

**Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
Sergey Lavrov at the Opening Ceremony of the High-Level Policy Dialogue
“ASEM at 25: Strengthening Asia-Europe Partnership in a Transforming World”
(22 June 2021)**

Mr. Chair,

Dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank our Vietnamese friends for organizing this meeting. A quarter-century is quite an “age,” so we can sum up intermediate results of the ASEM process and outline the way forward towards strengthening cooperation between the two regions on our common Eurasian continent.

On this day 80 years ago, Nazi Germany launched an invasion on our Motherland. Straining all forces and mobilizing all resources, our country played a decisive role in defeating the Third Reich and saving Europe and the rest of the world from the scourge of the brown plague. The longed-for victory, which was brought nearer by the close alliance within the anti-Hitler coalition, provided a basis for building the modern architecture of international law, including the United Nations, and paved the way for the peaceful and stable development of all humankind. This is our common heritage, which should be carefully preserved to prevent tragedies such as World War II in future.

Last year marked the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Let me remind you that the document proclaimed the end of the Cold War era and established the principle of indivisible security in the entire Euro-Atlantic space. Regretfully, it remained only on paper, as in fact we witnessed a significant eastward expansion of the NATO bloc. Yet we believe that ideas developed in the framework of the Helsinki process are still valid. With due regard for local specificities, they are certainly of relevance for solving many regional problems, whether on the Korean peninsula or in the Middle East, in the Persian Gulf and in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.

Unfortunately, today, we can see the opposite trend, with harmful attempts to undermine the UN-centered world order and substitute it with the so-called

“rules-based order.” A number of states are clearly seeking to shape – outside the scope of universal international organizations – various restricted ad-hoc coalitions to assume the right to speak and act on behalf of the entire world community.

It is obvious that such practice is by no means helping to tackle multiple present-day issues – from terrorism to the environmental degradation and increasing inequality. The situation is complicated by the need for all of us to take a long journey to overcome the aftermath of the coronavirus infection.

We stick to the view that it is only through concerted efforts and guided by the principles of international law, with respect for the cultural and civilizational identity of the peoples of the world and their right to determine their own development models, that we can stand up to common challenges and threats. This constructive philosophy should underpin ASEM activities, all the more so, since in the present-day context, our forum, with its rich expertise and practical capacity, could play an important role in preserving and strengthening genuine multilateralism, erasing dividing lines in the Greater Eurasian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

Connectivity issues are now coming to the forefront. ASEAN, with its aspirations for a greater unity and solidarity, stood at the origin of this track of regional development. Today, connectivity remains firmly on the ASEM agenda and could serve as a catalyst for practical cooperation and a driver behind cross-platform relations and continent-wide processes, in keeping with the “integration of integrations” concept.

Organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are successfully working on these issues. Relying on a solid legal framework and effective operational mechanisms, they implement a result-oriented agenda that is relevant to all participants, being guided by the principles of pragmatism and consensus.

We expect that the EU will join our collective work. The natural movement of states and international structures located in the ASEM space towards each other is designed to facilitate broader pan-Eurasian integration in the foreseeable future.

I would like to recall that this task is exactly what President Vladimir Putin's initiative to create the Greater Eurasian Partnership is aimed at.

A good example of synergy is the adoption of the Ministerial Statement on COVID-19 by the ASEM Regional Coordinators last September. Russia is actively involved in the work in the areas mentioned therein. We are increasing production and export of vaccines, medicines, test systems, equipment, and personal protective gear. We are deploying relevant production facilities in a number of countries, including ASEM partners – China, India, Kazakhstan, and the Republic of Korea. Much attention is paid to sharing experience in laboratory diagnostics and digitalization of medicine. The online platform «Traveling without COVID-19» has been created to ensure safe international travel. I am pleased to note that the countries of the region have been actively joining it.

Socio-economic recovery from the pandemic is an absolute priority. This should clearly be the focus of the decisions of the ASEM Summit to be held in Phnom Penh in November this year. We are interested in deepening cooperation on customs matters, establishing transcontinental supply chains relying on rail transport, expanding e-commerce, modernizing remote areas and developing women's entrepreneurship. We see possibilities for closer cooperation in the areas of urban development, information and communications technologies, and vocational education and training, with a view to implementing joint projects.

Work needs to be done to revitalize the tourism industry, which was badly hit by the COVID-19 crisis. We are working on this together with our Asian partners, including in the framework of the East Asia Summit.

I would like to emphasize the importance of maintaining and strengthening the principle of ASEAN centrality in the efforts to promote multilateral cooperation in Asia-Pacific region without any attempts to introduce divisive concepts in the regional architecture.

The development of virtual communication channels and people-to-people contacts is on the agenda as well. In this context, I would like to mention the launch of the Russian initiative STIpot – an online platform to support academic

mobility – within ASEM in 2019. This is a good instrument for establishing direct links between academics and educators with access to joint research programmes and start-ups.

Cooperation between volunteer movements seems promising. They have shown themselves to best advantage during the fight against the pandemic. The number of volunteers in Russia is several hundreds of thousands, and the number of people they have helped is several millions.

The challenges that ASEM faces are indeed enormous. In order to better exploit the potential of the ASEM process, more work should be done to improve the effectiveness of its operational mechanisms, particularly on sectoral tracks.

I am convinced that our today's meeting will facilitate the achievement of these objectives and contribute to the preparations for the upcoming ASEM Summit in Cambodia.

Thank you.