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## **Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's message to Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soreide on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Spitsbergen Treaty**

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent a message to Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen Soreide on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Spitsbergen Treaty signed in Paris on February 9, 1920.

Sergey Lavrov writes in his message that the Spitsbergen Treaty is a vital multilateral document that formalised the unique legal status of the archipelago. The Treaty recognised Norway's sovereignty over Spitsbergen and guaranteed the rights and legitimate interests of the other parties to that international treaty, including Russia. It created the foundation for the cooperation of the concerned states in the interests of development and the use of the Archipelago's vast territory. The traditions of peaceful coexistence and neighbourliness were not interrupted even during the Cold War and, in general, remain valid to this very day. Science and education are actively developing on the Archipelago. Coal mining, which constituted the basis of economic operations on Spitsbergen for years, is being increasingly complemented with tourism and the service sector.

At the same time, the Foreign Minister's message reiterates the importance of Norway complying with the letter and spirit of the 1920 Treaty when it comes to the guarantees of "equal liberty of access and entry" to the Archipelago and the possibility to conduct commercial and economic operations there "on a footing of absolute equality." In particular, we are concerned about the restrictions on the use of the Russian helicopter, the deportation procedure adopted exclusively for Russian citizens on Spitsbergen, the unlawfulness of Norway's fisheries protection zone, the unreasonable extension of nature protection zones where economic operations are limited, as well as several other problems.

Russia is the only country, apart from Norway, that for decades has conducted economic operations on Spitsbergen, and we do not intend to curtail our presence there. On the contrary, we have long-term plans for strengthening, diversifying and modernising it. The Russian Federation is interested in developing lasting and constructive cooperation with Norway on Spitsbergen and in promoting a dialogue on practical matters.

Our Norwegian partners are invited to conduct bilateral consultations to lift the restrictions from the operations of Russian organisations on the Archipelago. We expect a positive reply from the Norwegian side.

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