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IN THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA**

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PRESS RELEASE ON SALISBURY INCIDENT

On 11th of April the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland commented Embassy comment in relation to the “Statement issued on behalf of Yulia Skripal” published by the Metropolitan Police

The statement allegedly on behalf of Yulia Skripal published at Scotland Yard website is an interesting read. If everything mentioned there is true we cannot but congratulate our compatriot. However, with no possibility to verify it, the publication by the Metropolitan Police raises new questions rather than gives answers.

As before, we would like to make sure that the statement really belongs to Yulia. So far, we doubt it much. The text has been composed in a special way so as to support official statements made by British authorities and at the same time to exclude every possibility of Yulia’s contacts with the outer world – consuls, journalists and even relatives.

We are surprised by the point about the “access to friends and family”. Not a single friend or relative quoted by Russian or British media confirms such contacts. As far as we know, the Skripals have no relatives closer than Yulia’s cousin Victoria and their grandmother Elena (Sergey’s mother), who live together. A question arises: what family is Yulia in contact with?

We have also noticed the apparent contradiction between the phone conversation in which Yulia says to Victoria that “everything is fine” with her and her father, and their health condition as described in today’s Met Police statement.

Particularly amazing is the phrase “no one speaks for me” appearing in a statement which, instead of being read on camera by Yulia herself, is published at Scotland Yard website.

To sum up, the document only strengthens suspicions that we are dealing with a forcible isolation of the Russian citizen. If British authorities are interested in assuring the public that this is not the case, they must urgently provide tangible evidence that Yulia is alright and not deprived of her freedom.

On 12th of April Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova commented the Salisbury incident at briefing:

1. The so-called Skripal case

Everyone knows about the information campaign, or rather warfare of the UK authorities against Russia over the so-called Skripal case. They are using all the propaganda means and methods they can get their hands on. It is a long time since we last saw an ill-disguised and unscrupulous anti-Russia campaign of this dimension. The UK authorities are disregarding the standards of international law, diplomatic rules and principles, and elementary human ethics.

New versions and more discrepancies are coming to light amid the silence kept by the concerned UK agencies and the numerous political statements, which were anti-Russia from the very beginning. We do not see any intention on the part of the UK authorities to disprove false information planted in the media and blatant lies. On the contrary, this massive propaganda campaign involving all types of media is fully in keeping with London’s anti-Russia strategy. The UK authorities are actually encouraging the deliberate distortion of facts. It is clear why they are doing this. If government agencies and media outlets, for example, in the UK, really decided to get to the bottom of this case, if they started questioning some of the reported “facts” and analysing the increasing number of discrepancies, this would have rocked the European public’s belief in Russia’s alleged involvement. And the people would have asked the question that should have been addressed to London earlier on in the case: What has really happened at Salisbury?

Judge for yourself: On March 4, a former GRU officer and an agent of the British secret services, who was brought to the UK in a spy swap in 2010 after serving part of his prison term in Russia, and his daughter Yulia, a Russian citizen living permanently in Russia, were poisoned, as we have been told, with one of the most potent nerve gases known as Novichok according to the Western classification. Moreover, this happened in broad daylight in a quiet UK town that is not a tourist or pilgrimage site but a place where neighbours know each other and notice the smallest details. More than that, judging from London's claims, Moscow apparently did not find a better time to poison Sergey Skripal than a week before the presidential election and three months before the FIFA World Cup, although it could have had lots of opportunities to do this since 2004, first while Skripal was serving a prison term for treason in Russia and later after he moved to the UK in a spy swap.

Nobody wanted to take any notice of these facts. The crime was immediately blamed on Russia. The very first official statements started appearing even before the more or less serious investigation began. Of course, Moscow was kept away from the investigation, probably because London has drawn its lessons from the Litvinenko case, when Russia's initial involvement complicated the investigation. BBC brought up the Litvinenko case as soon as March 6.

On that day, BBC security correspondent Gordon Corera drew parallels with the poisoning of ex-FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko in the UK in 2006. However, there is one very important difference between the two cases: back in 2006, the public was at least shown the photographs of Litvinenko. As for the Skripals, during the whole month since the tragedy nobody has seen them. The media and Russian officials have been unable to contact the Skripals, although we have sent numerous notes to the UK side asking for such an opportunity.

But Russia has not kept away from these developments either. London has turned a blind eye to Russia's appeals over the Skripal case and has refused to involve our officials in the investigation. In this situation, we simply must draw public attention to inconsistencies in the official UK statements and assessments,

and to the numerous absurd leaks. A simple comparison of facts and conclusions clearly shows that this case is a poorly prepared and implemented (in terms of logic and logistics) provocation against Russia.

Full use has been made in this case of a new information warfare strategy, with the planting of fake news and suspicious leaks. Take note of the extremely sparse comments made by the official investigative authorities. The most frequent explanation was that the investigation was highly confidential and involved the interests of national security. What is the explanation then for the new versions of the incident, citing “sources close to the investigation”, that were provided almost daily to the media? Does this mean that the investigation was not so extremely confidential after all? Or do the UK investigative authorities employ people who don’t understand that state secrets must be kept secret? I believe that they know how to keep secrets. Previous cases have shown that when information is made confidential in the UK it is kept confidential tightly and for a long time. This brings us to the initial presumption according to which these leaks, which continue to reach the public, are made deliberately. Furthermore, no official comments have been made regarding these numerous leaks to the media. One more feature concerning this case is that many leaks allegedly originated from official agencies, yet none of these agencies have published a refutation.

Why do we say that this is a novel feature? Because the British media acted as the press service of government agencies in this case. One possible explanation is that these agencies are incompetent, but they are nothing but. We know how well the British can work, including in an information environment. We have seen the clear-cut and emotional statements made by Prime Minister Theresa May in parliament and the extravagant statements made by Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, including in the media. But why didn’t members of the investigative authorities hold any briefings or news conferences to clarify the discrepancies as well as the leaks to the media? They have not been held because the authorities didn’t need them. London did not want to follow grammar rules to the letter in this compound sentence.

The number of versions, according to the UK media, was really impressive.

March 5: Salisbury Journal writes that emergency services suspect the powerful drug fentanyl, a synthetic opiate, may have been involved. The Zizzi restaurant where the Skripals ate that day has been cordoned off.

The Telegraph offered a similar version. That item was later deleted but it is still to be found in Google's cache. Why was it deleted? What information did it carry that had to be done away with so urgently?

March 6: Nothing was clear yet, but Boris Johnson says pre-emptively in Parliament that the UK will “respond appropriately and robustly” if the Russian state is found to have been involved in the Salisbury incident. The decision was clearly made and the political accusations were formulated.

March 7: Scotland Yard's counterterrorism chief Mark Rowley says that the former Russian spy Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia were deliberately poisoned with a nerve agent. He refused to reveal the substance used.

The Daily Star carries an item saying that the victims may have been targeted with poison spray by an assassin.

March 8: The newspaper Metro writes that the nerve agent may have been administered into the pair's food.

March 10: The Skripals could have been poisoned in the Mill pub or at the Zizzi restaurant. Those who visited the pub and the restaurant are advised to “wash their clothes and possessions,” says the advice posted on the UK government's website. Note that the investigators suspect poisoning by one of the most toxic agents, yet six days after the event the authorities only recommend that the people “wash their clothes”!

The same day, Daily Mail writes, citing a high-ranking source, that the bouquet of fresh flowers Sergey Skripal laid at his wife's grave may have been contaminated.

March 11: The newspaper Express writes about a sophisticated plot to kill Sergey and Yulia Skripal with a poisoned parcel delivered by a courier service.

March 12: Theresa May says in Parliament that Sergey Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent developed by Russia and known as Novichok. The UK Prime Minister said precisely the following: “It is now clear that Mr Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia.

This is part of a group of nerve agents known as ‘Novichok’. Based on the positive identification of this chemical agent by world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down; our knowledge that Russia has previously produced this agent and would still be capable of doing so; Russia’s record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations; and our assessment that Russia views some defectors as legitimate targets for assassinations; the Government has concluded that it is highly likely that Russia was responsible for the act against Sergey and Yulia Skripal... There are therefore only two plausible explanations for what happened in Salisbury on the 4th of March. Either this was a direct act by the Russian State against our country. Or the Russian government lost control of this potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others.”

March 13: Mail Online offers a new version of the incident: a nerve agent was smeared on the door handle of Sergey Skripal’s car.

March 14: Theresa May blames Russia for the attempted assassination of the Skripals.

UK Deputy Permanent Representative Jonathan Allen said there was “no alternative conclusion than that the Russian state was responsible for the attempted murder of Mr Skripal and his daughter.”

March 15: The Guardian cites Boris Johnson as saying that the UK government had “overwhelming evidence” of Russia’s involvement. He did not say what kind of evidence the UK government had.

On the same day, The Telegraph published an article citing its own sources in the intelligence agencies, alleging that the nerve agent that poisoned Sergey Skripal was planted in his daughter’s suitcase. According to the newspaper, the

toxic agent that poisoned Sergey Skripal landed in Salisbury via Yulia Skripal's luggage. It was alleged that the toxin was impregnated in an item of clothing or cosmetics or in gifts brought by Yulia.

On March 17, Boris Johnson told the BBC that President of Russia Vladimir Putin was behind the Salisbury incident.

On March 18, The Daily Star posited, in keeping with the best traditions of science fiction, that a drone was used to poison the Skripal family. On the same day, The Guardian assumed that the toxic agent was introduced in the ventilation system of Skripal's car. Let me remind you that British government agencies together with the investigative authorities have not yet refuted these claims.

On March 22, EU leaders issued a statement following a summit reaffirming the European Union's solidarity in that there was no plausible alternative explanation to Russia's involvement in the incident.

On March 28, the British police reported that the investigation believed that the Skripals contacted Novichok at home, since the highest concentration of the toxic agent was detected on the door handle of the building where Sergey Skripal lived.

On March 29, the Foreign Office posted a message on its official Twitter account, accusing Russia of spreading misleading information by exploring multiple versions and theories regarding the Salisbury incident (it turns out that we are the ones with multiple versions).

On April 1, The Sun tabloid published material alleging that the toxic agent could have been brought in a bag of buckwheat or in a packet of bay leaves or spices that Yulia forgot to pick up before her departure to Great Britain. Instead, she asked a female acquaintance who was to fly to London with her husband a little later to bring the things. As it later turned out, it was an April Fools' Day joke. Do you think it is normal to make jokes in situations like this? This is not funny.

There was another version whereby Novichok was applied to an advertising leaflet that was intended for the Skripals.

On April 2, The New York Times cited “British officials” when it alleged that smearing a nerve agent on the door handle (after all, they preferred this explanation) was “so risky and sensitive,” that it was likely to have been undertaken by super professionals, meaning Russians... The newspaper went on to explain the lack of evidence on whether President of Russia Vladimir Putin himself ordered Sergey Skripal’s killing by the fact that the Russian President “is skilled at hiding his communications.”

On April 8, Boris Johnson published an article in The Sunday Times, claiming that Russia invented 29 theories about the poisoning of the Skripals. A few days before, on April 4, he released the long-awaited “facts” showing Russia’s alleged guilt in addition to the infamously overwhelming evidence contained in the six slides:

1. Porton Down identified the nerve agent as military grade Novichok;
2. Russia has investigated delivering nerve agents and as part of this programme has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichok;
3. Russia has a motive for targeting Sergey Skripal.

All in all, watching the events unfold as they were reported on the Twitter account of the UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson is quite intriguing. Harsh, rude statements about Russia and its guilt in the Skripal case are mixed with cute photos of Boris surrounded by smiling people, followed by monsters wearing masks and chemical protection outfits. It can be easily spotted that people are being manipulated to believe that the “terrible Russia” has intruded into the peaceful and happy life Britain enjoyed.

It seems that this media campaign to discredit Russia has not been easy for British politicians. Either they have run out of arguments, or their nerves are on edge. Take the war of words between Boris Johnson and the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who accused the Foreign Secretary of misleading the public by his frivolous interpretation of conclusions by Porton Down experts. In response, Boris Johnson accused the head of Labour party of playing the Kremlin’s game and “lending false credibility to its propaganda onslaught.” He went even further by

describing Corbyn as “the Kremlin's useful idiot.” And all this was done so that not a single political force within the country, let alone the media, has any appetite for appealing to reason and taking up a normal investigation after all. If statements of this kind can be thrown at politicians, what manners can be expected in communications with the country’s media?

The main message coming out from this multitude of voices is that the official position adopted by Britain does not require any evidence. It should be taken for granted. This is what British diplomats tell their colleagues when asked when evidence would be produced. They just look straight in your eyes and ask whether they are not being trusted.

Insinuations concerning the origin of the so-called Novichok merit special attention, of course. Theresa May first declared on March 12 that this particular substance had been used. Since then, this has never been questioned in spite of the repeated calls by Russia to look into what had happened and discuss the information about the alleged Russian provenance of the substance.

On April 4, Gary Aitkenhead, chief executive of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) at Porton Down, told Sky News that experts had been able to identify the substance as belonging to the series of agents classified by the West as Novichok. They were unable to identify the precise source, but they provided the scientific information to the Government, which had then used a number of other sources to piece together the conclusions.

From what other sources could information have been obtained if it requires special chemical laboratory research? Does Britain have any other lab than the one at Porton Down? If so, this is something new. Neither the British Foreign Office nor the Home Office have the facilities to analyse the substance, or at least this is what we were previously told.

At the same time, the head of Porton Down neither confirmed nor denied the claims that the lab had samples of the agent, saying merely that “there is no way anything like that could have come from us or left the four walls of our facility.” Interesting wording. So, did they produce and develop it or was it the case that the

substance “could not have left the four walls?” These are different things. The wording is so evasive as to leave it unclear whether or not the facility produced the substance. But it could have left the four walls only if it had in fact been produced.

The Foreign Office reacted instantly to the Sky News interview making it clear from the start that Porton Down experts had identified the substance used in Salisbury as a nerve agent called Novichok. But this was only one part of the intelligence picture. As Theresa May repeatedly made clear at the House of Commons beginning from March 12, the conclusions were based on the knowledge that over the past ten years Russia had been studying routes of delivering nerve agents, possibly for political assassinations, and produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichok as part of that programme. She repeated that considering Russia’s record there is no credible explanation of what had happened in Salisbury other than Moscow’s responsibility for the “reckless attack.”

How do you like the legal grounding? But as they don’t know who did it and they have no proof if it was done by anyone at all, they conclude that Russia did it. Show me the provision in international law about accusations based not even on suspicions, but simply on the grounds that there are no other logical explanations?

Why the Foreign Office hastened to announce its official position immediately after the interview by the Porton Down lab head Gary Aitkenhead will be clear from the article by the former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray of March 16 (i.e. before it was announced that the OPCW experts had been brought in). Citing sources at the Foreign Office, Craig Murray speaks about frictions between the Foreign Office and the lab at Porton Down. We do not know if this information is true, just as we don’t know if anything the British media wrote is true. But since we have been citing the British media, we might as well cite Mr Craig Murray. According to him, the British Foreign Office demanded that the lab confirm the Russian source of the agent used. In the end they settled for the formula “the type of agent developed in Russia.”

On April 6, the British publish yet another fake in the media and declare with reference to “special services officials” and “government sources” that the

agent used was manufactured at a secret laboratory in Yasenevo (amazing geographical precision!). Needless to say, no facts are offered again.

However, on April 9, the Financial Times publishes an interview with the Soviet chemist Vladimir Uglev, who, although overwhelmed with anti-Russian sentiments, admits that it is impossible to get an irrefutable confirmation of Russia's responsibility for the manufacturing and use of the agent: unlike radioactive materials, it does not leave traces behind and cannot be identified by usual means. The British officials yet again offer zero comments and no statements about that.

Here is another remarkable fact. In December 2005 and later in January 2006, the American Chemical Society's Journal of Medicinal Chemistry published in its Volume 49 an article by a group of UK chemists including Porton Down laboratory employees Christopher M. Timperley and Gareth R. Williams. The article features a formula of an organophosphorus agent similar to the one published in Vil Mirzayanov's book. It means that specialists at this British laboratory were capable of synthesising Novichok as early as 2005. These are the thoughts prompted by the UK media publications.

Numerous inconsistencies in media stories with reference to "reliable sources" are absolutely apparent. Here are just a few examples. The issue of the antidote – did it exist or not? Was it used or not? If we look at the news agencies' reports – now it was, now it wasn't, now it does not exist at all. Not a single person from the British side can make a responsible statement and clarify the issue. Meanwhile, there is a big reason to do that. Apart from the case itself, which, as we are told, should be classified since it is a national security matter, there are media publications that offer new versions every day. Could at least those have been commented on?

Regarding the doctors – this is a special topic. There were great many reports concerning the doctors who were rendering assistance and we do not doubt the competence of British medicine. But look, what sort of miracle doctors are they

who work with a weapon-grade nerve agent, either using an antidote or even without it? This is an absolute miracle!

After leaks from a certain “closed briefing” for special services on April 6, it became known that at the hospital where the Skripals were taken by a pure coincidence (!) there were doctors trained to treat victims of chemical attacks. This is yet another miracle! And again we see manipulations on the antidote issue – which antidote was used and in what way.

The next topic mooted in the British media, though we do not know the answer to the question, is what exactly they were poisoned with? Was it one substance or a group of substances? Was it one type of substance or several different sorts of substances?

I would also like to draw attention to the statements made from the local hospital in Salisbury where the Skripals were taken to. It never said in so many words that the victims showed symptoms of chemical poisoning and that this is what they were treated for. In a March 16 letter to The Times one of the hospital’s doctors, Steven Davis, wrote that “... no patients have experienced symptoms of nerve agent poisoning in Salisbury and there have only ever been three patients (apparently the Skripals and the police officer) with significant poisoning.” If this is classified data, why a letter to The Times? If it is a question of the hospital having no right to disclose information for humanitarian or ethical reasons why does a doctor write a letter to the media about the situation inside the hospital?

There is not a hint at what they had been poisoned with. Some other members of the hospital staff mentioned that the Skripals and Nick Bailey “were exposed to a nerve agent.” This could mean anything. For a specialist, the formula means nothing. It’s a fudge. For instance, they could have been near the poison without touching it, or they could have been attacked with this agent. In a statement made on April 10 the hospital’s Medical Director Christine Blanshard again used the word “exposed,” referred to standard chemical poisoning symptoms and then, referring to the Skripals, studiously avoided the words “chemical” or “nerve agent.” This raises a crucial question about the symptoms with which the

Skripals entered the hospital, the methods of treatment as well as the methods of diagnosis that justified the treatment administered. Information swirls, but there is no official confirmation or denial.

What is one to make of the recent episode when plans were announced to destroy all the evidence, including the Skripals' house? One can place accents whichever way and provide any reading, but the fact still remains that the Skripals are in isolation. We have not seen them and we do not know what is happening to them.

According to security sources, Sergey Skripal's house, as well as Zizzi restaurant and Mill pub that he and his daughter visited on the day of the poisoning will be demolished. Why not investigate every square inch of the buildings instead? The bench on which the Skripals were found has also been destroyed. No sooner did we publicly raise the question of the fate of the domestic animals in Sergey Skripal's house (unconnected with any animal rights issues, and probably linked with the use of chemical agents) than the media carried official and unofficial claims which further muddied the picture. Apparently the animals were in a sealed home. How could they not have been noticed if the house was scoured by "men in pressure suits?" That is, they discovered a poisonous agent on the door handles, but did not notice the animals? Can you believe it? All the more so since the Skripals had posted information on their pets, including numerous pictures, in social networks and everybody knew that they had them.

As a result two guinea pigs died from dehydration (not from poisoning with a toxic agent) and the cat was "under such stress" that it had to be put down. How could it have happened that the information fed raised more questions which no one seems to care to answer? Allegedly there was one more animal, but it was never found. Could it be that the animals were, after all, found during the search? What has become of them and where have they been taken? Probably not to the Foreign Office, much as they like cats there. More likely, to Porton Down. And what happened to them there? No one in Britain asks these questions. People have fun, draw pictures and chatter. But no answers have been given to questions that

would occur to any person who can think straight. It is worth noting that, according to the media, the vet who had been attending to Skripal's animals for many years, said that from his information the animals had been taken to Porton Down immediately after the house was searched. As of today, there are no animals and the house is likely to follow the way of the bench in the very near future.

I would like to highlight again the delay with releasing information about the pets, the confirmation that they died of dehydration or were just exterminated – this is another indirect proof that all evidence is being concealed and everything is being done to complicate the story from beginning to end.

Regarding the relatives. As you know, on April 6, the UK denied a visa to Skripal's closest relative Viktoria, a niece and a cousin to the victims. These developments were very odd. There was not a single statement made concerning the reasons for denying the visa, the form of the denial, whether she could apply again or was denied a visa for good. Each UK agency gave its own version. Some of them via leaks, some through chats with journalists, and some readdressed the question to another body. What is so odd about this? If you do not want to issue a visa, if you are reluctant to do that, if it cannot be done for national security reasons, just tell us about it. Yet nothing like that happens, and we see a million versions again.

We are perfectly aware that very real political considerations are behind the formal explanation of the reasons for denying the visa. Let me underscore again that the Skripals have not yet had any contacts with the outside world.

In violation of international law, we were not granted consular access to a Russian citizen. According to the Sunday Times and a number of other newspapers, the Skripals will be offered (or ordered?) to change their names and move permanently to one of the Five Eyes countries. And on April 11, it was revealed that Yulia Skripal had been transferred to a hospital at a military base. This is just a terrible mix of what is being published and chewed over. Why is this being done? The answer is very simple – to keep the topic afloat yet not to give any answers on the essence of the case.

On the same day Scotland Yard published a statement on behalf of Yulia Skripal saying that she allegedly does not want to meet with the media, asks her cousin Viktoria not to come to London and also does not want to communicate with the Russian Embassy. Why then wasn't Yulia's reluctance to see her cousin given as a reason for denying Viktoria a UK visa?

We certainly would like to make sure that the statement really comes from Yulia Skripal. Because we do have doubts in view of all that hell that is raging in the UK media and in statements made by British politicians. As has already been noted in an official comment by the Russian Embassy in the UK, the text was evidently written in such a way as to prop up official statements by British officials and at the same time to make it impossible for Yulia to have any contacts with the outside world. The phrase about "access to friends and family" is also surprising since none of the Skripal's friends or relatives referred to by the Russian and UK media have had any contacts with them. As far as we know, Viktoria Skripal and Sergei Skripal's mother, who resides with her, are the only close relatives of the victims. What family does Yulia have contacts with in that case? And it is even more bewildering that nobody speaks on her behalf. If it started out as a detective story, it is now turning into a thriller right before our eyes.

We understand perfectly well that Scotland Yard has real professionals who proved their professionalism to the UK and the whole world on a number of occasions. But we cannot but question why Yulia's letter was published by Scotland Yard. To be honest, the latest development reinforces our concerns that it is about isolating Russian citizens. We have every reason to believe that it is either premeditated forcible containment of Russian citizens, or a forcible or factual coercion to participate in some sort of a frame-up show.

Questions keep multiplying but there are no answers.

The position of many countries that decided to "express solidarity" with Britain merits a separate mention. Their comments and speculations on this subject appear not only biased but also simply unprofessional and even awkward.

For example, on April 8, the Daily Express published a notable selection of remarks by East European politicians, which supposedly illustrated London's presentation of convincing evidence of Russia's involvement in the poisoning of the Skripals. But the paper did not even bother to analyse the essence of those statements, which testifies to the fact that nothing of substance was really presented.

Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Bartosz Cichocki, for example, said that "in our case, the profoundness of information provided by the British was not of critical importance because we had observed Russia's behaviour model even earlier..." Is this evidence that some facts have been provided? On the contrary, this proves that facts are of no importance. Poland has a long-standing position.

Paul Teesalu, Political Director at the Estonian Foreign Ministry, declared: "We didn't have to think long before we came out in support of Britain." Generally, thinking tends to be a good thing, particularly when you represent a foreign ministry and a country in a situation where one country is accusing another. "We didn't have to think long" is how all these decisions are taken.

"As far as Britain's position is concerned, we have full confidence in our British partner; you don't doubt your friends, particularly when they say words like 'highly likely,'" said Deputy Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic Jakub Dür.

Saying that this is not serious is to say nothing. We are not saying that you can't have friends, but the case in point is a crime and an investigation. In this instance, we are not playing the believe-it-or-not game; people's fate is at stake and, I repeat, neither we, nor you have seen these people. The use of the word "solidarity" is indicative, as we said earlier.

Today we have every reason to accuse London of purposeful disinformation, propaganda and manipulating public opinion.

I would like to reiterate that we have no information about the Skripals' whereabouts and the circumstances of what has happened to them. We are doing our best to obtain this information via the British Foreign Office by sending diplomatic notes. We have publicly called on the UK to provide information, to let

us make sure that the Russian citizens are not in danger, to let the world see that these people have not been held hostage, that they are not involved in a hideous manipulation or game, that these people are alive so that they can speak for themselves and there is finally something in this story that could be used as reliable information.

We have sent dozens of diplomatic notes to the Foreign Office, which in one way or another boil down to demands to provide information about the incident, to offers of cooperation and requests for information on the condition of the Skripals and for access to them. Regrettably, we have to do the journalists' job as we write these diplomatic notes. We ask them to confirm or refute each new plant that appears. As of today, we have, regrettably, received no reply to our requests to confirm or refute a new version or some new information published in the media.

Last week, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office sent to the relevant UK authorities a request for legal assistance in a criminal case related to the assassination attempt on the life of Yulia Skripal. The British side has not replied. We continue to insist on being provided with detailed information on the course of the investigative actions as well as explanations concerning the reliability of versions surfacing in the media. Specifically, the Russian Embassy in London asked the Foreign Office about the British media allegations that the nerve agent had been brought to the country in the form of a "clear and odourless gel" that was smeared over the handle of Sergei Skripal's front door by some agents "in broad daylight."

We have officially asked the Foreign Office to comment on the media information that the British have intentionally destroyed material evidence I have listed. These actions are certainly creating obstacles to an independent and unbiased investigation. We feel that they are trying to conceal and destroy all incriminating evidence related to this case.

The Russian Ambassador to the UK, Alexander Yakovenko, has written to the Salisbury hospital medical director, Dr Christine Blanchard, asking her to clarify a number of concrete issues related to the Skripals' confinement at this

hospital and the treatment they had received. We tried to obtain the same information via the Foreign Office, but when this proved impossible, the Russian Ambassador had to apply directly to the hospital. Mr Yakovenko also sent a personal letter to Yulia Skripal. We still don't know whether it has been passed on to her. Yulia Skripal's statement, at least the statement that has been ascribed to her and published by the Scotland Yard, says nothing about receiving the ambassador's letter.

We have asked the British side for explanations in connection with publications about the "interception" of two messages, which were allegedly sent from Syria to Russia and which the UK immediately linked to the "Skripals case." They are clearly unwilling to provide any information at all.

2. OPCW Technical Secretariat's report on the findings of the designated laboratories in the so-called "Skripal case"

On April 12, the OPCW Technical Secretariat shared the report with all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) on the findings by the designated laboratories of the samples collected from the Skripal father and daughter at a medical facility in Salisbury.

The document confirms conclusions regarding the identity of the toxic chemical that was used that severely injured three people, including by all appearances, a British police officer.

According to the report, the toxic substance was of high purity with an almost complete absence of impurities.

The statement raises questions for Russian experts and definitely requires additional work on it, including by the British party. Any specialist understands that final conclusions can be made only having available the results of the chemical and spectral analysis of the above samples.

Let me reiterate, Russia is ready and open for joint work.

We confirm our official stand that Russia would not accept for granted any conclusions about the "Skripal case" until Russian experts are allowed access to the affected persons as well to the material of the above OPCW findings and all the

real information on the incident available in London. This is not a matter of trust but an issue of working with concrete material. It is impossible any longer to believe those who refer to partial results and make statements on somebody's behalf.

We all are sinking in a stream of disinformation which is one way or another supported by official London.

There are no reasons to believe that this is not a continuation of a crude provocation against the Russian Federation on the part of the UK special services.

On the same date Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova answered to media questions:

Question: Several hours before this briefing, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons published a report and the Executive Summary of its report [regarding the Skripal case]. The full version of the report discloses the formula of the toxic agent that was used in the Salisbury incident. It has been shared with all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). This means that Russia has received this report as well. Did you have an opportunity to read it? If so, do you accept the data and conclusions in it?

Maria Zakharova: We could only read the Executive Summary of the report. Before this briefing began, I had no information about access to the full text of the report. If the report is made available to us, which we want more than any other country, our experts will analyse it and draw their own conclusions. In principle, we previously published the list of basic questions we would like to ask the OPCW regarding this matter and the report that has just been made public, and I have repeated them today. Once again, I had no access to the full text of the report before this briefing.

Question: You mentioned the version which says Yulia Skripal is being kept in isolation. Similar information was published by the Russian Embassy in the UK. Do you see any further action by Russia? It looks like our compatriot is being forcibly kept, and we do not know where. Should we not respond to this?

Maria Zakharova: There is one thing. We do not have information about whether she is being forcibly kept or she is staying voluntarily in some medical institution, and now possibly in other institutions affiliated with the British special services. This is not about trust. Trust has been completely undermined by London after we were denied access to the case materials. We can assume that, since the UK refuses to supply any information regarding Yulia Skripal's location or condition, and since we do not have any data from her relatives, or possibly from some trusted media, who could have seen her or talked to her – then we have every reason to believe she might really be held against her will.

The letter published on the Scotland Yard website on her behalf is very strange. With all understanding of the situation she found herself in, this letter raises more questions than it gives answers. And the first question is, whether she has any access to the media at all. That is the question. The style of the letter is also suspicious. Considering the passions that rage in the world, does this young woman have access to the internet or television? Does she understand what is happening outside the building where she is being kept? If yes, one can only be surprised at the restraint shown in the letter. But it looks more like the opposite – like a person really kept in isolation, both physical isolation and isolation from the media, from access to information sources.

Our response will continue as before – we will be requesting access to facts, will be asking the British side to provide factual information, or have us involved in the investigative actions that we hope have been carried out in the United Kingdom, and to evidence that has not yet been destroyed .

Question: If the UK does not cooperate on the Skripal case, could the family relatives request an international search or file a complaint with the International Court of Human Rights citing violation of freedom or the right of access to information?

Maria Zakharova: I think this is up to the family. Surely there are legal procedures, but this issue is still up to the relatives and lawyers. They have taken the initial steps they had to take (not because they were forced to do so, but

because they are the closest relatives); and they were rejected. This is the whole story. Unfortunately, the legal mechanisms that should work in this situation are not working.

On 13th of April Ambassador of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Alexander Yakovenko issued the points at the press conference:

“The Skripal case

- Nearly six weeks have passed since the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury and exactly a month since Prime Minister Theresa May accused Russia of this crime.

- The British government still hasn't presented any evidence in support of its position.

- The investigation is conducted in the most non-transparent way. The British government refuses to cooperate with the Russian authorities, which have not received a single request for assistance.

- The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is continuously ignoring our legitimate requests and questions concerning the condition of Mr and Ms Skripal and the circumstances of this incident.

- Without any explanation, the British Government continues to violate its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the bilateral Consular Convention. We are not allowed to see our citizens, talk to doctors, have no idea about the treatment the Russian nationals receive.

- The British authorities consistently deny consular access to Yulia Skripal and her father. We cannot be sure that Yulia's refusal to see us is genuine.

- The British government continues to conceal information regarding whereabouts of Yulia Skripal, who was discharged from hospital and allegedly

transferred to either a "safe location", or a "military base", or a "well-guarded country house".

- We have every reason to see such actions as an abduction of the two Russian nationals or at least as their forcible isolation. The statement made by Scotland Yard on behalf of Yulia only confirms our suspicions.

- We get the impression that the British Government is deliberately pursuing the policy of destroying all possible evidence, classifying all remaining materials and making an independent and transparent investigation impossible.

- The cooperation between the UK and the OPCW is non-transparent as well. Instead of using the normal OPCW procedures whereby the UK could have engaged Russia directly or through the OPCW Executive Council, the UK has chosen to cooperate bilaterally with the OPCW Technical Secretariat under an arrangement the details of which are unknown...”

“...Russia’s position on the OPCW report

- Russia has received the OPCW report on the Salisbury incident. We will be able to comment on it after our experts study it carefully. At this stage, I have to say, that in order to draw conclusions, we have to look at the chemical and spectral analysis of the samples.

- Today Russia is going to send an official request to the United Kingdom under Article IX, paragraph 2 of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

- Under that Article, States Parties should make every effort to clarify and resolve any matter which may cause doubt about compliance with the Convention through exchange of information and consultations. A State Party which receives a request shall provide a reply within 10 days.

- It is regrettable that the UK invited OPCW experts under Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which does not provide for direct cooperation between the parties concerned.

- We have noted yesterday’s statement by Foreign Secretary Johnson, who said that “the OPCW has confirmed the findings of the United Kingdom, and that

was a military grade nerve agent – Novichok, and only Russia has the means, motive and record”. This is not the case. Porton Down and now the OPCW have refrained from identifying the source of the substance. This is another reason why the United Kingdom should cooperate with Russia. Such cooperation would raise chances to obtain answers to the question of where this substance came from and who is the perpetrator of this crime....”

On the same date the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland commented on the letter of Mark Sedwill to NATO on the incident in Salisbury:

We have taken note of the letter by Prime Minister’s National Security Adviser Sir Mark Sedwill to NATO Secretary General Mr Jens Stoltenberg published on 13 April. This piece is a further demonstration of the lack of any evidence of Russia’s involvement in the Salisbury incident.

The whole case against Russia is built on three elements: the identification of the chemical substance, artificial assumptions and conclusions regarding “track record” and “motive”, and unverifiable “intelligence information”.

As to the substance, it is now common knowledge that any modern laboratory is able to produce it. The OPCW report adds nothing in this respect.

As to the motive and historical record, Mr Sedwill says nothing new and repeats well-known allegations that we have commented upon elsewhere.

As to the “intelligence”, we should remember that UK secret services have a huge track record of misleading the government and the public, with disastrous consequences. However, this time, they are offering such an unbelievable picture that nobody will be misled. Here are some immediate questions to Mr Sedwill’s letter:

- In September 2017, the OPCW certified full destruction of Russia’s chemical weapons, in the presence of UK representatives. If the British government had information about Russia’s alleged secret chemical programme, why didn’t they raise the matter at that point?

- If the UK has for years had information on Russia “investigating ways of delivering nerve agents, including by application to door handles”, why didn’t the Salisbury investigation team check the door handle on Mr Skripal’s house in the first instance, but spent several weeks studying the bench, the car, the pub, the restaurant, etc.?

- How could British intelligence possibly learn that “GRU cyber specialists” targeted Yulia Skripal’s e-mail accounts in 2013? Does this mean that they had been monitoring her communications ever since her father moved to the UK?

Overall, the very fact of sending this letter today means that before, UK had not provided NATO allies even with this pathetic level of information. No wonder many of them start questioning their hasty decision to expel Russian diplomats out of the wrongly understood solidarity.

Boris Johnson has once advised: when you are losing an argument, throw a dead cat on the table. As the official Salisbury case is falling apart, we can expect more dead cats from the British intelligence.

On 14th of April Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland commented on the findings of the Swiss experts regarding the Salisbury incident:

Q. Is there any new information regarding the findings of experts from Switzerland in connection with the Salisbury poisoning?

A. According to information from the Swiss Federal Institute for NBC-protection in Spiez, its experts received samples collected in Salisbury by the OPCW specialists and finished testing them on 27 March.

The experts of the Institute discovered traces of toxic chemical called “BZ” and its precursors. It is a Schedule 2 substance under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

“BZ” is a chemical agent, which is used to temporary incapacitate people. The desired psychotoxic effect is reached in 30-60 minutes after application of the agent and lasts up to four days. According to the information the Russian Federation possesses, this agent was used in the armed forces of the USA, United

Kingdom and several others NATO member states. No stocks of such substance ever existed either in the Soviet Union or in the Russian Federation.

In addition, the Swiss specialists discovered strong concentration of traces of the nerve agent of A-234 type in its initial states as well as its decomposition products.

In view of the experts, such concentration of the A-234 agent would result in inevitable fatal outcome of its administration. Moreover, considering its high volatility, the detection of this substance in its initial state (pure form and high concentration) is extremely suspicious as the samples have been taken several weeks since the poisoning.

It looks highly likely that the “BZ” nerve agent was used in Salisbury. The fact that Yulia Skripal and Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey have already been discharged from hospital, and Sergei Skripal is on his way to recovery, only supports such conclusion.

All this information was not mentioned in the final OPCW report at all.

Considering the above, we have numerous serious questions to all interested parties, including the OPCW.

On the same date Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov issued the statement at the 26th Assembly of the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy, the comments on the Skripal case are provided below:

“...Coming back to the Skripal case. As you know, in the Skripal case the British specially invited a group of OCSW experts. It was done exclusively in a bilateral manner, it was announced that the others would be informed about the conclusions reached by the group. The report of this group of experts was initially distributed as a summary for public consumption and following that, a detailed and fairly substantial confidential version was distributed to the OPCW members only. In that report, in accordance with the OPCW way of conduct, the chemical composition of the agent presented by the British was confirmed, and the analysis of samples, as the report states, was taken by the OPCW experts themselves. It contains no names, Novichok or any other. The report only gives the chemical

formula, which, according to our experts, points to an agent that had been developed in many countries and does not present any particular secret.

Our colleagues tell us (I have already given examples as I described previous situations) that they have secret data that they cannot share. As you understand, we also have the capacity to obtain confidential information. Since this information concerns issues that are literally connected to death and life, we are not going to keep anything secret. We became aware of this from the Swiss Federal Institute for Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection in Spiez. The information was obtained on conditions of confidentiality. On March 27, experts of the Institute completed their study of the samples collected on the site of the incident in Salisbury, in line with OPCW, and sent to them by the OPCW. This laboratory in Spiez, where, I am sure, professional scientists who value their reputation are employed, came to the following conclusions. I will now be quoting what they sent to the OPCW in their report. You understand that this is a translation from a foreign language but I will read it in Russian, quote: “Following our analysis, the samples indicate traces of the toxic chemical BZ and its precursor which are second category chemical weapons. BZ is a nerve toxic agent, which temporarily disables a person. The psycho toxic effect is achieved within 30 to 60 minutes after its use and lasts for up to four days. This composition was in operational service in the armies of the US, the UK and other NATO countries. The Soviet Union and Russia neither designed nor stored such chemical agents. Also, the samples indicate the presence of type A-234 nerve agent in its virgin state and also products of its degradation.” End of quote. According to the specialists’ estimates, the significant concentration of A-234 discovered would have inevitably been lethal, and taking into account its high volatility, the fact that the specialists in the city of Spiez found it in its virgin state and also with high purity and in high concentration, appears to be utterly suspicious, because the period which elapsed between the poisoning and sampling was fairly long – I think, over two weeks.

Taking into account that Yulia Skripal and the policeman have already been released from hospital, whereas Sergei Skripal, as the British claim without letting

us see either Yulia or Sergei, is still recovering, the clinical pattern corresponds more to the use of a BZ agent. Nothing is said whatsoever about a BZ agent in the final report that the OPCW experts presented to its Executive Council. In this connection we address the OPCW a question about why the information, that I have just read out loud and which reflects the findings of the specialists from the city of Spiez, was withheld altogether in the final document. If the OPCW would reject and deny the very fact that the Spiez laboratory was engaged, it will be very interesting to listen to their explanations...”