



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Global Health; Europe; North Africa; Russia

PUSHING A VACCINE IN EGYPT

Grigory Borisenko, Russia's ambassador to Egypt, is attempting to establish an agreement for the production of its proprietary coronavirus vaccine, known as "Sputnik V," with Egypt. Russian officials have promised that if Egypt agrees to produce the vaccine, Egyptians would receive the drug at a discounted price. They have also asserted that such an agreement would serve as the "basis for further development" of relations between Russia and Egypt.

For their part, Egyptian officials have reiterated publicly that - if they decide to move ahead with the partnership with Russia - they would put Sputnik V through its own rigorous testing process prior to any production and administration. But the Kremlin isn't the only one courting Cairo on the health front; China also appears to be vying for a bigger stake in Egypt's pharmaceutical industry, and a Chinese vaccine is currently already being tested in the country. (*Al-Monitor*, September 19, 2020)

EASTERN EXPANSION FALLING FLAT

When it was launched back in 2016, Russia's Far East Hectare Program was designed to lure citizens to the country's sparsely populated regions between Siberia and the Pacific Ocean. But the program, originally conceived as a response to a demographic problem - the threat of a potential Chinese takeover of the Russian Far East, which just six million Russian citizens call home - has failed to catch on. To date, just 80,000 Russians have taken advantage of the program and claimed a portion of the 220 million free hectares made available by the government. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 20, 2020)

MOSCOW'S HEALTH DIPLOMACY

According to Russian officials, the Kremlin has agreed to sell its Sputnik V vaccine to several developing countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and India. Agreements with several more countries are allegedly moving forward as well. Through these arrangements, the Kremlin is trying to satisfy a global need - many of the countries in question lack the resources and/or know-how to produce a vaccine for themselves. But it has also proven to be a boost for Russia's global standing, as these same conditions have pushed more and more nations to rely on Russia.

The economic and political implications are huge. Total global demand for the Russian vaccine reportedly stands at some 1.2 billion doses - and its spread will serve as a boost to Russian soft power in key world regions. But a number of nations remain deeply skeptical of the Russian remedy. The United States, for instance, has signalled that it is "unlikely" to use a Russian vaccine (or a Chinese one) due to concerns over safety in development and unforeseen side-effects. (*Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2020)

SANCTIONS THREAT MAKES NORD STREAM 2 A RISKY PROPOSITION

The threat of U.S. sanctions is beginning to have an effect on Russia's Nord Stream 2 project - a planned energy pipeline that, when completed, will connect the Russian Federation to Germany, increasing Europe's energy dependence on Moscow in the process. The International Group of P&I Clubs, known for representing 13 of the world's top shipping insurers, circulated a message to its clients that it would not insure, "any activity involving or related to Nord Stream 2." In terms of market share, The International Group of P&I Club's portfolio includes the insurers of 90 percent of the world's seafaring cargo. The insurance association also promised to withhold coverage from any ships working on projects related to TurkStream, the recently completed pipeline connecting southwest Russia with southern Europe via Turkey. (Reuters, September 23, 2020)

RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS ACCUSED OF ESPIONAGE IN BULGARIA

Two Russian diplomats have been expelled from Bulgaria for attempting to attain intelligence on Bulgaria's military modernization plans. They were allegedly assisted in their efforts by several Bulgarian nationals. The Kremlin representatives were given 72 hours to leave the European Union. The development comes one year after Bulgaria expelled three Russian diplomats on similar spying charges, and five years after an attempted poisoning of a Bulgarian arms manufacturer in an incident that has been tied to the Kremlin. (*The Moscow Times*, September 23, 2020)