

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and Togolese Abroad of the Togolese Republic Robert Dussey, St Petersburg, February 16, 2021

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Togo Robert Dussey took place in a friendly, warm atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, as is always the case in our longstanding relations.

We have reaffirmed the fundamental agreements reached at the highest level, including on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg in July 2018, where Russian President Vladimir Putin and Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe held a bilateral meeting, as well as in October 2019, when Faure Gnassingbe participated in the Russia-Africa summit in Sochi.

We have a mutual interest in intensifying and deepening the entire scope of bilateral ties, including trade, the economy and investment. We have agreed to look for specific opportunities for joint projects in areas such as energy, natural resources, infrastructure, transport, and agriculture.

We have an understanding to develop humanitarian ties, including education opportunities at Russian institutions for Togolese people. We have offered to organise an internship for Togolese Foreign Ministry employees at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

We have discussed some key aspects of international affairs, above all the current situation on the African continent. The Russian Federation is consistently adamant that African problems (of which there are many) require African solutions, while outside interference never does any good.

We strongly support the African Union, the G5 Sahel, and the sub-regional organisations in Africa, in their efforts to resolve numerous local conflicts and crises. We specifically focus on supporting the fight against terrorism, which poses a real threat, including for our friends in Togo and other coastal countries in the region of the Gulf of Guinea.

We appreciate Togo's contribution to the peacekeeping mission in Mali – the largest contingent was sent by our friends from Togo. I expressed our condolences over the dead and wounded in three attacks by terrorists against Togolese peacekeepers during the past month. This is yet further evidence of the need to display international solidarity with our African colleagues.

We agreed to promote cooperation in the UN, where Togo supports many Russian initiatives, including the resolution condemning the glorification of Nazism. Togo is a co-author of our resolution. Togo also backs other Russian resolutions, including the one on preventing an arms race in space. We signed a joint statement by the governments of the Russian Federation and the Togolese Republic, emphasising our resolve to prevent an arms race in space and pledged not to be the first to begin it. This initiative has already acquired many supporters. The UN is adopting special resolutions to back this process.

We are interested in developing the resolutions of the Russia-Africa summit. We spoke in detail about the implementation of these agreements. The coronavirus pandemic has required adjustments. Nevertheless, the results on implementing the Sochi agreements are obvious. This year we will actively continue these efforts.

My colleague has kindly invited me to visit Togo. I am grateful to him for this invitation and will use it by all means. Thank you.

Question: Robert Dussey, Togo's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and Togolese Abroad, praised the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. What about the development of

bilateral COVID-19 diplomacy? When is Togo planning to register this vaccine? Is Russia going to supply Togo with medical equipment to help it counter the coronavirus?

Sergey Lavrov: It is very important to observe the necessary procedures on legislative regulations in this respect. I believe we have supplied almost 30 African countries with equipment, test kits and individual protective gear at their requests. We are willing to do this in the future, too, including at the request of our Togolese friends.

As for the Sputnik V vaccine, it has already been registered in over 30 countries, including three African states: Algeria, Tunisia and the Republic of Guinea. Our Togolese colleagues have officially requested our cooperation in supplying this vaccine.

As Minister Dussey has said, it is necessary to complete some procedures in Togo. Once this is done we will be ready to discuss the practical steps.

As you know, the Sputnik V vaccine is being promoted in external markets by the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF). The African Union established the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team on acquiring COVID vaccines. Recently, the RDIF and this Task Team held a video conference whereby our friends from the African Union were provided with relevant information. During the video conference, fund representatives replied to questions on what must be done.

Let me repeat that the RDIF is dealing with the distribution of the export vaccines, and it has its delivery schedules. The sooner the vaccine is registered, the quicker we can decide on distribution.

Question: The next Russia-Africa summit is scheduled to be held in an African country in 2022. Do you know where exactly? The first summit in Sochi in October 2019 was dedicated to promoting peace and security. What will the next one focus on?

Sergey Lavrov: Preparations for the summit are underway. It will be held in 2022. It was decided in Sochi to hold it every three years. Our African friends will decide on the venue.

The Association for Economic Cooperation with the African States was created in Russia following the 2019 Sochi summit. It includes representatives from the related departments and major Russian companies. The Russia-Africa Partnership Forum, which is a political

association, was created as well. Its secretariat is located at the Russian Foreign Ministry. We agreed to hold the forum's annual political meetings at the foreign minister level, from Russia and the African Union Troika that is comprised of its former, current and incoming chairpersons. In 2020, we held them via videoconference with the foreign ministers from South Africa, Egypt and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Hopefully, we'll be able to meet in person in 2021.

Russia and the African Union Troika will use the political meetings to draft the agenda for the 2022 Russia-Africa summit. I think it will be of a comprehensive nature and cover all aspects of our relations. The positions of the African Union, the African countries and Russia on key current issues overlap. We advocate full respect for international legal norms and principles, the UN Charter, non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign countries, the right of peoples to determine their future and the peaceful settlement of disputes through diplomatic and political means.

The participants in the 2022 Russia-Africa Summit will discuss combating terrorism and other threats of our time, drug trafficking and organised crime, as well as the economy and investment. We are still slightly behind other states, but trade between Russia and the African countries has been growing quite rapidly lately. I think we will soon make up for the time we lost in the years when, at the dawn of the new Russian statehood, we were too busy to maintain proper ties with Africa. A very strong foundation was laid in Soviet times, though. Our friends remember this. Many Africans have graduated from Soviet and Russian universities. We will continue to support the Russian Universities' Alumni World Association that is active in many countries. This is also a very important area of contact between the people. The agenda will cover all areas of our relations. There's no doubt about it.

Question: How do the Western countries feel about Russia getting closer to Africa?

Sergey Lavrov: Their approaches differ. Some are neutral, others, like the former US administration, are very negative about it. Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo went to Africa before the end of President Trump's term and publicly urged them not to cooperate with Russia and China in trade, because Moscow and Beijing are allegedly

pursuing their own geopolitical interests and trying to benefit from these ties. The United States, though, is doing so out of the goodness of its heart. I will not comment on this.

It wasn't long ago that representatives of the new US administration said the Russian Sputnik V vaccine should be treated with suspicion, since it was another geopolitical plan from the Kremlin, and that one must be careful not to become dependent on Russia. It's sad if they have nothing else to say about normal and friendly relations between countries, and if this is the only thing that they have to say about this. We never make friends with other countries in order to oppose third countries. If Russia and its foreign partners are mutually attracted, we have every right to develop our relations as we see fit. I hope others will also learn their lessons and treat our ties with Africa with respect.

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