



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2428

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Global Health; Russia

### RUSSIA LAUNCHES ONLINE CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE CORONAVIRUS CURE

The Kremlin has kicked off an online campaign to spread awareness about its official Sputnik V vaccine. The campaign will include a website, social media accounts, and an official hashtag to share vaccine news, including the personal experiences of those who have been vaccinated. The effort is intended to counteract negative perceptions of the country's chosen remedy for the coronavirus, given that the vaccine has been met with widespread skepticism both abroad and within Russia itself. Approximately 40,000 Russians have received the vaccine to date. Russia has agreed to sell the vaccine to several countries, and now expects to conduct vaccine trials in the UAE, India, Belarus, and Venezuela. (*Politico*, November 9, 2020)

### SOBYANIN EYES A SHUTDOWN

Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyenin has elected to close restaurants, clubs, and bars in the city until January 15, 2021 in response to rapidly rising coronavirus cases in the Russian capital. He also placed additional restrictions on universities, theaters, and sports venues as mitigating measures. The moves are delicately calibrated to fall short of a full lockdown, which the Kremlin previously stressed is not currently under consideration. Government officials have claimed that Russia is far more prepared to fight the pandemic now than it was back in March, citing several vaccines that have either been approved already or are in late-stage development. As of November 10th, the number of coronavirus cases was approaching two million. (Reuters, November 10, 2020)

### ISLAMIC BODY BANS INTERMARRIAGE FOR RUSSIA'S MUSLIMS

Scholars in Russia's official Islamic religious governing body, the Muslim Spiritual Administration (*Dukhovnoye Upravlenie Musulmaney*) are calling on the country's Muslim men to refrain from marrying outside the faith. The *fatwa* (religious edict) has already polarized opinion within Russia's Islamic community, with religious leaders in Tatarstan - where a more moderate, state compliant version of the faith predominates - denouncing it as incompatible with existing Islamic jurisprudence. On the other hand, the Grand Mufti of Chechnya has expressed his vocal support for such a ban. Officially, the *fatwa's* proponents see it as a way to decrease divorce among interfaith couples. (*Meduza*, November 11, 2020; *Window on Eurasia*, November 12, 2020)

### MORE HACKS ON COVID-19 VACCINE RESEARCHERS

A recent statement from Microsoft's VP of Customer Safety and Trust details attempts by Russian and North Korean hackers to disrupt and steal the work of multiple companies participating in the global fight against COVID-19, including some currently conducting vaccine trials. Targets in the U.S., Canada, India, France, and South Korea have been identified as having been targeted. The techniques used by the hackers range from phishing and spear-phishing, where hackers impersonate figures such as job recruiters and WHO staff to gain credentials, to "brute force" login attempts. According to Microsoft, most of the attacks were blocked by the cybersecurity infrastructure of the respective companies, while the targeted entities have been identified and authorities have been notified. (Microsoft, November 13, 2020)

### LITVINENKO WIDOW SUES THE KREMLIN

Marina Litvinenko is suing the Kremlin for 3.5 million Euros in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for the assassination of her husband. Her spouse, Alexander Litvinenko, was a former KGB officer who fled to London after speaking out against the Russian government. He was assassinated with polonium in 2006, and the order to kill him was traced to Russian President Vladimir Putin by a public inquiry later that year.

While the ECHR has never awarded punitive or exemplary damages, experts are urging the court to do so in this case. Analysts hope that if the ECHR approves the lawsuit, Russia may be compelled to bring its series of assassinations abroad to an end. The 2018 Novichok nerve agent attack on ex-spy Sergei Skripal and the more recent attempted poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny appear to have been motivating factors in Mrs. Litvinenko's decision to file the lawsuit. (*Guardian*, November 15, 2020)

## **NO OFFICIAL WRONGDOING IN JOURNALIST SUICIDE**

Russian state investigators have determined that authorities are not at fault in the suicide of journalist Irina Slavina. Slavina set herself on fire outside the police headquarters in Nizhny Novgorod in October after police raided her home to search for opposition materials. She had reportedly had several previous run-ins with Russian authorities regarding her alleged connections to opposition figures. Before taking her own life, Slavina had posted on her Facebook page that the Russian Federation should be blamed for her death. Investigators, however, reported that a "lack of close friends, mood swings, selfishness, and ironic" social media posts may have led to her suicide. After an initial inquiry, no criminal case was opened in her death. (*The Moscow Times*, November 16, 2020)