



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Warfare; Central Asia; Russia; Ukraine

October 14:

Russia has adapted to adverse global economic conditions, and crafted a state budget capable of weathering new sanctions from the international community, the country's top economic official has said. Russian state media outlet *Sputnik* cites Finance Minister Anton Siluanov as reassuring a gathering of investors that the Kremlin has taken concrete steps - including "lowering the budget deficit" - to secure and stabilize the national economy in an effort to boost investor confidence, and to head off an outflow of capital ahead of expected new U.S. sanctions targeting the country's energy sector.

October 16:

Russia's government has set its sights on popular messaging app Telegram, *The Moscow Times* reports. Pavel Durov, Telegram's founder, was fined 800,000 rubles (\$14,000) by a Moscow magistrate court for failing to decode data regarding six phone numbers of interest to Russian investigators. The company can appeal the verdict within ten days. ROSKOMNADZOR, Russia's state media watchdog, will give Telegram 15 days to decrypt the requested data if the court decision is enforced. If Durov continues to not comply, however, the agency can block access to the app throughout Russia.

October 17:

Various American media outlets may soon be labeled "undesirable media" by the Federation Council, Russia's upper legislative chamber. *RBC TV* reports that the Federation Council's Committee for the Protection of State Sovereignty has added the *Voice of America*, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* and *CNN* to a list of potentially undesirable media. Outlets are added to the Council's media blacklist based on the recommendations from the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs, state media watchdog ROSKOMNADZOR and the Office of Russia's General Prosecutor. Oleg Morosov, a member of the Committee on State Sovereignty, has explained that a media outlet is added to the list when "it receives money from afar" and "intervenes in internal Russian politics."

October 18:

The *Washington Post* reports that Ksenia Sobchak, a popular Russian television host and journalist, has announced her candidacy for president of the Russian Federation. The Russian celebrity and socialite serves as an opposition figure of sorts in Russian culture. She is the daughter of Anatoly Sobchak, the former mayor of St. Petersburg who served as Russian President Vladimir Putin's political mentor and one of the authors of Russia's modern constitution. Sobchak ostensibly hopes to appeal to the same demographic as protest candidate Alexei Navalny, whose supporters are largely youth in high school and university protesting the political status quo dominated by Putin.

Sobchak is running on a platform of "against all," opposing Kremlin policies and Russia's occupation of Crimea - stances she has propounded in public speeches for the past several years. But observers have nonetheless taken a skeptical view of her candidacy. Her rumored ties to Putin, and the Kremlin's acceptance of her candidacy, they say, may suggest that she is acting on the Kremlin's behalf to safely defuse domestic political pressure ahead of next year's elections.

October 20:

The Moscow Times has reported on the plight of Khudoberdi Nurmatov, a gay Uzbek journalist detained by Moscow police at the request of Uzbekistan's security services. Having been held without identifying papers since 2012 and refused Russian asylum in 2015, the journalist's most recent bid for asylum was denied by a Moscow court. Nurmatov maintains that he will be tortured if deported, and Europe's top human rights court ruled that his deportation is illegal without a court consideration. However, the legal counsel of the Russian Ministry of Interior has declared that there are no grounds to grant asylum. Nurmatov's attorney, Irina Biryukova, claims that multiple violations were committed by Russian authorities during this process, and plans to ultimately send Nurmatov, who reportedly attempted suicide shortly after his detention, to a third country.

