



Sergey Lavrov

«WE ARE READY FOR JOINT CONSTRUCTIVE WORK WITH ALL CONCERNED PARTIES»

In March 2008, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov commented to the Security Index journal on some topical issues of national foreign and security policy.¹

SECURITY INDEX: In your opinion, what is the role of Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in strengthening our positions on the international arena?

LAVROV: It is impossible to imagine politics in the country without active participation of NGOs. The authorities are open for dialogue and cooperation with the civil society institutions. The state support of NGOs is increasing. Their number is growing. Today various organizations of the Russian *third sector* comprise over eight million people.

Obviously, the MFA cannot stay apart from this trend. Such developments are typical of the current stage of international relations – NGOs generate many ideas that later become the subject of interstate cooperation. So it is the matter of being present at all level of global processes, otherwise it would be quite difficult to ensure our national competitiveness in foreign policy. Hence, we are interested in equal involvement of Russian NGOs together with their partners abroad into international cooperation – they should undertake zealous efforts to strengthen mutual understanding among the nations, should complement intergovernmental and interstate links of Russia.

We have signed appropriate agreements and have dynamic cooperation with Russian NGOs that deal with economic issues – the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, *Business Russia*, *OPORA*, the Union of Oil and Gas Industry, the Association of Russian Banks, and the Moscow International Business Association. Political experts, academic community, professional media associations also have significant foreign policy potential. We tighten our relationship with NGOs acting under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church, notably with the World Russian People's Council and the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society. The basis for such joint activities is the broad consensus on major issues of foreign and domestic policy proved at the recent parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia.

SECURITY INDEX: How would you assess the existing level of interaction between the Russian Foreign Ministry and the NGO sector?

LAVROV: I regularly meet the representatives of the Russian NGO sector. At one of the recent meetings in February this year the participants noted that lately our cooperation had intensified and became systemic.

Key coordinator of our interaction with civil society is the appropriate interdepartmental working group. The Russian Center for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation at the MFA has also gained positive experience of using various specialized loci for dialogue. We hold sectional meetings of NGOs with the MFA departments. The ministry maintains good working ties with the Presidential Council for Facilitating the Development of Civil Society Institutions and



I
N
T
E
R
V
I
E
W
S

Human Rights, with the Public Chamber, and so on. Another evidence of our close contact with the civil society is the MFA Website, which contains a special section on such issues.

To a large extent, thanks to our support, over 40 NGOs got consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and the Council of Europe. Such status encourages them to get engaged in numerous intergovernmental programs. Our civil society is represented in Russian delegations at international forums held by the UN agencies, including UNESCO, as well as by the Council of Europe and the OSCE. Last year our NGOs had a chance to take part in the work of the UN General Assembly for the first time.

During Russia's presidency in the G-8, the *Civil G8–2006* forum was organized. This project helped to raise the level of dialogue and interaction between the G-8 and civil society institutions.

SECURITY INDEX: Does Russia plan to involve NGOs more actively in the process of promoting national interests in the former Soviet Union?

LAVROV: We welcome the growing interest of our NGOs in working in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This is extremely important bearing in mind the expansion of humanitarian cooperation in this region. The legal basis for this is the initiative of the CIS Council of Heads of States aimed at developing relationships within the common humanitarian space, establishing the Humanitarian Cooperation Fund and the appropriate Council. Many new ideas emerge and get tested at the Forum of Artistic and Scientific Intelligentsia of the CIS countries.

As we elaborate the proposals set forth by President Putin in October 2007 at the Russia-EU summit in Mafra, the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation was established. The branches of this fund are opened in Paris and New York. The concept behind it is clear – to intensify the debate of the general public, NGOs and experts about the ways of organizing the electoral process, electoral monitoring, to discuss the situation with national minorities and migrants, rights of children and youth, and freedom of speech. At the same time, Russia stands for the elaboration of the European Convention on Election Standards and has submitted the draft of this document. Work at this document also opens a window of opportunities for Russian NGOs.

The *Russian World* Foundation has been set up in accordance with the presidential decree. This new structure is now operational and it provides grants to NGOs. The MFA is one of its founders. I am sure that the establishment of the foundation will assist in strengthening our ties with the Russian communities abroad, will broaden the opportunities for engagement of national NGOs in accomplishing such crucial tasks as protection of rights and interests of compatriots, consolidation of positions of the Russian language and culture abroad and, in general, maintenance of our common asset – Russian-language area.

SECURITY INDEX: Our journal traditionally draws attention to disarmament issues. So we can't help asking about the MFA's vision of efficiency of multilateral approaches to disarmament. What are the ways to enhance the effectiveness of such mechanisms?

LAVROV: We are concerned about the state of affairs in the process of disarmament. I mentioned this on February 12 in Geneva at the Conference on Disarmament.

We believe that multilateral approaches to practical disarmament should be approved and institutionalized. This would be in conformity with the multilateral approach to nonproliferation issues – we have to bear in mind that both matters are interconnected. The logic of development of the present-day international relations proves that any unilateral or bloc schemes, especially if they rely on force, fail – they are inadequate. Attempts to bring them to life undermine stability and raise the danger of external interference in domestic affairs of sovereign states, sometimes even under the pretext of nonproliferation missions.

President Putin has recently stated that Russia would not let anyone drag Moscow into costly confrontation, including new arms race, which would be fatal for internal development of our country. Among our priorities is the promotion of constructive disarmament agenda. We try to focus it on the following issues – to prevent the washing out of legal basis of disarmament and to impede the expansion of arms race in new spheres, such as outer space.

SECURITY INDEX: Would you comment on the fate of such pillars of the disarmament and nonproliferation regime as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), or new strategic arms reduction agreements?

LAVROV: The core element of the contemporary system of international security is the NPT. We are interested in maximum constructive and fruitful work of the 2nd PrepCom session, which should create conditions for success of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. It is important to ensure further effectiveness of the treaty, taking into account three components – nonproliferation, peaceful nuclear energy uses, and disarmament.

We are concerned about the process of strategic offensive arms reduction and limitation. It is known that in 2009 the restrictions of the START Treaty will expire and, meanwhile, the United States intensifies its efforts to deploy the global missile defense system. Under such circumstances, strategic stability cannot continue to be the exclusive area of U.S.-Russian relations. The remaining bipolarity should be overcome, this sphere should open to all concerned parties, which are ready for active cooperation in strengthening common security. In our opinion, to become productive, such interaction should be based on equal rights, joint analysis of the problems and consideration of interests of all parties.

Nowadays it would be important to streamline the structure and activities of the existing disarmament triad – the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, the UN Commission on Disarmament, and the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. The First Committee, which represents all member states of the United Nations, should be entitled with the functions of a basic political institution charged with elaboration of strategic directions for multilateral disarmament efforts. The commission should play the role of integrator of specific ideas and concepts, be the forum for approving practical recommendations. We highly praise the work of the UN Council of Wisemen on disarmament and assume that it may serve as a platform for provisional testing of ideas and expertise on specific issues.

SECURITY INDEX: The Conference on Disarmament has been blocked for several years now. How do you assess the prospects of this mechanism? Will it be revived?

LAVROV: As far as the Conference on Disarmament is concerned, it is a unique and indispensable negotiation forum, which has serious intellectual and professional potential. Russia, as the overwhelming majority of other states, is not content with the fact that substantive activities of the conference remain blocked. This is another evidence of stagnation in the area of disarmament and arms control.

The situation may change, if there is political will. The important prerequisite for this is the creation of favorable international conditions for further progress in disarmament on the basis of reciprocity, equal security for all and international law.

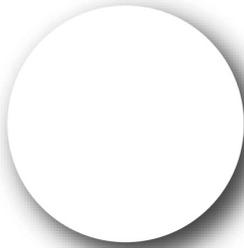
As we adhere to such approach, on February 12 Russia and China jointly presented to the conference the draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects. We are sure that the conference is the most appropriate forum for multilateral work on the draft treaty with research mandate. Later when the conditions are in place, these activities may be transformed into negotiations and the special committee of the conference may be set up.

In conclusion, let me emphasize once again that Russia is firmly committed towards collective approach and strengthening of legal mechanisms of regional and global politics on the basis of the UN Charter and principles of indivisibility of security and development. We support the establishment of open systems of collective security, above all, the creation of the single security space in the Euro-Atlantic region. We stand for continuity in disarmament and arms control, for their further development through treaties and legal norms, including multilateral and universal agreements in the spirit of strategic transparency. This is the key to our common success. We are ready for joint constructive work with all concerned parties. 

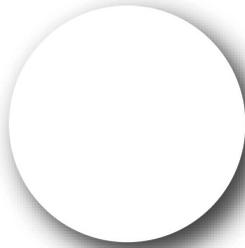
Note

¹ The interview with the minister was taken on March 27, 2008.

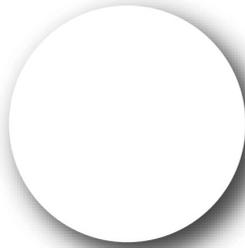




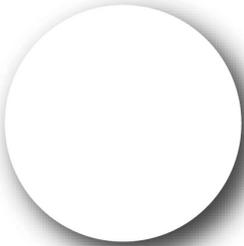
TOKYO



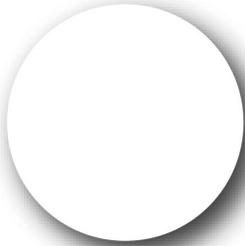
SHANGHAI



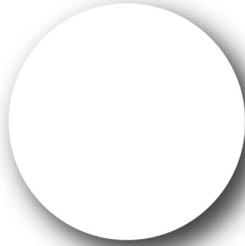
NEW YORK



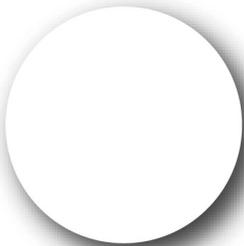
MEXICO CITY



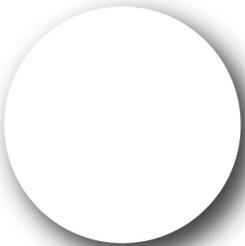
LONDON



TEHRAN



MOSCOW



TEL AVIV



EVERYWHERE

The Doomsday Clock reads five minutes to midnight as the world stands on the brink of a second nuclear age. Climate change now poses threats nearly as withering as those posed by nuclear weapons. Stay informed and receive the *Bulletin*, the leading authority on science and global security, for only \$48* a year (six issues). Subscribe today online.

**Bulletin
of the
Atomic
Scientists**

IT IS 5 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT www.thebulletin.org

*Please allow 6–8 weeks for delivery of your first issue. Outside of North America, one year is \$52.00, two years is \$93.50 (U.S. dollars only). For institutional rates please call 1-866-584-0009.