



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2431

December 10, 2020 **Matt Maldonado, Amanda Hardy, Ilan I. Berman**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Corruption; Europe; Japan; Russia; Southeast Asia

RUSSIA CONTINUES RAIDS ON "EXTREMISTS"

Russian authorities have conducted a series of raids across the country in search of members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a religious group that has been banned as extremist since 2017. One such raid in Moscow was taped and footage was released to the public. Authorities stated that the apartment raided in the video was home to a Jehovah's Witness group which held "secret meetings," studied religious literature, and recruited new members. The number of detainees was not specified. However, if convicted, those arrested could face up to 10 years in prison. Leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses have estimated that about 400 of its members have been charged or convicted in Russia since 2017. (*The Moscow Times*, November 24, 2020)

FACEBOOK FINED IN RUSSIA

Social media giant Facebook has paid the Russian government approximately \$50,000 in penalties stemming from its refusal to store user data locally in Russia. In 2016, Russia enacted laws requiring foreign technology companies to store data on Russian users on Russian servers - something with which Facebook has failed to comply, prompting legal action from the Kremlin. Those formal proceedings have now been dropped.

Facebook, however, is not alone. Other social media firms, such as Twitter, have also refused to comply with the regulation. However, tech giants Apple and Google have both adjusted their operations to remain in compliance with the Kremlin's edict. The Russian regulations are seen as part of a larger effort by the Kremlin to gain greater control over Russia's internet. The Kremlin has also recently enacted laws requiring Russian tech companies to share encryption data with the country's main intelligence service, the FSB - stirring fears about the future of privacy in Russia. (*The Moscow Times*, November 26, 2020)

NAVALNY WANTS SANCTIONS ON OLIGARCHS

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has called on the European Union to impose sanctions on several Russian oligarchs, including Roman Abramovich, the owner of the Chelsea football club, and former Arsenal shareholder Alisher Usmanov. Navalny has argued that oligarchs with connections to the EU should be targeted as punitive measures against the Russian government. The Kremlin, he has claimed, would not take Western sanctions seriously so long as Russian oligarchs are able to keep their yachts in "Barcelona or Monaco." Navalny has also requested that the EU refuse to recognize the upcoming parliamentary election in Russia should opposition parties be barred from participating. (*Guardian*, November 27, 2020)

MOLDOVA'S NEW PRESIDENT WANTS RUSSIAN TROOPS GONE

After defeating a pro-Russian incumbent and securing victory in Moldova's November presidential election, the country's president-elect, Maia Sandu, is calling for the removal of Russian troops from Moldovan territory and their replacement with civilian peacekeeping monitors affiliated with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Sandu is referring to the presence of the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF) in Transnistria, an unrecognized breakaway region nestled between Moldova and Ukraine. Russia maintains a 1,500-troop presence there, as well as stockpiles of munitions and tanks. Moscow, however, has taken a dim view of the suggestion; the Kremlin has pledged to continue its presence, and argued that its troops play a stabilizing role in the region. (*BBC News*, November 30, 2020)

FORTIFYING THE KURILS

The Russian military is continuing to fortify the disputed Kuril Islands in the Pacific by installing short- and long-range missile defense systems there. The move follows the Russian government's recent deployment of anti-ship missiles and fighter aircraft to the islands, which Russia has claimed since World War II. It marks an escalation of the long-simmering territorial dispute between Moscow and Japan, which has persisted despite repeated attempts at mediation. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 2, 2020)