What is your assessment of UK-Russian relations currently?

Relations between Russia and the United Kingdom historically have never been simple. In recent years, our political relationship has been characterised by instability and volatility, by abrupt changes from relatively good collaboration to overt hostility.

While we witnessed some positive developments between 2010 and 2014, these achievements were substantially undermined by the UK’s projection of our differences over Ukraine, Crimea and Syria onto bilateral matters. The British government unilaterally froze all main formats of cooperation: Strategic Dialogue “2+2” between Foreign and Defence Ministers, High Level Energy Dialogue, Inter-Governmental Steering Committee on Trade and Investment, and UK-Russia Joint Committee on Science and Technology. Regular consultations between the foreign ministries have virtually ceased. The UK took the lead within the EU to impose anti-Russian sanctions. Artificial obstacles to the normal functioning of the Russian Embassy in London have been created. All of this is being accompanied by a vehement Russophobic campaign in the British media.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson’s visit to Moscow in December 2017 did not lead to any changes in the British approach.

In parallel, the UK portrays itself as the leader of joint Western efforts to “contain” Russia, to hold her “accountable” for “aggressive behaviour” and to ensure Western “solidarity” in this regard. This policy is part of official documents and speeches, including the 2015 National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review. During her speech to the Lord Mayor’s Banquet in November 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May said that Russia is chief among those who seek to undermine open economies and free societies, and fails to observe universal rules of conduct.

In February 2018, the British government accused Russia of the NotPetya cyber attacks against Ukraine, without presenting any evidence either to us or to the public. Raising this issue publicly instead of discussing it bilaterally was regrettable, especially as Russia had long been proposing to establish a dialogue on cyber security matters.

In March 2018, along the same pattern, Russia was accused of poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury. Again, no proof was presented, while Russia’s legitimate questions have been ignored and consular access to the Russian nationals has been denied in violation of UK’s legal obligations under consular conventions.

The deterioration in our political relations has had a negative impact on bilateral trade and economic ties. UK authorities have created artificial obstacles for Russian investment into the
British market. Rosatom – Rolls-Royce cooperation on the possibility to build secure, relatively inexpensive and reliable nuclear power plants in the UK stopped in 2014. In 2015 the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change de-facto blocked a commercial deal of the Russian capital company “LetterOne” that had made a bid to work on oil and gas fields in the British part of the North Sea.

At the same time, the British business community, which is interested in continuing normal business relationship with Russia, has taken a constructive approach and does not support the attempts to politicize economic relations. This is particularly the reason why the UK has been able to remain one of important foreign trade and investment partners for Russia. Today about 600 British companies successfully continue their operations in the Russian market. Russia has a sound business presence in the UK as well. Russian and British business are good at understanding each other, and that allows them to continue developing mutually beneficial ties and prevent bilateral trade and economic relations from further deterioration. The resumed growth of bilateral trade in 2017, for the first time since 2013, demonstrates the willingness of businesses to work with each other and their adaptation to the new political realities. Yet huge potential remains unused due to the political situation, not least due to political influence being exercised on British businesspeople.

One area where cooperation continues regardless of the political climate is culture. Important joint projects over the recent period have included the joint Russia-UK Year of Culture 2014, Year of Languages and Literature 2016, and Year of Science and Education 2017. These initiatives were marked by hundreds of bilateral events at intergovernmental, university-to-university and other similar levels as well as a number of flagship exhibitions at top British and Russian museums enjoyed by the public of the two countries. The cultural community both in Russia and in the UK is willing to continue these exchanges despite political pressure.

**What are you doing to assist UK law enforcement agencies in their efforts to stop illegal money-laundering?**

Russia is a consistent advocate of eliminating corruption and therefore a longstanding and reliable member of major international mechanisms such as UNCAC (United Nations Convention against Corruption), OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, Council of Europe conventions and specialised bodies (GRECO and Moneyval), FATF (Financial Action Task Force), relevant G20 and APEC structures, etc. UK’s membership in most of these formats allows us to cooperate on a regular basis, where necessary. Russia actively participated in the AntiCorruption Summit hosted by the UK in 2016.
We remain ready to an open, unbiased and mutually beneficial dialogue with the UK on all issues of international corruption and money-laundering challenges.

However, fruitful bilateral cooperation in these sensitive areas requires trust and well-developed ties between national law enforcement agencies. To our regret, such dialogue has been frozen on London’s initiative.

The willingness of the UK to provide a “safe haven” to criminal money from around the world has been consistently criticised by Russia. We welcome the declared intention of British authorities to finally sort out this deplorable situation. In that regard, we hope that the British Government will take appropriate measures to discover and properly punish the violators.

Yet we are concerned with the fact that these initiatives are accompanied by an openly anti-Russian propaganda campaign. We expect the UK to implement any new initiatives in a country-neutral way. A push to get rid of corrupt money must not develop into an intimidation campaign against Russian businesspeople, most of whom abide by the law and make an honest contribution to the prosperity of both Russia and Britain.

Russia is prepared to fulfil its respective obligations under the abovementioned anti-money-laundering instruments as well as international conventions on mutual legal assistance. To date, we have received no requests to cooperate under the recent UK initiatives.

At the same time, over the past decade, the UK has rejected several dozen Russian requests for extradition of persons accused of corruption, money-laundering, embezzlement and similar offences committed in Russia. We believe Parliament has a role to play in persuading the Government to live up to its international obligations as well as to the expectations of the public as regards an efficient anti-corruption policy and international cooperation.

April 2018