Mr. Minister,

At the outset let me thank the Estonian Presidency for convening this Arria-formula meeting on the eve of the 9th of May, the Day when we celebrate Victory in the Great Patriotic War. We do not privatize this Victory. This was Victory of the Soviet people, who all contributed to drawing it closer. All of them – Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Georgians, Azeris and Armenians, Moldavians, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians, Jews, Tatars, Bashkirs and dozens and dozens of other nationalities of the multinational USSR.

Behind me you see some 75th anniversary photos, the logo and the banner with the band of St. George, like this one in my lapel – golden black in color which is the symbol we wear during our Victory Day. Tomorrow millions of people in Russia will commemorate those who fought or died during the Great Patriotic War. Normally they would take to the streets with the portraits of their relatives and that would be an immense, solemn, and breath-taking procession. It takes place not just across Russia, but world over, in particular here in New York.

This year, due to the pandemic it will be a virtual one. I would take a photo of my father who at 17, being a student in Leningrad, volunteered to go to the front in 1941 and ended his war in 1945 in Berlin.

Twenty seven million of USSR citizens died in this War, two thirds of them were civil population. Almost every Russian family lost one or several members in the War. That was a war of extermination. I myself was named after one of my three uncles who died at the front in combat.

This is all to explain that this memory is sacred to us and is part of our DNA. Today some are trying to politically modify our DNA telling us they discovered a better DNA strain. We don’t think so.
We learned lessons of that war hard.

75 years ago, the Soviet Red Army together with its allies liberated the world from Nazism. This Victory is the common heritage of mankind and a monument to the unity of peoples and states who faced unprecedented evil.

The Soviet Union was the main victim in that war and at the same time it made the biggest sacrifice and contribution to our common victory. This cannot be disputed.

Attempts to challenge this, to present the Soviet Union as allegedly “equally responsible” for starting the war, that surface today and circulate, propagated by some modern politicians and sly historians, are not only immoral, but disgusting and sacrilegious to the truth and to our historical memory.

Today I saw an article by Minister H.Maas in the SPIEGEL called "There can be no politics without history". I appreciate what he said there.

I will not elaborate on the pre-war situation in Europe and lecture you on who was “appeasing the aggressor” back then. I will not be telling you that the Soviet leadership knew without a doubt that the war with Hitler was unavoidable and inevitable and that was only a matter of time. I will not cite shameful insinuations by those politicians I mentioned claiming that the Soviet Union was not liberating their countries from Nazism, but instead came to enslave them. These allegations are equally disgusting and an insult to the sacred memory of millions of Soviet soldiers who laid their lives and did so convinced that they were doing it for a just cause.

I will not be saying all this because the theme of today’s meeting is “Lessons learned”.

So what lessons did that war teach us?

Perhaps, the greatest lesson was that mankind realized the need for a vaccine against the ideology of hate. The Nuremberg tribunal verdict
about it was unequivocal. The culprits were called culprits. War criminals were called war criminals. Collaborators were called collaborators. A spade was called a spade.

The mankind also realized that it needed a universal organization for collective security. And United Nations was a product of that realization.

It was created “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind”. It was founded on lessons learned from the failure of the League of Nations. It gave equal representation to all states, big and small, but also established checks and balances to ensure that decisions to be adopted enjoyed agreement of all major stakeholders.

Today it is popular to say that the world lacks multilateralism. Concepts are invented like “Rules Based International Order” instead of International Law. The lack of multilateralism is very easy to remedy. One simply needs to go back to full implementation of UN Charter which is the quintessence of multilateralism.

In 75 years the world has seen a lot. It has seen the East-West divide and the Cold War. It has seen the end of colonialism. It has seen the rapprochement and the end of Franco-German rivalry that was the source of numerous conflicts in the XIX and XX centuries, the rapprochement that led to the birth of European integration and the present day EU. The world has seen the Helsinki Final Act that laid the foundation of coexistence between East and West. The world has seen the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union and many other tectonic events.

What, fortunately, the world has not seen was another World War that would have been nuclear and catastrophic. But we shouldn’t be complacent about it. Current turbulent international relations show some trends that are reminiscent of those that existed before WWI and WWII.

Deep mistrust among major international players. Attempts to achieve hegemony. Unilateral actions. Scapegoating. To name a few.
The fact that a major war was averted and prevented should be credited to the wisdom of world leaders of the time and to a large extent, to the existence of the UN that became a major platform for reaching agreements and finding compromises and a depository to a host of international treaties negotiated within its framework.

What then about the European Soil that was the breeding ground for two World Wars?

Europe enjoyed decades of peaceful coexistence.

Then came the disintegration of the SU and conflicts at its perimeters. Then came the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and its disintegration. Then came NATO expansion to the Russian borders. Then came bombardment of Serbia. It was clear that things were going wrong. We repeatedly tried to draw attention to this, propose formulas that would guarantee peace, security, and cooperation in Europe and in the world. But some of you chose not to hear and to push forward with NATO enlargement, to play a zero-sum game and promote dividing agendas. Then we witnessed Georgian aggression against South Ossetia. Today we witness civil war in Ukraine which some of you so eagerly attribute to Russia, but which was, in fact, a result of a coup d’etat. Europe was confronted with new unseen challenges like massive migration from conflict zones in the Middle East.

But all these are “hard facts”. There are still “soft processes” on the European soil that many of you prefer to ignore.

Creeping revision of history. Rebirth of hate and neo-nazi movement. Demonizing Russia as “revisionist state” that “behaves aggressively” dreaming to threaten and challenge and using every opportunity to hurt the “free world”. I have to disappoint some of you. We have other priorities that preoccupy us much greater.

Instead of joining forces to confront real challenges like international terrorism, drug trafficking, cybercrime and others some of you are busy looking for an enemy. A black cat in a dark room.
Neither the fall of Berlin wall nor the disappearance of ideological divide lead to the triumph of uniting agenda. “The end of history” was declared. It proved to be wrong. Who is to blame for that? We know.

Re-writing history has become a popular trend. The aim is clear – to shift the blame and to deprive Russia retrospectively of its status as one of the pillars of modern world order. Sadly it is rightly said that the past is a hostage of the present.

But falsification of history has its side-effects that Europe is turning a blind eye to. The rise of hate speech, popularization of racism in its contemporary forms, such as aggressive nationalism and Neo-Nazism, proliferation of Nazi ideology.

It is a trend in many European countries and what is particularly worrisome, among youth. Youth that is not immunized against the ideology of hate.

Nowhere it is seen more clearly than in modern-day Ukraine. And for us this phenomenon is shocking. It took merely a decade or so to grow a generation of aggressive nationalists who know nothing but hate speech.

What was impossible to imagine even six years ago is a gruesome reality today. In Kiev, in the center of Europe neo-nazis and nationalists bravado with Nazi salutations, hold gatherings and torch-light processions, stage blatant provocations and burn people alive facing not even a hint of accountability, glorify and worship convicted war criminals and collaborators, and suppress the views of those in their country who are too weak or too shy to protest.

Some of you fail and deny to recognize that Donbass and Crimea happened as a result of a coup d’etat and the refusal of their people to live in such Ukraine. But coup d’etat itself was to a large extent the result of your policies in our neighborhood. And no less regrettable is that you wouldn’t listen to us when we were warning you to stop building dividing lines and alienate Russia. You didn’t listen to President Putin speech in Munich in 2007 which turned to be prophetic. You were aggressively promoting your agenda that ignored Russia’s core interests and concerns.
I want to address High Representative J. Borrell and to remind that back in 2000’s, when Russia and EU were discussing the prospects of EU enlargement for 10 new members states from Central and Eastern Europe and its consequences for our relations, we were pointing out at blatant human rights abuses, language discrimination, and crafty and perfidious discrimination in general, distortion of historical facts in some of these states. The reply then was: they are small and insecure, they are afraid to be left alone with a big Russian bear. Once they get into the EU, they will emancipate, their complexes will heal and the relations of strategic partnership between Russia and the EU (that was the narrative at that time) will not be affected in any way.

But what do we see now? The picture is the opposite. These historic complexes and phobias, like coronavirus today, have not subsided but grew larger, while EU, to our disbelief, is providing them with a cover-up.

I would like to draw you attention to yet another shameful trend of our times. Some of those countries started a “war with monuments”, a campaign to destroy and dismantle monuments to Soviet soldiers that liberated them from Nazi occupation. What do you think we feel watching this sacrilege?

Mr. President,

I know what rhetoric some of today’s speakers will use. They will be blaming Russia for all unimaginable sins. The list is well-known. They will challenge historical facts and documents and even the obvious. I leave it on their conscience.

We see clearly today that not all lessons of WWII were learned in Europe and dividing lines broaden. But they should be learned in order to serve a warning against a new global war that may become the final for mankind.

The world has seen the Rape of Europe during WWII. I pray Europe never sees the Rape of the World.
In a statement on the 75th anniversary of meeting on the Elbe (the meeting of the Soviet and US troops in Germany) President Putin and President Trump said: “The “Spirit of the Elbe” is an example of how our countries can put aside differences, build trust, and cooperate in pursuit of a greater cause. As we work today to confront the most important challenges of the 21st century, we pay tribute to the valor and courage of all those who fought together to defeat fascism. Their heroic feat will never be forgotten”.

We hope that the spirit of Victory over Nazism, the wisdom and will to act together against common threats and challenges will prevail today, as it did 75 years ago.

Thank you.