

## Interview of Ambassador Graf Lambsdorff with RTVI

EKATERINA ZABRODINA: Добрый день! Это программа «Специальное интервью», я ее ведущая Екатерина Забродина. И сегодня у нас в гостях Чрезвычайный и Полномочный посол Федеративной Республики Германия в России Александр Граф Ламбсдорфф.

(Good afternoon. This is the program "Special Interview", I am its host Ekaterina Zabrodina. And today our guest is Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland to Russia)

Herr Botschafter, guten Tag!

ALEXANDER GRAF LAMBSDORFF: Einen schönen guten Tag! Добрый день!

EZ: Thank you so much for coming!

AGL: I am very happy to be here.

EZ:: Thank you. So, Mister Ambassador, you have been working here, in Moscow, for almost half a year. And I would like to ask you about your first impressions. You are representing here a country that has been included in the list of so-called "unfriendly countries" by the Russian authorities. So, how is it to work here in such circumstances for you?

AGL: Well, let me start by saying that our Russian colleagues here have received me in a professional manner, and the relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have always been correct. But my conversations, of course, at the Ministry right now are mostly limited to technical issues of maintaining, you know, the way we work at the Embassy, the Consulate, our cultural institutes - and, vice versa, for the Russian of course, in Berlin as well, which is, unfortunately, due to the situation with the war in Ukraine. And that has damaged our bilateral relations substantially.

EZ:: But you have some contacts with Russian officials, to Russian diplomats?

AGL: Yes, of course. I mean, we are here on the basis of the recognition that Russia and Germany maintain diplomatic relations. And, obviously just as Russian diplomats see German officials in Berlin, I see Russian officials here, although much more limited than in the past.

EZ:: Did you have an opportunity to arrive somewhere outside Moscow? For example, some regions?

AGL: Yes, I am travelling to Saint-Petersburg soon because there is the commemoration of the end of the Wehrmacht's Blockade of Leningrad 80 year ago. This is something that is very important to us to make very clear that our responsibility as Germans for the memory of the war crimes that were committed by Wehrmacht at that time. You know, it is beyond any doubt that we will maintain that responsibility. That is something I am looking forward to. I went in Voronezh some time ago, and I have been travelling a little bit in the vicinities of Moscow, but in my first few months here I have not seen other parts of the country unlike in the past when I spent a couple of months in Siberia.

EZ:: Oh, really, you were in the early 2000s in Siberia?

AGL: Late 1990s, it was in 1996. I spent two months in Akademgorodok learning Russian, but that is a long time ago and unfortunately my Russian is not where it should be.

EZ:: But you can speak a little or you just understand?

AGL: Чуть-чуть. Just a little bit. I understand a little bit, I can read a little bit, but I clearly can't use it in a professional setting.

EZ:: By the way, what is your favorite book in Russian?

AGL: Oh very clearly - is Master and Margarita. I've read everything that Bulgakov have ever written, including the memories of his wife. And I think Mikhail Bulgakov is one of the most interesting and exciting authors in the world literature, really.

EZ:: So can we call you so to say "Russlandversteher" to some kind?

AGL: Yes, it's a bit of an ambiguous term. "Russlandversteher" in German means, literally translated, "somebody who understands Russia", which is fine. I mean, trying to understand Russia is my profession, is my job here as a German Ambassador: analyze what is happening in Russia, analyze what the Government is doing, explaining this to Berlin so that Berlin can design a good Russia policy. However, in the German language "Russlandversteher" has a pejorative connotation, which means, it describes a set of people in Germany who are naïve about the Russian government. This is something entirely different. Russia and the Russian government are distinct. And, so therefore, I think it is important to be very sober, very clear in the analysis of the politics of Russia, the policies of Russia - its military campaign, its invasion of Ukraine - all of these things, that is to be analyzed. But to understand Russia and the undercurrents of the Russian history, Russian culture, Russian political thinking – that is something that you need to do, and that is what my team at the Embassy and myself we are trying to do every day.

EZ:: And how can you describe the current relations between Germany and Russia? Have they reached the bottom, what do you think?

AGL: Well, of course, we, like many other nations, had a real shock in a way, a profound disappointment when Russia invaded Ukraine bringing war back to Europe. The entire setting of the European order changed in a way, and therefore, of course, our bilateral relations are now at a very low stage, absolutely. We have to see... You know, the part of my job is to remind the Russian officials here that they should return to the respect of international law, to respect the territorial integrity of neighboring countries, particularly Ukraine, that they should stop the military campaign, attacking cities in Ukraine day in day. Particularly, over the New Year, we had hundreds of missiles and drones raining down on Kharkiv and on other cities in Ukraine. It is a terrible situation, and in this situation, of course, we cannot have business as usual. But what we must have in diplomatic relations so that at least to see what is going on and understand what the other side is doing.

EZ:: Can you admit that our relations will get worse? Can you admit the termination, breaking of diplomatic relations between Germany and Russia?

AGL: So far, I think it is the right decision of our governments, both the German and the Russian governments have decided to maintain diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level ...

EZ: That is why you are here?

AGL: That is why I am here. That is why there is Russian Ambassador in Berlin. But the same goes for Japan, or for the United States, or UK and France, we all have these diplomatic relations simply because the worst thing that can happen is to withdraw diplomatically, which is the backbone of everything else in terms of relations. Because the number of misunderstandings, the danger of misreading what the other side is about to do would increase. And in international affairs, if you look a little bit at the history, when one government misreads another government, that may lead to really a very difficult and terrible misunderstandings that could lead to escalation of the situation. And therefore I think although we have a really damaged situation in terms of diplomatic relations between Russia and about a hundred and forty nations who condemned the Russian aggression in Ukraine it still important to keep up the work.

EZ:: So you don't think that they gonna be breaking of relations between Russia and Germany in the nearest future?

AGL: I see no indications whatsoever either in Berlin or in Moscow.

EZ:: About the worst scenarios. As you know, Bild Zeitung published a sensational leak of a secret paper of German Bundeswehr. According to this document, NATO and Germany particularly are preparing for a full-scale war conflict with Russia. A possible escalation, could occur already this February and the war - by summer 2025, so next year. Bundeswehr predicts that Russia «can attack

NATO's eastern flank". Russian Foreign Ministry already commented on this leaks in a very skeptical way. So what could you say about this? Does Berlin really admit such a scenario?

AGL: - No. I've read the article, because I read the newspapers in the morning. Bild is, of course, always a paper where you have to take everything with a grain of salt. But the important thing here is that it is - I suppose it is a paper, I haven't seen it, I don't know the paper - but I suppose it is a paper where different scenarios are discussed. And this is something that all the ministries of defense - including the Ministry here in Moscow - do all the time. You always develop scenarios. These are things that are usually kept inside the ministries. When the newspaper gets it and writes about it - it leads to that kind of - you know - apprehension and nervousness. But I'm here to say that scenarios that are being planned there are defensive scenarios - against a possible escalation by Russia to which NATO would then respond. That is why I've read this article. But this is something that I have to make a certain reservation about, because I haven't seen the paper that Bild refers to. I've only read the article and I prefer to see official documents before I comment officially.

EZ: But now you consider this scenario to be unlikely?

AGL: Yes of course. I mean that is something that's it's a series of things the Bild writes about. I don't know where they got the paper, what is in the paper and whether the paper even exists. I have no clue. I simply don't know. I assume that it exists - otherwise the newspaper wouldn't write about it. But the scenarios in it are very theoretical, hypothetical and not something that we are expecting to happen.

EZ:: The war conflict in Ukraine has been lasting for already almost two years and there is no any sign for an end or the sign for the conflict at least to become frozen. So how do you see the realistic way-out? What do you think about possible negotiations? In western media there have been a lot of publications, so-called leaks last year. They said that the United States and its allies, including Germany, can push Kiev to negotiations with Moscow because no one can see a realistic way-out on the field. So, what do you think about that?

AGL: I think, it is important to start with a very simple truth: the moment Russia stops the war - the war is over. Ukraine does not pose a danger to Russia. Russia has invaded the neighboring country. The moment Russia stops fighting, the war is over.

EZ:: And what about negotiations?

AGL: Well in Berlin, we do not see a serious intention here in Moscow to enter negotiations. What we see is a military campaign aimed at the subjugation of a neighboring country in a service of some outdated and illegal imperial idea. And so, for the time being I don't see the intention here in this town to enter negotiations. And as far as negotiations are concerned when we are talking about Ukraine, it is for them to determine when and how they want to enter the negotiations. There will never be any talks about Ukraine without Ukraine. It is very important to realize that. When the Ukrainians think the time has come to enter into a diplomatic process to end the war, we will support that. But let's go back to the outset: should Russia decide to stop fighting, the war is over. The dying is over, the killing is over, the suffering is over. So, that is why I am here to say to our Russian colleagues: it is completely in Moscow's hand to end the war.

EZ:: And what about the military help for Ukraine? So, Germany remains country number two helping Ukraine after the United States. But to know that the United States suspended their assistance for a while to Ukraine. And we don't know what is gonna be after the elections in the United States. So, how do you think, will Germany be ready to replace somehow the United States here and to compensate for the failing military aid?

AGL: First of all, what is going on right now is you have a country that has been attacked, and under the Charter of the United Nations that country has the right to defend itself. And the other countries have the right to help that country, what many countries are doing. Not just Germany or the United States, but many countries are helping Ukraine to defend itself. As far as Germany is concerned, we can see a strong resolve on the part of the German Government to continue supporting Ukraine. Because what Ukraine is defending is not only Ukraine proper - that too, obviously. But it is the very notion of territorial integrity, peaceful resolution of conflicts, the very principles of the Charter of the United Nations. That is something that we in Germany believe in very strongly. We want peace and we want the rule of law, and we want the Charter of the United Nations as the founding document of the way we organize our life internationally. That is why Germany is supporting Ukraine. At the same time, the nations that help Ukraine don't become parties to the war. Sometimes you hear people here in Moscow say that as if you had entered the war. No - we are helping the country that is defending its principles. As far as the United States are concerned, that is in November. The elections happen in November. I'm not going to speculate on the outcome, but the Americans have a very nice saying. It says: "Two weeks is the long time in politics". So, it is January now, the elections happen in November. Let's wait and see what happens. And let's wait and see how the American people are going to decide.

EZ:: Yes, sure. Continuing the topic. Chancellor Scholz is under huge pressure about the possible supplies of Taurus missiles to Ukraine. Their operational range is estimated at about 500 kilometers. It means that the missiles can reach Russian territory - and may be very far. So, can Berlin decide to send this missile to Ukraine, what do you think?

AGL: Berlin could decide, but it is not for me to talk about, because that's a political decision that needs to be taken in Berlin, and as you are rightly pointing out, there is a big debate in Berlin about this. I mean, there are some political forces that are supporting this decision, there are others who are a little bit more hesitant, and that is a very democratic process. You have a public discussion about this issue. But for me, as an Ambassador, I can only say that it is a political decision that (at the end of the day) the German Government, the Chancellor would take. And it is not for me to comment on that.

EZ: So, about our trade and economic relations. There is an enormous rupture of our trade relations and mutual trade between Germany and Russia - in first seven months of 2023 collapse is by 76% as German data says, so the drop is estimated at about 27 billion of euro.

AGL: That is correct.

EZ: So, of course it definitely has an impact on Russia, but I would ask you what impact does this situation have on the German economy? Sanctions and severance of economic ties with Russia - how does it affect Germans?

AGL: Well, there are two aspects to that. One: German exports to Russia always were a very small part of our overall exports. In terms of the German GDP it is not very significant, because Russia is an interesting market, but, you know, the entire economic production in Russia is about the size of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. For the German GDP it is not a major problem that our exports have gone down. On the other hand, we have imported, of course, oil and gas. And that is no longer happening. And that has led for some time to a rise in energy prices, because Gazprom switched off the gas deliveries, and so we had to look for alternative sources. That had an impact because the energy prices went up and the Government had to decide on some measures to mitigate the effect of this price hike for our companies and for our private citizens. And that has now sort of gone rather smoothly. It has not been a positive thing, obviously, but it has led to something positive. And the positive thing is that we have ended our overdependence on a single supplier. 55% of the natural gas that we imported came from Russia. Now we are at zero, and so we had to look for alternative sources - Netherlands, Norway, the United States, Algeria. We are now diversifying our imports, which, strategically speaking, from the point of view of national sovereignty, is much better because you no longer depend on any one supplier. So, if one of our suppliers has a problem with deliveries it is not going to change the price structure in Germany any longer the way the price structure was changed when Gazprom switched off the deliveries.

EZ: But experts say that the world gas market is not stable - I mean the market of liquefied natural gas. And also we don't know whether next winters are going to be also warm for Germany or more frosty as previous two. So, there is an uncertainty about it.

AGL: Yes, but uncertainty is a part of life (laughing). Norway is pipeline gas, the Netherlands are pipeline gas, we have some LNG from the United States, we have some LNG from other countries, but it is a mix now. It used to be nearly only pipeline gas before, now it is a mix of suppliers. And we've also drawn lessons from the past in terms of our reserves. For example, now we are having rather cold weather in Germany. Nothing compared to Moscow, obviously, but we are having rather cold weather. But there is absolutely no gas shortage, the prices are stable, everything is fine, our industry can continue to produce with the heat for their industrial processes, and our private citizens can heat their homes. So, there is absolutely no problem there. Uncertainty is always there and we need to manage this thing, but this is a situation, in which the German Government, German industry and consumers feel comfortable.

EZ: I saw the survey results. About 70% of Germans do support sanctions against Russia, but at the same time about 30% - it's also a huge part of people - do not support. And the surveys also show that most people who stand for lifting the sanctions, belong to supporters of the far-right "Alternative für Deutschland". And on the [recent] weekend we saw huge demonstrations in Berlin, in Potsdam against "Alternative". Chancellor Olaf Scholz was among them [demonstrators]. So there is a big fear of rising party's popularity. So, don't you see here some connections, some causal relationship? Because a lot of people in Germany are not satisfied with rising energy prices, with inflation and so on. Is it somehow connected with sanction policy?

AGL: No. There is one very important detail that we need to remember: it was not Germany who said “we stop all gas imports from Russia”, it was Gazprom who switched off the gas imports. That is important to remember. I mean, Gazprom for a long period of time reduced the gas deliveries to Germany pretending that there was a problem installing the turbine, then the turbine came to Saint-Petersburg to be installed, then the installation did not work. There was one excuse after another for Gazprom to go down. There is no causal relationship in energy prices and the sanctions because Gazprom was at the beginning not affected by the sanctions. It was its decision to stop deliveries of gas to Germany. Now the domestic political situation in Germany is one that's very lively. We've had extremely intensive discussion about the national path, we had farmers protests, but this is domestic politics, and for me, as an Ambassador here, that is not my role. I cannot talk about the domestic dynamics. I mean, if you read the newspapers, if you go online, you can see a lot. It is a very lively democratic debate, but it is not for me to comment on.

EZ:: Then maybe you can comment on the North Stream sabotage that happened in 2022. Is there any progress in investigation? Earlier Russia blamed Germany for not sharing information about the results with Moscow. Is there any cooperation?

AGL: The current situation is that the Public prosecutor's office at the Federal court, which is in Karlsruhe, they are investigating, but they have not come up with any public statement as to what one would call ascribing the act. So, they have not identified anyone who would be responsible. So, the Danes, the Swedes and Germans are looking into this, but no country has yet come up with a conclusion as to who was the perpetrator and whether a state act was involved or not, for example.

EZ:: But why Germany does not share any information with Russian colleagues?

AGL: Because it is a confidential investigation. And I can tell you, even in my former role as a member of the Parliament, the Public prosecutor's office - they are a part of law enforcement - they don't share this information. They are very independent. They do the investigation. And when they have results - they share the results. But they do not share anything in the process of investigation not to endanger the investigation proper. Because if they say: “Well, we have this, we have that”, people who might be responsible might decide to do things. They don't do that. It is a very-very independent procedure. They don't share information about with anyone, not with Berlin or Moscow.

EZ:: Yes, but it is connected with Russian property, Russian infrastructure. It is obvious that Russia asks for some information.

AGL: I can understand that, and I can tell you also that people in Berlin asked for information, but Karlsruhe in that case is not giving the information, and so, that is the situation.

EZ:: I see, OK. Recently, the twentieth package of sanctions has been adopted.

AGL: The twelfth!

EZ:: Yes, and what have I said?

AGL: The twentieth.

EZ:: Oh, not yet (laughing)!

AGL: Not quite there yet (laughing)!

EZ:: The twelfth. So, this package includes the possibility of confiscation of frozen Russian assets “for the purpose of public interest”. We know that the earlier Chancellor Scholz admitted that it would be very difficult to find the legal ground for that. Is Germany considering such a possibility now? And how does this relate to the European principle of protecting private property?

AGL: Yes, the Chancellor has said that very clearly, and this is something that the German Government stands by obviously, because he is the head of our Government. It is important to remember however that of course Russia will have to pay reparations to Ukraine. That has been recognized by the United Nations in the resolution that was passed in the General Assembly, condemning the invasion. Where it says that Russia must be held accountable for the damage. If we look at the damage to Herson, to Kharkiv, to Kryvyi Rig, to Kiev, with all the missiles, with all the drones flying in that come through and caused this enormous damage. And because of this enormous damage, if we look at cities like Mariupol and others, you have a situation in which, of course, Russia will have to pay for the damage that it caused. And some of the funds that are frozen now will probably be used for that. But I don't know under which circumstances and at what point in time. But the United Nations have declared themselves on this very clearly.

EZ:: So, you admit that Russian assets could be withdrawn by Germany in favor of Ukraine?

AGL: It would require the United Nations' decision, and it is not a German decision. That is an international decision. As I have said, in the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations 143 countries, I think, condemned the invasion and said that Russia must be held accountable. And the frozen assets are maybe one of the elements of reparations. But we're not saying that we going to confiscate anything on the part of the German Government, it is not a German decision, as the Chancellor has pronounced himself very clearly on that.

EZ:: OK. And what about the property of Russian businessmen under sanctions? In some European countries they are being confiscated. Can such a call find support in Germany? I think, such cases are rather rare and not common in Germany.

AGL: Yes, but it is because we are very circumspect in respecting the legal requirements. What we do is, of course, to identify businessmen or companies who are under sanctions. And if the sanctions provide for the confiscation of assets or the freezing of assets, the German authorities will proceed to do that. But we are a country with the rule of law. If something like that happened, you can have an appeal. And so therefore, our authorities are very careful and circumspect in that regard.

EZ:: About visas and flights. First of all, we should mention that the liberalization of the visa regime was canceled bilaterally. But to get Schengen visa issued by Germany is a real challenge now. It is much more difficult than, for example, from Italy or France or Spain. You need more documents; you



need more serious grounds for coming to Germany. What do you think about the situation, when many Russians who love Europe, who are missing Europe, now they are cut off from Europe? Do you think that it is, let's say, reasonable?

AGL: Yes, of course, I think it is reasonable - it's the policy of my Government. But I think it is important to recognize we still do issue a lot of visas, particularly to Russians who want to come to work in Germany. We also have family reunion visas, we also issue visas for students who want to come and study in Germany. With the Schengen visas we have one situation that is very unpleasant because the Russian Government imposed on Germany a maximum number of people that we, as Germany, can employ here in Russia.

EZ:: It was a response to the expulsion of Russian diplomats, as far as I know.

AGL: No, no, no! The expulsions were mutual; that was more or less the same. We had the same number of diplomats were to leave - Moscow or Berlin. But when we had this decision, which is a sovereign decision, it was unnecessary in our view and unfriendly, but the Russian side decided that there was a cap: Germany could only employ so many people in all of Russia. And we have a Consulate in Saint-Petersburg, we have schools, we have the Goethe institute. In our Embassy we had to let a number of people go - quite a few, actually. Esteemed colleagues, I should say, - they were not let go because they've done anything wrong, but we had to reduce the number of people. And when you mention the Schengen procedure, of course, a lot of people in our consulate had to leave unfortunately, and so it takes a lot longer to administer the issuance of visas.

EZ:: Do you have some info about how many, approximately, visas were issued last year, for example?

AGL: I would have to check. I don't want to give you a figure that would be a wild guess but I would have to check that.

EZ:: OK. But do you admit that maybe the situation could become a little bit easier in the future?

AGL: The moment Russia returns to the respect for the international law, the war ends and we have a situation in which we might look at a peaceful settlement, and possibly softening or the end of the sanctions which is right now not discernible - nobody can see this happening any time soon. But in that situation, of course, I would hope for that - that we could return to bilateral relationship that would allow for easier traveling than we have now. But it is really not our fault.

EZ:: In the EU, in the European Commission, they often say that the goal of the sanctions is to impact on Russian military capacities. But we see that they don't work actually. So, when, in your opinion, sanctions will start working?

AGL: Oh, I disagree with that.

EZ:: Really?

AGL: Yes, I disagree with that. The Sanctions are working - and that is very important.

EZ:: How?

AGL: Sanctions are not a light switch, OK? It's not so that you impose sanctions, and like a light switch, the policy of the sanctioned party changes. It is not how the things work. Sanctions work over time - and they work by increasing the cost of what the sanctioned party is doing. And if you look at some of the technical elements that are required for certain military products, they are no longer imported to Russia. The companies that used to sell them can no longer sell them. We know the circumvention, but this makes things more tedious, more expensive, it makes it more difficult to wage a war. And what is implemented, what is happening, what is working - we know that the high-priority battle field items have gone down to nearly zero in terms of exports to Russia. No, the Russian Government, the Russian Ministry of Defense and the arms-producing companies - they have hard times, they have to go to other markets to try to find substitution for products that they used to simply buy on the world market.

EZ: I see, but in many situations the sanctions just impact on ordinary Russians, who just, as I have already mentioned, were very strongly connected to Europe, and now they have no such an opportunity because they are cut off. Do you think "collective responsibility" is a really good thing?

AGL: Again, I am sorry to be so tough, but again I disagree, because it is possible for Russian citizens to travel to Europe. You can apply for a visa, you have to fulfil certain criteria. The liberal regime that was in place before the war is no longer there - you are right, it's now administratively much more difficult. But it is not as if it was cut off for regular Russian citizens, it is possible to travel to Europe.

EZ: But much more difficult...

AGL: I agree with that, but that is the situation. I told you, in our consulate, just a practical case, our colleagues can work on so many visas per day, but there used to be many more people. The same goes for many other embassies where there are a fewer people now.

EZ: Have any cultural exchanges of scientific exchanges remained? Because, as far as I know, after the 24th February, German minister of education recommended the universities to stop projects with Russia, to stop taking part in common conferences, in issuing grants, and so on. Don't you think it impacts civil society, and it's not very good, because the civil society is something that has to remain vivid, and now it is affected so much?

AGL: Yes, that is true. There is a difference, I would say. The scientific, the research community and indeed all contacts were essentially either frozen or canceled. That has happened. And that has to do with the fact that according to the German government - and I completely agree with that - when Russia is waging a war against a neighboring country, we cannot simply do business as usual in the scientific and the research field. It doesn't work. It would be too much. As far as the civil society is concerned, we see an enormous pressure on the organizations of the civil society. They are labeled foreign agents or, they are labeled undesirable organizations, you have people who have been sent to prison for talking about the time of the Stalinist repressions. Civil society is in a very difficult place in Russia right now, and we are doing whatever we can to support those who are willing to accept any kind of support that we have.

EZ:: And there is one more problem that is very sad for me, because I know that there have been a lot of common projects around the memory of the Second World War, and the “culture of memory”, so to say. You mentioned that you went to Leningrad...

AGL: I'm about to go.

EZ: Yes, sure. So, Germans commemorate by themselves, and Russian commemorate by themselves now. There is no common projects, common ceremonies. What is gonna be with all this “culture and memory”?

AGL: It is good that you mentioned that. Because this is area in which - we believe that despite all disagreements that we have now about the war in Ukraine and about the way the Russian Government sees our reaction to the war in Ukraine, - commemorating the horrors of the Second World War is something that has bound our peoples together for decades. This is something I grew up with, for example. I mean, to have this atrocious series of events: The Second World War, The Great Patriotic War, the Holocaust, - we assumed the responsibility as Germans to maintain the memory of this and to work on the message of “Never again”. This is something really important. And we have an extended hand, I mean we are open to joint events. For example, when we have the Day of Remembrance, Volkstrauertag - the Day of the National Grief in Germany - we do have a cooperation with the Commission of War Graves here in Russia. So our organization that looks after German war graves in Russia and the Russian organization that looks after war graves in Germany and in other countries, - they do cooperate. And I find that is correct. I find that in this situation, in which the problems of the day are difficult, insurmountable as they may seem, right, we have to make a step back, because it is so crucial. That is why I go to Saint-Petersburg and to lay a wreath and commemorate the victims of one of the most terrible war crimes committed by the German army ever, which was the Siege or Blockade of Leningrad.

EZ:: And what is gonna be with the Russian-German Berlin-Karlshorst Museum, a unique place where the Nazi capitulation was signed? What is the future of this museum that used to be a Russian-German museum?

AGL: Yes, I think that the museum is going to be maintained. It is a place where the German Wehrmacht signed the capitulation for the surrender for the second time - that time with the Red Army. And it is very important point of memory in Berlin, and I see no one who would even think of changing the nature of the museum as a point of commemoration for the future.

EZ:: Yes, but Russian diplomats, Russian historians are no more invited there, as far as I understand.

AGL: It used to be a joint organization that maintains the museum, but the bilateral official relations have ended. The nature of the museum, however, has not changed and it will not change.

EZ: I see. I want to ask you about some delicate point, a political point. Last year, the Wall Street Journal reported the United States are preparing a multilateral prisoner exchange deal with Russia. And Germany can also take part in this deal, because a Russian citizen Vadim Krasikov is in life imprisonment in Germany in charges of a murder in Tiergarten. So can this Russian citizen be

included in the list for exchange with some American citizens who are imprisoned in Russia? So, can Germany extradite Krasikov to Russia?

AGL: It is the privilege of journalists that The Wall Street Journal can write about whatever they like, but these are issues that certainly diplomats will not talk about on television, as much as your program is esteemed. That is not something that I am going to talk about. The important thing in terms of Krasikov's personality, I mean, he was found red-handed in Tiergarten about 500 meters from the Reichstag, having just killed a man. And he had done so on sort of the instructions of Russian authorities. This is a very clear case: he is a cold-blooded murderer. So, I think, it is very clear, it is a difficult situation, but The Wall Street Journal is free to speculate about whatever they like.

EZ: So, you can't confirm such negotiations about this?

AGL: No, I cannot confirm, and I would not confirm and I would even not comment on.

EZ: I'll have to concentrate, just a moment. Alexander Sebastian Léonce Freiherr von der Wenge Graf Lambsdorff, - am I correct?

AGL: Nearly!

EZ: Nearly?

AGL: (Laughing). Ha-ha, but it is not your fault, because the German Wikipedia...

EZ: Yes, I took it from here.

AGL: Because you speak German, I know. The German Wikipedia put the "Freiherr", but it doesn't belong there.

EZ: Ah, why?

AGL: I don't know why. One part of my family has that name, Freiherr, but my part of the family does not. So, you are nearly correct.

EZ: So, I would like to ask you to tell something about your family. As far as we know... I hope I am correct here, your ancestors come from "Ostsee Deutschen", German nobles who moved to the Russia Empire, and also joined the royal service, is that right?

AGL: Well, my ancestors moved to what is now called the Baltic countries in the 1400s. At that time, it wasn't the Russian Empire. They became subjects of the Russian Empire after the Great Nordic War, when these regions became the part of the Empire of Peter the First.

EZ: At the beginning of the XXth century we had Foreign Minister Vladimir Lambsdorff. Is he a relative of Yours?

AGL: Yes. He is my distant uncle, we have a common ancestor who is Matvey Lamzdorf.

EZ: Yes, and you saw his name on the wall of the Georgievsky Hall in Kremlin?

AGL: Yes, that is correct. Because Matvey educated Nikolai the First. He was a general. At the court it was common that a noble man would educate the tsarevichs - which the sort of the soon to be tsars. And so Matvey was the educator of Nikolai the First and he received the Order of Saint George, as did his son, by the way, Nikolai. And so when I was there waiting for handing over the credentials to President Putin, we had some time - and I was wondering whether my ancestors were on the wall. Because in the Georgievsky Hall all people who received the Order of Saint George are inscribed on the wall. And the gentleman from the protocol called the guide who knew everything about the Hall, and she found the name.

EZ: It was a surprise for you?

AGL: That was a surprise for me, but it was a nice surprise, I have to say.

EZ: So, how much do you know about this part of your family, of so-called Russian roots?

AGL: Oh, quite a bit. There were some who were prominent. Matvey, obviously, then Nicolai his son, who, as you could call him, was the director of the Russian forests in his lifetime. He was a soldier, of course. We had one ancestor who died at Borodino, defending Russia against Napoleon. There was Vladimir, of course, the Foreign Minister, who was good as a minister, because he advised the Tsar not to go to war against Japan in 1905. And I think it would have been a good idea for the Tsar to listen to him, because that war did not end well.

EZ: Very interesting parallels. So, I would ask you some more question about Russian culture in Germany. In Russia, there is a very popular thesis about "the culture cancel" in Europe. And we remember that in December Chancellor Scholz unexpectedly went to Hamburg to see Kirill Serebrennikov's performance. Do you think, was it a political gesture or a human gesture?

AGL: Or maybe, just a private interest. You know, the Chancellor is from Hamburg and he goes to the theatre when he is at home. So, I think that was something I cannot talk about because it is a private life. The important point is that there is no such thing as a cancellation of Russian culture in Germany. We see Russian conductors, we see Russian composers being performed, we see Russian plays. So, we see Russian performers, dancers, singers on stages all across Germany. There is absolutely no cancellation of Russian culture in Germany. And we believe that, from the point of view of the European culture, Russian culture is an integral part and will remain an integral part of it. So, therefore nobody in Germany believes that it is a good idea to pretend that the Russian culture has no influence on the sort of what constitutes the European culture, with French, British, Dutch, German, and Polish. That is something that has a very strong conviction when you talk with people who work in culture in Germany, they are very clear about that.

EZ: So, you are not abolishing Tchaikovsky or Dostoevsky?

AGL: Absolutely not!

EZ: Mister Ambassador, I want to thank you so much for a very interesting conversation. Thank you for coming!

AGL: Thank you very much for inviting me!