

## Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with VGTRK, Moscow, August 19, 2025

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**Question:** What a pity you are not wearing the sweatshirt with a USSR logo on it.

**Sergey Lavrov:** I think that this whole story has been blown out of proportion to make it look like a sensation of some sort. But there was nothing extraordinary about this. We have so many goods around us which replicate Soviet-era symbols. I do not think that I must be ashamed of wearing them. This is part of who we are, and how we used to live, this is part of our history – the USSR was our Motherland. Today, it evolved into the Russian Federation living side by side with the former Soviet republics, our friendly neighbours. Of course, there is no getting away from clashes of interest – they do happen. This is how life is.

I believe that this is a fashion trend, if you will. I saw that after the Anchorage summit, young people studying here showed off these sweatshirts. There are no imperial aspirations in this posture, as far as I can judge, nor there are attempts to revive what some call an imperial mindset. There is nothing to suggest that. The message here is that history exists, and we do have a past. It is our duty to preserve this history, including with a light touch of humour.

**Question:** How did the Americans react when they saw you wearing this outfit?

**Sergey Lavrov:** They took it in stride, so there were no hysterical responses of any kind. They simply said that they liked the shirt I was wearing – this is what US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said.

**Question:** How would you describe the overall atmosphere there?

**Sergey Lavrov:** The atmosphere was quite good, actually, and it made its way into the statements by presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump following the talks. It was a useful conversation.

It showed without any doubt, first that the US leader and his team are sincere in their commitment to achieving tangible results by bringing about something lasting, durable, and sustainable. This is what sets them apart from the Europeans who, at the time, shouted at every corner that they would not accept anything but a ceasefire, while continuing to supply weapons to Ukraine even after it is declared.

Second, President of the United States Donald Trump and his team have developed a clear understanding of the fact that this conflict has its causes which means – this is what some presidents and prime ministers from Europe have been saying – that all the speculation alleging that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was unprovoked – all this is just baby talk. I cannot find any other way to frame this. What matters here is that

they are still sticking to this narrative. Their meeting with President of the United States Donald Trump in Washington, where they summoned Vladimir Zelensky, demonstrated that they continue to demand an immediate truce. At least some of these leaders, for example Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz, are still talking about the need to pressure Russia with sanctions. Not a single of these gentlemen mentioned the term human rights.

Whenever they raise any foreign policy matters involving countries which do not belong to their camp, and do not fit into a neoconservative or neoliberal mould, be it Venezuela, China, Russia and even Hungary these days, as well as a host of other countries too, they invariably focus first and foremost on ensuring human rights as part of what they call a rules-based order.

But if you look back from where we are today and remember what they have been saying about Ukraine for all these years, you will not find any references to human rights. But how could someone posing as champions of democratic principles fail to be appalled by a total ban on the Russian language in all its everyday applications? Not at all. No one felt any misgivings with the fact that this is the only country in the world to ban a language. As for their statements on having to agree on a territorial swap – someone among them did say these words, first, it is up to Vladimir Zelensky to decide. Second, they went on to perorate about deploying a peacekeeping mission of some sort, which means sending a military force there disguised as peacekeepers. What does this mean? This means that ensuring human rights will be up to a person on whose watch the country adopted laws to strip the Russian-speaking population of its rights, including the rights to language, education, accessing the media in Russian, as well as norms denying them the right to practice their religion. In fact, there was a law de facto banning the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Therefore, they believe that this is the man who must be in charge of striking a deal with Russia as he deems fit. We have not heard anyone say that this man should start by cancelling these laws before moving forward with these talks, not least because there is the UN Charter which stipulates the need to promote and encourage respect for human rights for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

From the standpoint of language and religion, the UN Charter is being flagrantly violated in Ukraine. It is important to recall that Vladimir Zelensky declared in Washington that, while he was prepared to engage in negotiations, he would not entertain any discussions about territorial concessions, as these are prohibited by the Constitution. This is an intriguing point, as – absurd though it may appear – the Ukrainian Constitution still mandates the state to fully guarantee the rights of the Russian language (specifically highlighted as such), alongside other ethnic minorities, despite the enactment of laws banning Russian in

all spheres of public and private life. If he is so concerned about his Constitution, I would advise beginning with its initial articles, which explicitly enshrine this obligation.

Nevertheless, it has long been apparent that such realities have been ignored by various political figures – Ursula von der Leyen, Emmanuel Macron, Keir Starmer, Friedrich Merz, and, prior to him, Olaf Scholz. Naturally, Joe Biden and his administration took the lead in disregarding and distorting the facts underpinning the Ukrainian crisis. Notably, these European delegates, who accompanied Vladimir Zelensky as a support group in Washington on August 18, spoke of the necessity to take action and move forward – a clear response to the fact that US President Donald Trump and his team (particularly following the Alaska summit) have adopted a far more substantive approach to resolving the Ukrainian crisis, recognising the imperative to address its root causes, as Russia and President Vladimir Putin have consistently emphasised.

One such root causes lies in Russia's security concerns. These arise from the decades-long, systematic violation of commitments made to us against NATO's eastward expansion. President Putin has repeatedly acknowledged that, subsequent to these assurances, the Alliance underwent five waves of expansion. To suggest these were merely verbal promises is categorically false. They were formalised in writing through political declarations signed at the highest level during the OSCE summits in Istanbul (1999) and Astana (2010), which explicitly state that security is indivisible and no one may strengthen their own security at the expense of others. NATO did precisely that. No state or organisation has the right to assert dominance over the OSCE space. Yet they acted in direct contravention. To claim otherwise is mendacious – not least because a verbal promise carries weight, and crucially, there exists not only documented evidence of these facts but also highest-level signed documents.

When these delegates in Washington insisted that efforts must commence with formulating security guarantees for Ukraine – and simultaneously for Europe (as emphasised by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer among others) – not once did they mention Russia's security. Yet the OSCE document I referenced (universally drafted and adopted by consensus) mandates security arrangements acceptable to all.

The patronising disregard for international law, for pledges often made deceitfully and formalised on paper, remains evident in these officials' approach to the Ukrainian crisis. Without respect for Russia's security interests, without full recognition of the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine, no lasting agreements are possible – for these are precisely the issues requiring urgent resolution in the context of the crisis settlement.

I reiterate: the Alaska summit demonstrated that the US administration is genuinely committed to a settlement not to rearm Ukraine for war (as occurred after the Minsk agreements), but to ensure this crisis never recurs – guaranteeing the lawful rights of all states in this region and the peoples inhabiting them.

This understanding was reaffirmed during President Putin's late-night call with US President Donald Trump yesterday, in which the latter briefed our leader on his discussions with Vladimir Zelensky and this so-called "European support group."

**Question:** One of the proponents of 'European support' – Finnish President Alexander Stubb – drew a parallel between the current situation in Ukraine and the war of 1944, when Finland gave up part of its territories. How should this be understood?

**Sergey Lavrov:** That's one parallel, but there are others to consider.

For decades after World War II, Finland enjoyed ideal conditions for economic growth. It was able to address social issues and ensure the well-being of its population largely because of its access to Russian energy resources and, more broadly, its deep cooperation with the USSR and later the Russian Federation. This included Finnish businesses running profitable projects on our territory. The immense benefits Finland gained from these special ties (a status earned by its neutrality) have now been discarded almost overnight.

This gives one certain thoughts. In 1944, Finland, which had fought on the side of Hitler's Germany, was implicated in the atrocities of the Nazi regime, with its military units involved in numerous war crimes. It was that Finland that signed a series of definitive agreements with the Soviet Union.

Recently, President Alexander Stubb himself referenced those very agreements. I know him well from his time as Foreign Minister. They signed an agreement that enshrined a principle of indefinite neutrality, stating that neither the Soviet Union nor Finland would ever join any blocs directed against the other. So one must ask: where did that commitment go?

Finland has now joined an alliance that explicitly considers Russia its enemy. So, if President Stubb's parallel was meant to evoke the territorial changes that resulted from WWII, then yes – that was indeed one of its outcomes. Such territorial adjustments are often an integral part of reaching a definitive peace. There are multiple examples of this kind.

In this case, I would like to reiterate: we have never stated any interest in seizing territories. Neither Crimea, nor Donbass, nor Novorossiya were ever the goal in and of themselves. Our goal was, and remains, to protect the Russian people – people who have lived on that soil for centuries, who first discovered those lands and shed their blood for them. They are the ones who built the major cities in

Crimea and across the region – cities like Odessa and Nikolayev – and who developed the ports, factories, and plants.

Everyone is aware of the role Catherine the Great played in developing those lands. We all know how they were later incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR and, ultimately, became part of an independent Ukraine. They ended up as part of that independent state through the 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty, adopted by the Kiev leadership. This document also stated that Ukraine would forever remain a non-nuclear, neutral, and non-aligned state. It was this very commitment that formed the foundational basis for its subsequent international recognition as an independent state.

If Vladimir Zelensky's regime now rejects all these commitments – by discussing nuclear weapons, pursuing NATO membership, and outright rejecting neutrality – then it logically follows that those provisions, that very foundational basis for Ukraine's independent statehood, cease to exist. This is a critical point that must be considered. Otherwise, we are left with a situation where international law is not front and centre. Instead, we see the application of those so-called "rules" again – the ones the West has never formally written down but seems to invent whenever it needs to justify an action, or condemn the very same action if its interests change. This will not work anymore.

Once again, I would like to reiterate that we value the understanding shown by the current US administration. Unlike the European approach, it appears to be sincerely striving to understand the core of the problem and help resolve the root causes of this crisis – the ones that were nurtured in Ukraine by the West, led by the previous US administration, under Joe Biden, with the goal of using Ukraine as an instrument to contain and suppress Russia, ultimately aiming to inflict upon us what they termed a "strategic defeat."

**Question:** Did you discuss sanctions with the American side? After all, as the Americans said, they had to pay for petrol with cash.

**Sergey Lavrov:** You always have to pay for petrol, whether it is cash or not. These are the costs borne by the country whose leader with a delegation visits another state.

We did not discuss the sanctions. Many of our experts, politicians and officials have repeatedly stated that lifting the sanctions may have adverse effects. That would create illusions for some economic sectors that now we can finally overcome the problems by returning to the strategies developed and implemented in the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Many believe that would undo the achievements we have made recently and which we are experiencing first-hand in terms of strengthening our technological sovereignty and the key matters pertaining to military, economic and food security, as well as reliance on our own technology. Do not shut the door on

cooperation but do not become dependent like when essential goods and technologies were in shortage here. Overall, I believe that the current process is more reliable and has more prospects than even six months ago when Joe Biden's administration was finishing up its term.

**Question:** What can we anticipate further? Will it be bilateral or trilateral talks?

**Sergey Lavrov:** We are not rejecting any forms of work, either bilateral or trilateral. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said it multiple times. It is important that any formats, 1+1, 1+2, or multilateral formats which exist in abundance, including within the UN, are not exploited for the purpose of media coverage, in morning newspapers or in evening news, or on social media, to skim the propaganda cream off the top. These formats are designed for step-by-step, consistent preparations for summits, from the expert level and up. We will always support this sort of serious approach. Any contacts involving top officials must be prepared extremely carefully.

**Question:** Is it possible that US President Donald Trump will fly to Moscow this year?

**Sergey Lavrov:** As you know, he has been invited. During the news conference in Alaska, President Putin confirmed this invitation. As far as I remember, President Trump said it would be very interesting. It would indeed be interesting to everybody.