LAVROV COMMENTS ON RUSSIAN-JAPANESE RELATIONS

- 17.01.2019

Russian News Agency (17 January 2019)

Moscow and Tokyo still have a long way to go to become true partners on the international stage, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said at his annual news conference on Wednesday

"We are a long way from partnership in global affairs, moreover, we are still far from reaching an understanding on the need to search for constructive approaches that will bring our positions closer, instead of blaming each other," he said.

"We need to feel like partners with the Japanese on the international stage rather than two countries that are on the opposite sides of the fence," Lavrov stressed.

The Russian top diplomat pointed out that "Japan did not join some sanctions [against Russia] but it did join a number of them." "It is hardly in line with the idea of bringing relations to a new level. Japan joins the G7s statements aimed against Russia, but as for resolutions that Russia is interested in and that are put to the vote, Japan votes against us," he added.

On French-Japanese meeting

Lavrov also noted that Japanese top diplomat Taro Kono had visited Paris before travelling to Moscow recently. While in Paris, he participated in a meeting of the foreign and defense ministers of Japan and France, who eventually adopted a declaration. "Judging by the declaration, we are clearly far from partnership on the international stage," Lavrov said.

"I would like to point out that in the declaration adopted at the two-plus-two ministerial meeting, France and Japan pledge to coordinate their activities in connection with Japans G20 presidency and Frances G7 presidency. We have questions in this regard, because the G7 is part of the G20 and the presiding country - Japan - must create conditions that would allow the 20 member states reach a consensus, rather than ensure the interests of one group of member countries. I hope that a misunderstanding just came about during the documents preparation and we expect our Japanese colleagues to show their usual professional skills and facilitate consensus decisions that will bring the developed and developing G20 countries together," the Russian foreign minister said.

On January 14, Lavrov and his Japanese counterpart held the first in a series of meetings within a new mechanism aimed at resolving the peace treaty issue.

Kuril Islands issue

Japans demand that Moscow hands the southern Kuril Islands over to Tokyo runs counter to the

countrys obligations under the United Nations Charter, which says that the outcome of World War II is not subject to review, Lavrov said.

"Recognizing the outcome of World War II is neither an ultimatum nor a precondition. It is an inevitable and indispensable factor in todays international system," he said. "When joining the United Nations, Japan signed and ratified the UN Charter, while its Article 107 says that the outcome of World War II is not subject to review. This is why we dont demand anything, we just call on our Japanese neighbors to act in accordance with their obligations under the UN Charter, the Treaty of San Francisco and a number of other documents," the Russian top diplomat added.

"The Japanese legislation enshrines the term northern territories," Lavrov noted. "No one ever made agreements on the return of those territories, it directly contradicts Japans obligations under the UN Charter," he stressed.

Since the mid-20th century, Russia and Japan have been holding consultations in order to clinch a peace treaty as a follow-up to World War II. The Kuril Islands issue remains the sticking point since after WWII the islands were handed over to the Soviet Union while Japan laid claims to the four southern islands. In 1956, the two countries signed a joint declaration on ending the state of war and restoring diplomatic and all other relations, however, a peace treaty has still not been reached. Moscow has stated many times that Russias sovereignty over the islands cannot be called into question.

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