



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2426

November 11, 2020 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Amanda Hardy**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Global Health; Caucasus; Central Asia; Europe; Russia; Turkey

INVESTIGATORS FIND MISSTEPS IN NEMTSOV CASE

A group of investigative journalists have found that Russian officials investigating the 2015 assassination of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov ignored key witnesses and failed to pursue important leads. Nemtsov was shot just steps from the Kremlin in February of 2015. Five Chechens were charged with his murder, but the accused have claimed they are innocent of all charges and had been pressured into confessing to the crime. Leads and witnesses ignored in the original inquiry, the probe found, included officials with connections to Chechen politicians. The person who ordered Nemtsov's assassination has never been identified. However, the investigative report named as suspects several officials connected to Chechen regional strongman Ramzan Kadyrov. (Meduza, November, 2 2020)

A COLD SHOULDER FOR KYRGYZSTAN

In the wake of Kyrgyzstan's tumultuous parliamentary election last month, officials in the Central Asian republic are attempting to get back into the good graces of Moscow. Things, however, appear to be off to a rough start. Kyrgyz officials have been treated coldly in recent meetings with various Russian officials, and the Kremlin recently announced that it was tabling \$100 million in aid that had originally been intended for Kyrgyzstan. President Putin himself has weighed in on the situation, describing recent events in the former Soviet republic - which saw the rise of nationalist politician (and former prison inmate) Sadyr Japarov to the post of Prime Minister and acting president - as "tragic." It is as yet unclear, however, what if any further action Moscow is prepared to take to stabilize the situation according to its preferences. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 2, 2020)

A COVID CASE SPIKE? BLAME TURKEY

Russian state health regulators are now blaming travel from Turkey for high levels of coronavirus cases entering the country from abroad. According to statements from ROSPOTREBNADZOR, 90 percent of the country's 10,000 imported positive tests have arrived via Turkey. Not only has Turkey historically been a popular tourist destination for Russians, but a travel resurgence has taken place since flights between the countries resumed in August after a four-month closure due to the pandemic. Further complicating matters is Turkey's status as a transit hub for Russian passengers to reach more distant locations that do not currently offer flights to Russia. Moscow and Ankara are now said to be in talks to cut down on the number of flights between the two countries. (The Moscow Times, November 3, 2020)

A RUSSIAN CONNECTION TO THE VIENNA TERRORIST ATTACK

Several Russians from the North Caucasus have been detained for suspected involvement in this month's terrorist attack in Vienna, Austria. The sole gunman in that attack killed four and wounded 22 others in a shooting spree reportedly inspired by the ideology of the Islamic State terrorist group. A total of 14 suspects have been arrested to date in connection with the incident, and Austrian authorities are looking for additional accomplices. Other suspects are said to be from the Balkans and destinations in the "Islamic world." (The Moscow Times, November 3, 2020)

MASS VACCINATIONS WON'T BE READY THIS YEAR

Months after leaders touted the safety and expediency of Sputnik V, the world's first coronavirus vaccine, manufacturers are pushing back on expectations that mass inoculations will be possible in Russia by the end of the year. Serious problems have arisen in vaccine stabilization, and quality standardization among large scale doses has not yet been achieved. Officials at the Russian Ministry of Health have been claiming for weeks that mass production of Sputnik V was imminent. However, other scientists say dosage totals will only be in the hundreds of thousands by the end of the year. Regardless, Moscow city authorities are still pushing ahead with the organization of vaccination sites across the city. (The Bell, November 3, 2020)

NOBODY WANTS TO BE MAYOR OF MAGADAN

Magadan, a remote Russian city near the Kamchatka Peninsula, has been searching for a new mayor since October of this year, but to no avail. The city has been plagued with budget and demographic problems, but there's another reason why no one seemingly wants the job. Magadan is one of many Russian cities that has abolished mayoral elections, instead adopting a system in which political elites select local officials. It would take a local to effectively lead Magadan, observers say, but locals have been discouraged from applying to the position believing that an elite candidate from far away would be seen as more palatable. The press has since spread word of the situation, prompting several applicants. However, a number of them do not appear to live in Magadan. The next application deadline for the position is December 11th. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 4, 2020)