
FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEY LAVROV'S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FROM THE ARMENIAN MEDIA

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Question: What do you think of the development of Russian-Armenian bilateral relations in recent decades?

Sergey Lavrov: Relations between Russia and Armenia are relations of alliance and strategic partnership. These terms are formalised in bilateral agreements and in documents of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). These relations cover all the spheres of activity of the countries, and all areas of life of our peoples, from security and foreign policy to culture, the economy, technology, humanitarian contacts, education and many others. In the past 10 years, our bilateral relations have developed under the influence of direct, trust-based contacts between our Presidents, Vladimir Putin and Serzh Sargsyan. Several times a year, they hold top-level meetings in Armenia and Russia and communicate on the sidelines of numerous international forums.

I would like to emphasise that Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which gave a boost to our trade, economic and investment cooperation. Suffice to say that last year, trade between Russia and Armenia increased by over 30 per cent as compared to 2016 and reached, if I am not mistaken, 1.75bn dollars. It is a very large sum, not to mention the fact that hundreds of companies with Russian participation - be it Russian or joint Russian-Armenian companies - operate in Armenia and benefit our relations and the economy of our ally.

Military-technical cooperation is traditionally very intensive. In addition to the Intergovernmental Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation, which is very active, we have a commission for military-technical cooperation. The commissions are operating well and producing good results.

Cultural cooperation has always been appreciated by our peoples. I can mention the Days of Armenian Culture in Russia last autumn, the opening of which in November 2017 was attended by both presidents.

As for education, the Russian-Armenian (Slavic) University operates in Yerevan. The university and eight branches of Russian institutions of higher learning in Armenia accommodate some 3,500 Armenian citizens and provide Russian higher education programmes. Moreover, 5,500 Armenians study in Russia, with 1,500 of them using the state scholarships provided by the Russian Government.

Our bilateral relations have witnessed very stable and high quality growth over the past 10 years.

It is complemented by close cooperation in foreign policy. We are allies within the CSTO. I already mentioned the EAEU, of which Armenia is now a full member. The CIS, of course, is relevant too, as well as our coordinated actions in the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

This does not cover everything that characterises our relations over the past 10 years, but I think that it indicates how rich these ties are and how they serve the current interests of our countries.

Question: Analysts believe that the 2011 Kazan summit could have been a breakthrough in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement process. How do you see this? What could be the key to successfully resolving this issue in the future?

Sergey Lavrov: The Nagorno-Karabakh settlement process is one of our priorities in the post-Soviet space. Russia, along with the US and France, chairs the OSCE Contact Group in Minsk. We align our efforts with the two other co-chairs and at the same time try to propose our own initiatives in line with the decisions made on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by the chairmen, considering our special ties with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The work done approximately in 2009-2011 was very intensive. The presidents of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan met almost 10 times.

The next meeting, which was set to take place in Kazan, inspired hopes for serious positive results, because the draft documents prepared by Russia with the support of the US and French co-chairs addressed, in our view, all Baku's and Yerevan's concerns in a balanced way. However, additional questions and comments arose during the summit. This happens. It is no tragedy. The work will continue. I am sure that many things contained in the Kazan documents are still important. Yerevan's and Baku's reaction following the contacts between the presidents, ministers and co-chairs, who visit the region (Yerevan, Baku and Stepanakert) regularly, confirms this.

I do not think we have lost anything of what we developed during those years, although, of course, some new ideas appeared during that time, which the co-chairs promote in their contacts with the parties. The main thing is to get beyond the mistrust we can still sometimes see during talks and concentrate on realistic and pragmatic ideas. We have a lot of them. We only need to write them down, and, although all the parties generally agree that we need to do this, we face difficulties when it comes to exact phrasing, as sometimes happens in other situations as well. I believe we will continue to overcome them and achieve some results.

Question: Armenia is often cited as an example of a country that advances relations both with the EU and the EAEU on an equal and mutually beneficial basis. Do you think such organisations as the EU and the EAEU will be able to find common interests and promote cooperation in the future?

Sergey Lavrov: It is true that Armenia shows it has the sense to develop relations in all areas. It is a winning and beneficial policy for a country. Post-Soviet countries must not accept this false choice between Russia and the West. This is an ideologically and politically charged approach. I believe the fact that Armenia insisted on such relations with the EU - with Armenia's rights and responsibilities in other integration processes recognised in approved documents - is a step in the right direction. Of course, it is very important for the European Union to drop this wretched logic of either/or, which has already resulted in the 2014 events in Ukraine, so that the rights and interests of Armenia, Azerbaijan or other participants of the EU initiative called the Eastern Partnership are not derogated. This is tantamount to robbing a people of their chance to fully develop cooperation with all their neighbours. This is the approach that Russia promotes consistently. Back in 2015, the

Eurasian Economic Union proposed establishing contacts with the EU, but the European Union did not acknowledge the EAEU as a rightful partner due to ideological and political reasons. This biased and prejudiced attitude is still present to a certain degree. However, there already are sensible people in Brussels; and experts of the Economic Commission for Europe and the European External Action Service have already had contacts with experts of the Eurasian Economic Commission. Now there is interest in making these expert contacts permanent. The first step is to have them address regulatory issues. I think this is just the first step, because the demands of life will require our European partners work with the Eurasian Economic Union and the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, which is currently headed by an Armenian citizen, as is the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. The EAEU member countries have delegated a wide range of responsibilities to supranational institutions, which means that many practical trade issues and practical steps in services and investment must be solved with the Eurasian Economic Commission.

I am quite optimistic about the future of EAEU-EU relations. Although this future will not arrive soon, the demands of life will force us to move closer together. I am sure that Armenia's Tigran Sargsyan, who chairs the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, will facilitate movement in this direction.

Kaynak/Source: