



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
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August 27, 2019 **Margot van Loon**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Resource Security; Russia; Ukraine

RUSSIA'S HIV CRISIS RAGES ON

The latest data from the Russian Ministry of Health indicates that HIV infections in the country are on the rise despite long-running efforts to limit the spread of the epidemic. At least 20,600 people died from HIV-related causes in 2018 (2.2 percent more than the previous year, and mostly between the ages of 25 and 44), bringing the country's total deaths from the virus to 318,000. Due to the stigma surrounding HIV, however, the World Health Organization has warned that the actual figure of HIV-related deaths in Russia is likely much higher than the reported figure. (*The Moscow Times*, July 31, 2019)

WASTE TRIGGERS MORE PROTESTS

The outrage of a small town near Moscow has cast a spotlight on widespread environmental concerns and a growing divide between urban and rural Russia. Residents of Likino-Dulyovo have gathered for weeks to protest the planned construction of a waste processing plant in a nearby peat forest. The construction is part of efforts to relieve pressure on Russia's capital, which generates 20 percent of Russia's annual total of 70 million tons of waste. National reforms on waste disposal which passed in January ushered in a host of new projects like the plant in Likino-Dulyovo. But residents in nearby areas claim that Muscovites are benefiting at the expense of small communities, which receive no compensation for potential harms wrought by the disposal projects while the contractors involved are incentivized to build harmful trash dumps instead of recycling facilities or more ecologically responsible plants. Meanwhile, as Russian authorities grapple with a rise in the number of public demonstrations, law enforcement authorities in Likino-Dulyovo have responded violently to citizen complaints, beating and arresting protestors to force them to disperse. (*Financial Times*, August 1, 2019)

SIBERIAN FIRES PROMPT STATE OF EMERGENCY

A massive wildfire is raging across the northernmost reaches of Russia. By early August, more than 2,800 firefighters were struggling to combat a mere 450-mile part of the then-11,800 square mile blaze. Since much of the affected area is in remote Arctic regions where the fire cannot threaten any towns or facilities, Russia's aerial forest protection agency, AVIALESOKHRANA, admitted that it intends to let most of the fire burn itself out (while also "seeding clouds to induce rainfall" and enlisting the efforts of Siberian shamans). However, as smoke blanketed Siberian cities and drifted to North America, residents expressed outrage at the lack of concrete action and the mounting environmental damage. On August 1st, President Vladimir Putin ordered the mobilization of military transport planes and helicopters to assist the firefighters and declared a formal state of emergency across Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk – an area roughly the size of Western Europe. President Trump also offered U.S. assistance, although Putin said that for now outside help is unnecessary.

However, the week that followed the declaration brought little, if any, relief. Russian authorities now believe that the fires were started deliberately in order to hide illegal logging operations in Irkutsk. Despite the efforts of the firefighters, as of the end of the first week of August an area larger than 16,000 square miles continued to burn, releasing millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and prompting Greenpeace to label the disaster a "climate catastrophe that cannot be stopped by human means." (*New York Times*, August 1, 2019; *Deutsche Welle*, August 7, 2019)

THE SUFFERING OF CRIMEA'S TATARS

Under Russian occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, ethnic Tatars have faced widespread persecution and harassment. At a recent conference in Kyiv, Eskender Bariiev, a member of the Tatar representative body known as the *Mejlis*, told the audience that Russian security forces had conducted 73 raids, 69 detentions, and 67 arrests in Crimea in the first half of 2019 alone, with most of them targeting ethnic Tatar residents. He noted a particularly high number of illegal detentions and interrogations taking place in March and June. The Crimean Tatar Resource Center, a human rights organization, confirmed Bariiev's data regarding the politically motivated targeting of the Peninsula's Tatar population by Russian law enforcement, highlighting a trend of systematic illegal arrests, regular deprivation of religious freedoms and the right to a fair trial, and even unexplained disappearances of local residents. (UNIAN, August 1, 2019)