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**Article by Sergey Lavrov for print media in the Latin American countries
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Russia and Latin America: Forward-looking partnership and cooperation

In the run-up to my visit to Latin America, I decided to share with readers my thoughts on the prospects for Russian-Latin American relations in the current geopolitical context.

The international situation remains extremely tense and continues to worsen in many aspects. The main reason for that is the stubborn desire of the so-called historical West, led by the United States, to maintain global dominance and to hinder the development and strengthening of new global centres and ultimately to impose on the international community a neo-colonial unipolar world order in the hope of, as President Vladimir Putin aptly put it, “collecting a tribute from humankind... extracting the hegemon’s rent.”

This is what stands behind long-time Western policies to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states, including through ideologically motivated operations to change objectionable governments, and to make extensive use of unilateral, illegitimate sanctions and dirty information war tricks. The consequences of these policies have been felt by many nations around the world, including Cuba, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria.

The ruling elite in the United States and the EU have always seen Ukraine as a tool to contain modern Russia. For years now, they have been nurturing this neo-Nazi Kiev regime, which came to power in February 2014 as a result of an anti-constitutional coup, dragging it into NATO and flooding it with attack weapons. In fact, they were pushing it to bring a military solution to the Donbass issue and to conduct ethnic cleansing among the local people who refused to recognise the results of the coup. Cynical confessions by the former leaders of Ukraine, Germany and France to the effect that they needed the Minsk Package of Measures, which they signed and which was approved by UN Security

Council Resolution 2202 in February 2015, only to gain time for Kiev to build up its military capacity. It turns out that Berlin and Paris had been deceiving not only Moscow, but the entire international community. Meanwhile, France and Germany, like other Western countries, openly supported the Kiev regime in its outright refusal to conduct direct talks with Donetsk and Lugansk, even though this requirement was at the heart of the Minsk agreements. This says a lot about the European leaders' ability to negotiate and the lack of elementary decency as human beings.

At the same time, despite the openly aggressive policy pursued by the United States and its allies to recklessly expand NATO in violation of the promises that they gave us in the early 1990s, we did everything possible, up to the last minute, in order to reduce the degree of tensions in Europe. To this end, in December 2021, President Putin proposed an initiative to provide Russia – and Ukraine – with legally binding security guarantees in the western direction. However, our proposals were haughtily rejected amid Kiev's preparations for a military solution to the problem of Donbass.

This left us with no choice but to recognise the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, to conclude treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with them and, in response to their official request, to launch a special military operation in accordance with Art. 51 of the UN Charter. The goals of the operation are to protect Russian and Russian-speaking people from extermination in the lands where their ancestors have lived for many centuries and to eliminate any military threat to Russia's security on our western borders.

Clearly, everything that is happening in and around Ukraine is part of the unfolding fight for the future international order. What's at stake today is whether the world order will be truly fair, democratic and polycentric, as the UN Charter says, which proclaims the sovereign equality of all countries, or whether the United States and the coalition that it is leading will implement their agenda at the expense of other countries including pumping resources over to suit their needs. This is precisely the goal of the rules-based order concept. The Western capitals want to replace international law, primarily the UN Charter's goals and principles, with these rules that were made up by no one knows who.

This simple truth has been realised by many countries that are implementing nationally oriented agendas and are guided, above all, by their core interests. It is no coincidence that the efforts to abandon the US dollar in foreign trade and to create an infrastructure of transport, logistics, interbank, financial and economic ties that are not controlled by the West have stepped up significantly around the world. Naturally, about three-quarters of the countries

around the globe, including our Latin American friends, chose not to join the anti-Russia sanctions. We appreciated them for that.

The rapidly changing geopolitical landscape opens up new opportunities for expanding mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and the Latin American countries, which are now playing an increasingly prominent role in the multipolar world order.

For us, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is an area of foreign policy that is important in and of itself. We do not want this region turn into an arena of confrontation between major powers. Our partnership with Latin America is built on ideology-free and pragmatic approaches and is not directed against anyone. Unlike former colonial parent countries, we do not divide our partners into friends and enemies. Neither do we confront them with an artificial choice of whether they are with us or against us. We are in favour of the Latin American and the Caribbean countries remaining united and diverse as well as remaining strong, politically close and economically sustainable.

We consistently stand for the strengthening of Russian-Latin American cooperation based on mutual support, solidarity and consideration for each other's interests. Our relations with many countries in the region, including Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, which our delegation will visit in the second half of April, rely on strategic partnerships.

We are open to continuing to strengthen our diverse contacts at the level of heads of state and government, parliaments, diplomatic services, and other ministries and agencies. We are likewise open to expanding cooperation on a multilateral basis, primarily as part of Russia's dialogue with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

I believe we have things to show the Russian and Latin American public. The contractual and legal framework has expanded noticeably in recent years and concerns, in particular, the creation of a space for mutual visa-free travel which includes 27 states in Latin America and the Caribbean. All of South America and most of Central America can now be visited visa-free by our citizens.

Despite the sanctions imposed on Russia and the political pressure, if not blackmail, on the part of the United States and the European Union, our total exports to the LAC countries grew by 3.8 percent last year. Fertiliser and refined oil product trade is up as well. In 2022, Russia increased wheat exports to Latin America and the Caribbean by 48.8 percent, nearly 50 percent.

While we are at it, I would like to note that without any help from the UN, we supplied 23 million tonnes of grain and 20 million tonnes of fertiliser to

international markets. This does not include the tens of thousands of tonnes of fertilisers that the West is blocking in its ports in defiance of the Black Sea Grain Initiative that was signed in Istanbul at the UN Secretary General's initiative. We even suggested making these fertilisers available to the poorest economies at no cost. Our efforts in this regard are being hindered as well.

Russia and Latin America have their respective competitive advantages in the context of the objective processes for forming a multipolar world order. It is essential to make the maximum use of the complementary nature of our economies in order to build comprehensive project, production and technological alliances, and to expedite the transition to transactions in national currencies or other currencies as an alternative to the US dollar and the euro.

Acting within the framework of existing opportunities, we contribute to overcoming international development challenges in that region. In the interest of strengthening civil security, we are training national law enforcement professionals, and providing unfailing assistance to the countries in need, in bringing relief in the aftermath of natural disasters.

I would like to note in particular the steady growth in the number of Latin American students whose studies in our country are covered by Russian state grants. Taking into account our mutual interest in strengthening education ties, we are determined to work hard on agreements on mutual recognition of diplomas.

Russia will continue to pursue an independent, peaceful and multi-faceted foreign policy course. We will continue to contribute to the strengthening of global security and stability and the settlement of conflicts. In conjunction with our like-minded partners, we will continue to push for the practical application of UN Charter principles, including the sovereign equality of states and non-interference in their internal affairs. We stand for expanding the membership of the Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter and reinforcing other multilateral associations, including BRICS and the SCO, which strive to democratise international relations.

We remain open to building up ties with our foreign partners who are willing to interact with us on the principles of equality, integrity, mutual respect and consideration of interests. It is gratifying to know that our Latin American friends are among such partners.