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Russian FM Lavrov Warns of New Cold War Turning 'Hot'

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Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. **Artem Geodakyan / kremlin.ru**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Thursday warned that the new Cold War Moscow blames on the West risks turning into a "hot" East-West conflict., the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

In remarks to an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) council meeting in Malta, RIA Novosti quoted Lavrov as saying that the West was behind a "reincarnation of the Cold War, only now with a much greater risk of a transition to a hot stage."

This is Lavrov's first visit to an EU member state since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. Lavrov was among scores of senior Russian government officials hit by EU sanctions over the war.

A spokesman for Malta told AFP on Wednesday that while he faces an EU asset freeze, there was no travel ban on Lavrov, and he was invited to "keep some channels of communication open."

The foreign ministers of Ukraine, Poland and the Czech Republic were filmed walking out of the venue during Lavrov's speech.

Lavrov also walked out during remarks by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who accused the Russian diplomat of spreading a "tsunami of misinformation." Blinken and Lavrov were not due to meet face-to-face in Malta.

Founded in 1975 to bolster engagement between the Western and Eastern blocs, the OSCE has 57 members from North America, Europe and Central Asia.

At last year's ministerial summit in North Macedonia — a potential candidate for EU membership — Lavrov accused the OSCE of becoming an "appendage" of NATO and the EU.

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Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova argued the OSCE had been "Ukrainianized." Malta had initially issued a visa for Zakharova to attend the OSCE ministerial council but then annulled it over protests from other participants.

The OSCE has been paralyzed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, with Russia vetoing several major decisions that require consensus. Ukraine has since the war called for Russia to be excluded from the OSCE.

The posts of OSCE secretary general and three other top jobs have been vacant since September because of a lack of agreement over their successors.

Ambassadors have reached an agreement on Turkish diplomat Feridun Sinirlioglu as the new secretary general to replace Germany's Helga Maria Schmid, a diplomatic source told AFP.

The ministers in Malta will also be seeking to agree on which country will chair the OSCE in 2026 and 2027.

Russia had blocked NATO member Estonia from holding the chairmanship this year. Finland, which joined NATO last year, is up for the post in 2025.

The OSCE sends observers to conflicts as well as elections around the world. It also runs programs that aim to combat human trafficking and ensure media freedom.

However, its efforts have been hampered by an inability to agree on a budget since 2021.

AFP contributed reporting

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