Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction initiative. The sides are actively cooperating towards fulfillment of UN Security Council resolution 1540 on the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, adopted in April 2004. In September 2005 the Russian and US Presidents were the first to sign the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, adopted by the UN General Assembly on Russia's initiative. At the summit in Bratislava (February 2005), the Russian and US Presidents' Joint Statement on Nuclear Security Cooperation was adopted and the intergovernmental Arrangement on Cooperation in Enhancing Control of Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) was signed, which have expanded the base for Russian-American engagement in these fields. Effective cooperation in combating international terrorism is being effected within the framework of the Russian-US Counter-Terrorism Working Group, which in December 2005 held its 14th session.

Question: What is the outcome of cooperation in the trade-and-economic and scientific-and-technical fields?

Answer: In the field of trade-and-economic relations, 2005 was one of the most productive. Russian-American trade rose nearly 30 percent, to 19.2 billion dollars (from 14.8 billion dollars in 2004). An indubitable positive gain is the diversification of economic exchanges, and the further inflow of American investments into the Russian economy. There are real successes in the scientific-technical sphere too. The Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement was renewed for another ten-year period. June 2005 saw the creation of the Innovation Council at the Presidents' initiative. An important achievement was the agreement on using Russian spacecraft for ensuring the further work of the International Space Station.

Question: Where else are the two sides cooperating?

Answer: Links between Congress and the Federal Assembly integrally supplement the interstate dialogue. A permanent working channel of interaction has been set up between the upper houses of the parliaments. Two years ago there was signed the Memorandum of Cooperation leading to the creation of the permanent Senate-Federation Council Working Group. In addition to the Duma-Congress Working Group formed at the level of the State Duma and the Congress of Representatives a new form of cooperation has emerged - meetings between members of the Lower Houses' foreign affairs committees.

We expect that a substantive discussion of questions of further intensification of the engagement in all these sectors will take place in the course of Sergey Lavrov's contacts in Washington.

Question: What is Russia's approach to the further promotion of bilateral relations?

Answer: The visit is taking place against a not simple informational background in the US around Russian-American relations. In this connection we are ready for an open and frank conversation with members of the Administration, of the American political science community and in Congress in order to explain our approaches to pressing international problems as well as various aspects of the internal political situation in Russia. We presume that the level of relations enables conducting an honest and constructive dialogue on any issues. But we consider that it is in mutual interests to protect the Russian-American partnership from political fluctuations and dishonest attacks.

By and large we expect the Minister's visit to become a concrete contribution to advancing Russian-American relations which have positive dynamics and good prospects. This does not mean that the sides have no differences in approaches to some or other problems. But the practice of pragmatic engagement that has become established in recent years helps find solutions on any, even very complicated issues and serves to reinforce the partner bases of our relations with the US.

March 6, 2006