

**Remarks by the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation  
Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the Ministerial Meeting of the Conference  
on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA),  
Nur-Sultan, October 12, 2021**

Mr Chairman,  
Colleagues,

Despite the destructive and ruthless impact of the coronavirus pandemic we have been fighting for almost two years, Asia has managed to maintain a positive development momentum. Its strong response has confirmed that the region's total accumulated anti-crisis potential and the shared dedication to find collective solutions give us strength to confront major challenges and overcome their consequences.

Unfortunately, the geopolitical configuration remains quite complicated in the region, holding back its transition to a comprehensive multilateral cooperation and integration paradigm. We can see deliberate attempts to wind up the situation, to undermine the existing mechanisms of interstate interaction, with narrow-format exclusive groups and Cold War- and containment policy-style military blocs playing a role.

NATO's recent policies can be placed on a par with the aforementioned hurdles as after Afghanistan, the North Atlantic Alliance seeks to redeploy its forces to other zones in the region, such as Central, South or Southeast Asia, while also sending flows of Afghan refugees to those regions. The alliance seems to sidestep the question of its responsibility for the consequences of its 20 years of experiments there leaving it to the international community, primarily Afghanistan's neighbours, to deal with the problems.

NATO's hasty departure has further tightened the tangle of Afghan contradictions. They left many weapons and military equipment in the country. It is important to prevent their use for destructive purposes. The Taliban said they would fight drug trafficking and terrorism, would not project instability onto neighbouring states, and would work to create an inclusive government. We hope these promises are kept.

With the growing instability around the world, it is important to prevent the situation in the region from going south towards further deterioration. This bloc-based confrontational ideology should give way to an awareness of the benefits of pan-continental cooperation, of forging strong, mutually complementary economic ties, and resolving differences jointly through peaceful dialogue.

We are interested in the regional architecture being sustainable and open to all, based on cooperation among states and multilateral organisations. An architecture that would provide everyone with equal rights and opportunities based on respect for international law, mutual trust and respect for national identity.

By acting in a coordinated manner, we will be able to ensure a broad connectivity in the interests of all countries on our common continent of Eurasia. We have started moving in that direction by linking together the various subregional integration projects.

In particular, ties are being established between the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). All these platforms rely on solid legal frameworks and a network of cooperation mechanisms. They implement specific programmes and projects that are relevant to all participants while guided by the principles of consensus. We regard the growing cooperation between these associations as promising groundwork for further harmonisation of integration processes.

The SCO, the EAEU, and ASEAN are active in forging dynamic ties with their neighbours and other countries. This paves the way for the Greater Eurasian Partnership, an initiative proposed by President of Russia Vladimir Putin.

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) could also play a role, with its expert and practical resources in various sector-specific dimensions. This should be beneficial in the context of strengthening pan-Eurasian multilateralism, erasing the remaining dividing lines and deepening applied cooperation.

The Kazakhstani chairmanship and the CICA Secretariat, supported by the participating countries, have added new dimensions to the forum. There has been a revival on the transport track, with a discussion of the prospects for creating continental cargo corridors, as well as in the human dimension, with an emphasis on tourism and education.

We are grateful for the support of the Russian proposal to include one more important topic on the agenda, information security. CICA can make a solid contribution to the UN effort to agree on reliable tools for protecting the digital environment and preventing crimes involving digital technologies.

On the CICA economic track, Russia continues to oversee cooperation in the development of small and medium-sized businesses. Our experts presented an updated concept of interaction in this field for 2021-2023. A specific action plan is in the works.

The CICA is updating its catalogue of confidence building measures to incorporate new areas for cooperation in addition to the traditional ones. We welcome Kazakhstan's proposal to begin working on improving epidemiological security. This initiative is in line with efforts made at other multilateral platforms. Russia has been promoting similar initiatives at the SCO and the East Asia Summit platform since 2016 and discussing them as part of its dialogue partnership with ASEAN, such as the proposal to train epidemiologists from Southeast Asian countries.

Our country is actively involved in the global COVID-19 response effort. We are augmenting the supply of medicines, test systems, equipment and PPE. We place particular importance on the possibilities for technology transfer to developing countries and ensuring the maximum availability of vaccines, primarily through launching local production.

We intend to support the Conference's second track in every possible way, in particular, the work of the planned Council of Wise Men. We are to approve the Council's regulations today.

October 5, 2021 marked the Conference's 29th Anniversary (CICA Day). Next year, we will mark an even bigger anniversary and hold a summit. We need to begin thorough preparations. This forum has good potential. We need to further unlock its potential as an important tool for strengthening the atmosphere of trust and developing productive cooperation in Eurasia.

Thank you for your attention.

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