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Unofficial translation from Russian

Transcript of Replies to Media Questions by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov Following Meeting of the Bureau and Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Moscow, May 29, 2006

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Foreign Minister Lavrov: We are delighted to greet here, in Moscow, one of the first undertakings as part of the Russian chairmanship - the field meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). I was very flattered to have this opportunity to speak to the parliamentarians today.

We have formed and have already got support of a fairly ambitious program of Russia's chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. This program envisages very close engagement with the Parliamentary Assembly and generally has a fairly strong parliamentary dimension. We are keen on the Committee of Ministers cooperating with the Parliamentary Assembly as closely as possible, particularly on such most basic matters - President of the PACE Rene van der Linden has just mentioned one of them - as relations between the CE and the EU.

We have many areas of activity which are developing the traditional fields in which the CE actively participates. It is human rights issues, social problems, and those of the struggle against the new threats and challenges, including international terrorism. Russia became the first country to ratify the Council of Europe's Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. We hope for other CE members to soon follow suit.

On the whole we are in the process of the fulfillment of the obligations which Russia assumed upon entry into the Council of Europe. The question is not one of the absence of political will, but exclusively of the time that we need in order to fulfill the obligations still outstanding, to which belongs the Sixth Protocol, which van der Linden mentioned today. I can also say that in the period of our chairmanship we will pay special attention to the promotion of intercivilizational and interconfessional dialogue. Too many problems connected with interethnic and with interreligious relations have appeared in Europe recently. This is our common task. We will cooperate with the parliamentarians, with the PACE in order to solve it, so that in Europe there is no place left for the manifestation of Xenophobia and fascist ideology. Unfortunately, so far this happens, but to eradicate these disgraceful phenomena for modern Europe is only possible by acting together. The CE is one

of the most effective platforms where these efforts can be undertaken.

Question: Today you addressed the theme of Belarus many times. When will Europe here your answers? Will a consensus be found in this matter?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: If by Europe is meant the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I know that the leadership of the Assembly, just as we, proceeds from the need to develop dialogue with Belarus, and solve all the issues that arise with regard to this country through such dialogue. I also know that the representatives of the Belarusian Parliament leadership were invited to a PACE event literally not so long ago, but because of the restrictions imposed by the EU on a number of leaders of the Republic were unable to come to participate in such dialogue with PACE. Although that would have been very useful. I am convinced that both Russia as the Chair of the CE Committee of Ministers and the PACE leadership will try their very best to forge such a dialogue. We will be doing that jointly with the PACE President.

Question: Will there be a meeting of the European trio, Russia, the US and China on the Iranian nuclear problem next week?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Regarding the nuclear program of Iran contacts are continuing, not ceasing for a single day. So I think that this week too will not go by without events.

Question: What is your assessment as the Chair of the CE Committee of Ministers of the recent dispersal of the sexual minority march and the fact that radical nationalists and police were acting almost together?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: Each country has its own laws. That this demonstration was not permitted is a fact. Further, probably, each participant of this or other undertaking must draw conclusions for themselves. Today I spoke of the fact that any manifestations of intolerance require our attention, including in the Council of Europe. Not all of the manifestations, about which the deputies are concerned, are the subject of universal norms. Probably, a dialogue can be conducted on how to make some or other norms universal. But what is universal has to be applied irreproachably. We in Russia were concerned by the moments when the CE maintained a silence in the period of the dispersal of antifascist demonstrations in one of the Baltic states, when the antifascists clothed in camp robes and with the Star of David were dispersed and the Council of Europe kept mum. I want to once again say that the norms of the fight against Xenophobia and the manifestations of racism and fascist ideology, that are universal should absolutely be complied with by all members of the CE.

Question: Russia is often being criticized for human rights abuses. Did you discuss this issue today?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: We discussed the issue of human rights many times. I am certain that these discussions will never cease. I would agree with those who clearly declare that nobody is exempt from criticism of human rights abuses. I am certain that in Europe there is not a single country which could say it has an absolutely clean reputation. Do not forget that most European countries moved towards their present condition through democratic reforms and market reforms over the course of many decades. We in Russia chose democracy as the way to organize our society, just as we chose market reform as the basis for developing our

society. In fifteen years we have traveled the path which, as I've already said, most European countries spent many decades to cover. We must approach this issue logically and avoid attempts to establish one model of democracy for the entire world. It is even worse to do that overnight. I consider that each sensible person knowing life will agree that this will be absolutely impossible and counterproductive. Democracy cannot be modeled by somebody. It must be "felt" by the people themselves. As it is happening in Russia. That's exactly how Russian democracy is stabilizing itself, stabilizing the country and, I am certain, the nearby countries.

Foreign Minister Lavrov (speaks after van der Linden): So that our dialogue will continue with the CE and PACE, including dialogue on the issues which we believe the PACE either keeps mum on, as in the case of certain negative tendencies, or artificially politicizes. Attempts to artificially rewrite history, unfortunately, also concern some deputies of parliamentary groups in the Council of Europe. So the questions, I repeat, are very many. The main thing is to conduct a mutually respectful dialogue and tackle the questions that arise between us through such a dialogue for the good, eventually, of democratic and united Europe. The main thing is that dividing lines should no longer appear in it. On this point we absolutely concur with the leaders of PACE.

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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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