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**FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEY LAVROV'S INTERVIEW WITH THE ARMENIAN MAGAZINE  
REGIONAL POST CAUCASUS**

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20.03.2017

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States News Service March 16, 2017

The following information was released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation:

Question: Would you describe geopolitical, economic and cultural relations between Armenia and Russia as satisfactory, and what areas do you think have potential?

Sergey Lavrov: We consider our current relations with Armenia to be at a high level. We have a long record of friendship and mutual support and are bonded by cultural and spiritual affinity. Russia and Armenia are reliable allies in international affairs and security. Together, we are forging the forward-looking Eurasian Economic Union. We have a shared perspective on today's most pressing challenges.

Our ties are based on the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of August 29, 1997, and the Declaration on Allied Cooperation Oriented to the 21st Century of September 26, 2000. The legal framework for our cooperation includes dozens of documents embracing every area and aspect.

One can hardly overestimate the role of a close trust-based dialogue at the highest level in our joint work. In 2016, President Vladimir Putin and President Serzh Sargsyan met on two occasions in Moscow (on March 10 and on August 10) and once in St. Petersburg, on June 20, on the margins of the trilateral summit on the Nagorny Karabakh settlement. Vladimir Putin visited Yerevan on October 14, 2016, to participate in the events in the framework of the CSTO Collective Security Council. Our bilateral trade and economic relations gained an additional impetus following the official visit of the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, on April 7, 2016, to Yerevan.

Russia is Armenia's leading economic partner, whose share in the Republic's foreign trade amounts to 24.3 per cent. The bilateral trade between the two countries reached USD 1.24 billion in 2015 and USD 745.3 million in the period from January to August 2016. A considerable increase in Armenian exports of agricultural products to the Russian market has been registered lately. Accumulated Russian investments in the Armenian economy amount to USD 4.3 billion, making up 40 per cent of its overall foreign investments. The total number of enterprises with Russian participation is about 1,300. They operate in a wide range of sectors, such as energy, transportation, banking, telecommunications, mining and smelting. Intergovernmental commissions on economic and military and technical cooperation pursue their work. Cooperation between legislative authorities steadily progresses, including in the framework of the

Interparliamentary Commission. There is an increase in inter-regional exchanges involving about 70 constituent entities of the Russian Federation. On October 14, 2016, Yerevan hosted a successful Fifth Russian-Armenian Interregional Forum.

I would like to highlight the humanitarian and spiritual ties that have bound our peoples for ages. Names of many Armenian academicians and artists have been listed among those who constitute an important part of Russia's cultural heritage. Armenia has traditionally offered a warm welcome to Russian performance groups. Contacts in the educational sphere are growing stronger. Eight branches of Russian higher educational institutions operate in your country, providing education for the total of over two thousand students. In September 2015, the Lomonosov Moscow State University opened its branch in Yerevan. I cannot but mention the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University, which nowadays ranks among the most prestigious higher educational institutions in the Republic.

Fruitful collaboration between the foreign ministries of the two countries remains an integral part of multifaceted Russian-Armenian cooperation. I highly appreciate our meaningful dialogue with my Armenian counterpart Eduard Nalbandyan. I warmly recall my official visit to Yerevan on April 21-22, 2016, during which we held an amicable and detailed discussion of the major items on the bilateral, regional and global agenda.

We are grateful to Armenia for cosponsoring the Russian draft resolution "Combating Glorification of Nazism and Other Practices That Contribute to Fuelling Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance" approved by the UN General Assembly on December 17, 2015. We appreciate the support Armenia provided to us when the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly was voting on the Ukrainian-sponsored draft resolution "Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol" on November 15, 2016.

Indeed, the relations between Russia and Armenia are comprehensive in nature. Together with Armenian friends we shall continue working on further unlocking their truly limitless potential for the benefit of our peoples.

Question: A rapprochement between Russia and Turkey has recently begun. Should Armenia watch this rapprochement with caution, given the complicated relations between Armenia and Turkey and the special relations Turkey has maintained with Azerbaijan?

Sergey Lavrov: This normalization between Russia and Turkey should not be regarded as a process that may harm other States. Russia has no hidden agenda. We build no political and no economic alliances directed against third countries or adversely affecting any interests.

In general, we are open for constructive and mutually respectful cooperation with all who express same readiness.

We are convinced that getting the Russian-Turkish ties out of months-long crisis will enhance trust and mutual understanding in the region. We expect the gradual restoration of bilateral cooperation with Ankara to benefit peace, security and stability in Transcaucasia.

Question: The border between Armenia and Turkey which now de facto delimitates Turkey and the Eurasian Economic Union remains sealed. Can Russia play a positive role in settling this issue?

Sergey Lavrov: We would most certainly welcome the opening of the Armenian-Turkish segment of the EAEU's external border for free movement of people, goods and services. This will obviously benefit the entire region.

Let me note that Russia played an important role in restoring the relations between Armenia and Turkey during the active phase of this process in 2007-2009. The collective efforts, first and foremost those of Yerevan and Ankara, led to the signing in Zurich on October 10, 2009 of the Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations and the Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations between the two countries in the presence of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, France and Slovenia, the U.S. Secretary of State and the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Sadly, the normalization process subsequently stalled and by now has come to a complete halt. It is of principle importance, though, that the sides have demonstrated the ability to reach agreement and take serious and responsible decisions. I am convinced that Armenia and Turkey are able to resolve the current problems. That said, quite a lot depends on themselves. After all, the quality of the politicians is measured not only by the depth of their realistic analysis of the objective difficulties, but also by their ability to be optimistic in order to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of their citizens. When Yerevan and Ankara sit at the negotiating table, Russia will be ready to provide them with most vigorous assistance.

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Kaynak/Source: