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Lavrov: European security should be restructured

~ Solana wants agreements among NATO members on security, the global economy and protecting human rights ~

BRUSSELS (March 21, 2009) – Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov said that his country will continue to push for a new or revised transatlantic security compact and also emphasized the need for agreement among world leaders on how best to handle Iran and other security hot spots.

Speaking at Brussels Forum alongside Javier Solana, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Lavrov expressed disappointment with recent NATO policies regarding Russia and some of its neighbors, and he accused the United States and European members of the security organization of breaking promises made in the early 1990s when the Soviet Union dissolved. He advocated for a restructuring of European security structures that would guard against broken commitments or unilateral moves by stronger members at the expense of others.

“No country should secure itself at the expense of another,” Lavrov said. “What we suggest is to get together and make [NATO] principals binding. We just want to check whether the principals are still valid for all members.” Later, he added, “We also don’t like that NATO takes upon itself to judge everyone and everything ... without any legal justification.”

The fourth-annual Brussels Forum is a high-level meeting of influential worldwide leaders to discuss pressing transatlantic issues. Brussels Forum is organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) with the Federal Authorities of Belgium & the Egmont Institute, Daimler, and the government of the Czech Republic.

In the cordial discussion, Solana warned Lavrov that a wholesale revision of the European security structures and its tenants is premature. He told Lavrov that he would rather focus on three “baskets”: hard security, the economy, and protecting human rights worldwide.



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“If there is someone who doesn’t feel comfortable, he has the right to say it,” Solana said. “I think the Americans and the Europeans are ready to engage the Russians and make them comfortable.” But Solana added later that it would be time-consuming to take up restructuring NATO at this juncture in time.

In terms of security, Solana said it is critical that NATO members come to an agreement on Iran. “Russia and the Europeans and the Americans — together we have to really face the problem of Iran in a coordinated fashion,” he said. “This is one of the most important tasks we have in front of us. If we can do that we will get a tremendous amount of work done.”

Lavrov suggested that Russian leaders are prepared to discuss Iran but added that so far, his country does not believe that Iran has any nuclear weapons. “There is no proof,” he said. Lavrov said that negotiations with Iran will only work if Iranian officials are engaged directly and with respect.

He implied that Russia has been treated unfairly by NATO in the past and that future relations between Russia and Europe and the U.S., as well as advancement on key global initiatives, will work only if this impression can be dismissed.

“I want Russia to be understood,” he said, adding that Russia’s objective in challenging NATO is not about striking fear into its neighbors who join NATO, but rather about establishing binding rules that are adhered to by all members. “It is not about fear, it’s about fairness,” he said.

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Brussels Forum is an annual high-level meeting of the most influential political, corporate, and intellectual leaders worldwide to address pressing challenges facing both sides of the Atlantic. Participants include heads of state, senior officials from the European Union institutions and member states, U.S. officials, Congressional representatives, Parliamentarians, think tank leaders, academics, corporate executives, and media.

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