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Transcript of Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Following Talks with President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gasparovic, Bratislava, April 5, 2006

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Foreign Minister Lavrov (speaks after Gasparovic): For my part, I want to express gratitude to the President of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Gasparovic, for the welcome, hospitality and very informative conversation.

We have a reciprocal striving for cooperation. As a result, we noted the effective fulfillment of all the agreements that were reached a year ago during the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to the Slovak Republic.

In the field of economics - the Intergovernmental Commission has resumed its work, and agreements have been reached on concrete actions to step up cooperation in the areas of investment and high technologies. We have industrial, energy and transport infrastructure projects, as well as those for developing cooperation in culture, science and education. Our visit here has confirmed that both Russia and Slovakia regard their partnership as a long-term one that meets the interests of the peoples of the two countries and is not subject to any momentary considerations.

Question: A few days ago Iran test-fired a torpedo that allegedly was made in Russia. Your comment?

How do you feel about the intention of Iran to set up an oil exchange?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: I do not know who tested whose weapon. Many western countries also sold arms to Iran at a point in the past. I saw sequences on television. I am not a specialist on sea torpedoes.

I've also heard that an oil exchange is supposedly being opened that will trade in oil in euros. I do not know whether that's true or not. I can say nothing on that score.

Question: Why do the official statements refer to friendship and cooperation when in practice we see a divergence of positions, for example, on Ukraine?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: I would not draw such conclusions that there is a mismatch between our words and deeds. We understand that Slovakia acts on the international scene in the mainstream of the common positions of the EU and NATO. We respect its choice. We understand that this lays some definite obligations upon Slovakia. We have a dialogue both with the EU and with NATO. On a whole array of issues we hold similar positions, on certain issues our assessments differ. There is nothing unnatural in this, because never, probably, will there be a situation in the world where all states without exception will identically approach this or that issue. The point is not to state the differences and regard them as obstacles to cooperation, but to work on the rapprochement of positions. That's the approach of Russia in our relations with the EU and NATO. The wish that may sometimes be discerned in such matters is to treat everyone in the world as if they were all alike, which simply is unrealistic. Everybody understands that such will never be the case.

Foreign Minister Lavrov (adds after Gasparovic): We and the European Union are interested in seeing Ukraine develop as a stable, democratic state and a responsible participant in international cooperation in Europe and in the world arena as a whole. Here the interests of Russia and the EU are absolutely identical.

It's another matter that sometimes from certain European capitals, of course not from Bratislava, calls were heard that Ukraine should make up its mind with whom it wants to be - with Russia or the EU. That's a provocation. But it does not reflect the profound interests of the EU which coincide with those of Russia to see Ukraine a stable and steady country.

Question: 2006 is the last year for determining the status of Kosovo. Don't you fear that, should Kosovo become independent, this tendency might spill over to Slovakia, where the Hungarian minority lives?

Foreign Minister Lavrov (replies after Gasparovic): We feel it is necessary to look for exclusively negotiated solutions, because any hastiness with the imposition of decisions on whomsoever may create a serious precedent and have echoes not only in this region.

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