



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Military Innovation; Corruption; Resource Security; Global Health; Arctic; Europe; Russia

KADYROV AND THE NAVALNY POISONING

Razman Kadyrov, the controversial strongman leader of Chechnya, has weighed in on the ongoing controversy surrounding the recent poisoning of anti-Kremlin activist and opposition figure Alexei Navalny. Like other Russian officials, Kadyrov ridiculed the notion that the Kremlin was responsible for targeting Navalny, and went so far as to suggest that it would have been more plausible to accuse him of the incident than to accuse Russian President Vladimir Putin. He insinuated that evidence connecting the Kremlin to the attempted assassination had been fabricated. After all, "no doctor would lift a finger to save [Navalny's] life and the German flight would not be allowed to land at Omsk airport if they wanted to kill [him] in Russia," Kadyrov contended. (*The Moscow Times*, October 2, 2020)

SUICIDE SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON PRESS FREEDOM IN RUSSIA

Irina Slavina, the editor-in-chief of a local independent Russian newspaper, has committed suicide via self-immolation in front of a government building in the city of Nizhny Novgorod. Her newspaper, *Koza*, had styled itself as uninfluenced by orders "from above" and free of censorship. In truth, however, opposition leaders say that Slavina had been "under pressure from authorities" for several years. Her suicide occurred just one day after authorities searched her home for materials related to "Open Russia," an opposition group financed by former oligarch Michael Khodorkovsky. The day prior, Slavina posted a message on Facebook declaring that the Russian Federation should be blamed for her death. The Investigative Committee of Russia stated that it was opening an investigation into her death. (*Guardian*, October 2, 2020)

A HARDER LINE IN BERLIN

Germany has called for the European Union to institute sanctions against the Russian Federation for its alleged poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny with a banned chemical agent. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas noted that "such a grave violation of the International Chemical Weapons Convention cannot be left unanswered," and stated that Europe was united on the matter. EU member states are expected to announce their stances on Navalny's poisoning at the EU's next summit on October 15th. Maas was asked whether the attempted assassination would impact the construction of the nearly finished Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which will bypass Eastern Europe and carry Russian gas directly to Germany. Despite international pressure to scrap the deal, Maas said, construction would go forward, as many German workers would suffer from delays to the project. (*The Hill*, October 2, 2020)

COVID-19 RESURGENCE IN MOSCOW

Coronavirus cases are once again spiking in Russia after stabilizing during the summer months. At the start of this week, authorities recorded an official new case tally of 10,888, with over 3,500 of them identified in Moscow. The new case tally was only 768 cases short of Russia's highest recorded single day case total: 11,656, recorded on May 11th.

Russian officials, however, are putting on a brave face. Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova told the TASS news agency that the surge was expected, and related to the onset of flu season and the reopening of businesses in the country. Government leaders are doing whatever they can to avoid another strict lockdown, similar to the one instituted earlier this year that crippled the country's economy. (*Asia Times*, October 5, 2020)

NEW HYPERSONIC WEAPON TESTED IN ARCTIC

President Putin celebrated his 68th birthday this week with news that the Russian Navy successfully tested a new hypersonic missile system. The missile, known as the *Tsirkon*, was launched from a naval frigate in the White Sea and travelled at speeds of Mach 8 for over 250 miles before successfully striking a target in the Barents Sea, deep in the Russian Arctic.

The Russian arms industry has been working diligently to fulfill President Putin's public demand to develop weapons that are faster, more maneuverable, and ultimately more deadly than anything available in the West. The *Avangard* class of hypersonic missiles entered service late last year, while the new *Sarmat* and *Burevestnik* missiles are still in development. The *Tsirkon* hypersonic missile is expected to be carried aboard Russian submarines and warships in the near future. (*Al Jazeera*, October 7, 2020)