

## **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the 11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, Rovaniemi, May 7, 2019**

Mr Chairman,

Colleagues, friends,

First of all, I would like to thank our Finnish neighbours for this warm reception. We appreciate our partners putting together a pragmatic and unifying agenda for their Arctic Council chairmanship.

I would also like to emphasise our gratitude for condolences offered by many of you in your remarks in connection with the Russian plane crash.

Russia occupies almost one-third of the Arctic. We see the region as a region of peace, stability and productive cooperation. I am satisfied to note that all of our Arctic Council partners have expressed a similar position. We see this as a guarantee of the Extreme North's successful development because the Arctic states assume special responsibility for the developments in the region.

We are open to the broadest possible cooperation in the Arctic where, as we have repeatedly noted, there are absolutely no pretexts for conflicts or attempts to address any issues arising here with a military response. Current international law makes it possible to reliably guarantee the national interests of the Arctic states and other interested countries. We also need to be guided by the decisions that we develop within our organisation's framework.

Efforts to ensure the region's sustained development in three dimensions – economic, nature-conservation and social – remain Russia's strategic long-term goal. We consistently proceed from the premise that the Arctic's economic development should proceed under high environmental standards and with due respect for the interests of the regional people, including the lifestyles of indigenous ethnic groups.

Russia intends to help the region adapt more effectively to global climate change, to enhance its resiliency in this respect and to minimise the anthropogenic impact on the environment, including in the context of implementing the Paris Agreement [dealing with greenhouse-gas-emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance] and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We must prioritise the preservation of the Arctic's biodiversity, its unique and extremely vulnerable ecosystems, prevent sea and ground pollution and improve practical cooperation among the Arctic states as regards joint response measures.

Given the rapid development of maritime activities and navigation, including cruise ship tourism, in the Arctic, it is important to continue strengthening our capability for rapid

response to possible emergencies. We favour expanding coast guard cooperation within the Arctic Forum framework. We think that the multilateral Polaris 2019 exercise staged in the Gulf of Bothnia in late March and early April was useful.

Nature protection activities should remain a priority. We welcome the decision to extend the pilot stage of the Project Support Instrument that has proven its value as an effective financial mechanism for implementing projects to reduce environmental pollution in the Arctic and promote practical cooperation in the ecological area.

We proceed from the need to continue the work on drafting the Arctic Council's Strategic Plan of Action, the first ever long-term planning document, which was initiated under Finnish Chairmanship.

It is obvious that issues of vital importance for the Arctic, such as enhancing the region's resistance to global climate change, minimising man-made environmental impacts, preserving biodiversity, and developing the telecommunications infrastructure, are closely interconnected. Dealing with them effectively requires a higher level of coordination and a comprehensive approach. In this connection, I'd like to note the Finnish Chairmanship's contribution to strengthening synergy in the Arctic Council.

We welcome close interaction between Arctic Council bodies, the practice of working in unified formats, and the drafting of joint expert materials and recommendations. Let me single out the cooperation with the Arctic Economic Council, a promising venue for attracting investment and promoting business and innovation.

We are interested in an effective, value-added mainstreaming of observers into the Arctic Council's activities. This status carries much responsibility. We are happy to see the International Maritime Organisation become a new observer. Last year, a separate session with observers was held as part of the Senior Officials Committee plenary meeting, where they presented measures undertaken to fight pollution in the Arctic and maintain its biodiversity. We believe this practice is very useful.

We support the programme of the Icelandic Chairmanship. Russia has common interests with Iceland in the region, primarily in the sea, including the promotion of marine bioeconomics and green shipping, mitigating marine refuse, including micro-plastics, as well as ocean acidification. We will ensure the continuity of the general Arctic agenda when the council chairmanship is transferred to Russia in 2021. We will pursue the implementation of all the initiatives originated under Reykjavik's chairmanship.

As Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the International Arctic Forum in St Petersburg on April 9, the priorities of our chairmanship in 2021-2023 will be designed to promote environmentally safe technologies in all areas. Accordingly, we will focus on socioeconomic development of the region and, of course, maintain proper focus on environmental issues,

particularly converting to liquefied natural gas and renewable energy, and encouraging a circular economy.

As we continue to develop shipping, gas production, liquefaction and transportation facilities in the region, we intend to continue to promote energy security of Europe and Asia, to improve the quality of energy balance and to diversify transport arteries.

We will focus on support for sustainable life in Arctic settlements, including efficient energy distribution, as well improving the well-being of the people living in the Arctic, especially the indigenous peoples of the Extreme North, preserving their languages, cultures and traditions.

Colleagues,

The challenges that the Arctic is facing today require deeper state-to-state cooperation, which was specifically discussed at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Forum, The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue in early April. The changes that are taking place in this region of the world open new opportunities for us. It is important to use them properly to secure a stable future for the region and the well-being of its residents. Russia supports the idea of holding a summit of the Arctic states when the time is right.

In closing, I would like to once again thank Finland and wish success to Iceland. For our part, we will assist our partners in any way we can.

Thank you.