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Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Enzo Moavero Milanesi, Rome, November 23, 2018

[...]

Sergey Lavrov: We have explained our position in detail in a Foreign Ministry Statement that was issued a few days ago. We have cited concrete facts and urged the parties concerned to refrain from being guided by certain politicised and artificially invented estimates. The legal implications of this situation are taken care of in the 2003 Agreement between Russia and Ukraine, which defines the Sea of Azov as internal waters of Russia and Ukraine. Both sides have the right to conduct inspections. The procedure for these has been described as well.

I can assure you that this is the absolute truth: Since April of this year, not a single captain or a ship inspected by the Russian Federation has complained. A thing of no small importance is that we did not hear our European colleagues, who are currently worried over this sufficiently artificial situation, voicing any concerns, when Ukraine absolutely illegally, in violation of all and everything, was seizing Russian ships, detaining their crews and declaring an intention to auction off the ships themselves. At that time, I repeat, no one of those who are now so concerned with the immaculacy of events in the Sea of Azov expressed any worries. I don't see any other explanation than the desire to invent yet another pretext for bringing pressure to bear on the Russian Federation.

Let me also remind you that the Kerch Strait is not subject to any regulation by international law. It is a Russian strait. It is only logical that we had to step up our border guard and military presence there after officials in Ukraine repeatedly promised to start preparations to blow up the Crimean Bridge across the Kerch Strait. Neither did we hear any coherent response to these statements made by Ukrainian officials from our Western partners, who are now expressing concern over the absolutely legitimate Russian steps in the Sea of Azov. These have caused not a single complaint from captains of the inspected ships. All the inspections were in full conformity with the established norms.

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