



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Resource Security; Europe; Russia; Ukraine

RUSSIAN ALLIES VOTE AGAINST UN RESOLUTION ON CRIMEA

A UN resolution condemning Russia's occupation of the Crimean Peninsula has successfully passed a General Assembly vote, but the number of abstentions (62) nearly matched the votes in favor (63). Russia spearheaded the 17 outright votes in opposition to the measure, joined by allies such as China, Iran, and Belarus. Notable among the "nays" was Serbia, who's support of Russia on the issue is a break from the position of the European Union, a body that Belgrade is actively working to join. Unlike Serbia, EU candidate states Turkey, Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia all voted to condemn the occupation. (*Balkan Insight*, December 8, 2020)

AFD VISITS LAVROV IN MOSCOW

While members of Germany's ruling coalition are pushing for sanctions on Russia over the poisoning of activist Alexei Navalny, far-right members of the country's political opposition met with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow. The delegation was composed of members of Alternative for Germany (AfD), the largest party in the opposition wing of the Bundestag. During the delegation's visit, Lavrov expressed his concern over the current state of relations between Berlin and Moscow in the wake of Navalny's poisoning and the subsequent EU sanctioning of Russia. Included in the delegation were German politicians who support the completion of Nord Stream 2, the energy pipeline that - if completed - will more closely connect Russia with Germany's Baltic coast. (*Deutsche Welle*, December 8, 2020)

DENMARK MOVES AHEAD WITH TRIAL OF ACCUSED SPY

Danish authorities are moving forward with judicial proceedings against a Russian national living in the country accused of divulging state secrets to Russian intelligence. The unnamed suspect has been held in pre-trial detention since being back arrested in July. According to Danish counterintelligence officials, the suspect exchanged secrets related to energy technology with members of Russia's intelligence services in return for cash payments. Proceedings in the trial will take place behind closed doors due to the sensitive nature of the accusations. If convicted, the suspected spy faces a maximum of six years in prison and possible deportation. The Russian Embassy in Copenhagen has maintained that the arrest was a mistake. (Associated Press, December 9, 2020)

BACK TO MILITARY COOPERATION WITH THE WEST?

For the first time in nearly ten years, the Russian Navy will participate in joint exercises with member states of the NATO alliance. The "Aman-2021" naval drills are scheduled to take place off the coast of Pakistan in February 2021, and will include personnel from NATO members Turkey, Great Britain, and the United States, as well as Asian nations such as Japan, Indonesia, China, and others. Not since 2011's "Bold Monarch" exercise off the coast of Spain has the Russian Navy trained with NATO forces. The development comes after - and in spite of - NATO leadership and the Russian General Staff both recently identified the other as a threat to national security. (*The Moscow Times*, December 10, 2020)

NORD STREAM 2, BACK ON TRACK?

Nearly a year after the project was paused as a result of U.S. sanctions, work on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is set to resume before the end of 2020. The energy pipeline, which will more closely connect the Russian and German Baltic coasts, is in its final stages of construction, with less than ten percent of the route still to be completed. Russian gas giant GAZPROM is the pipeline's main investor, but European energy companies such as Shell, Engie, and others also have stakes in the project. American concerns over the effect of Nord Stream 2 on Europe's already deep energy dependence on Russia have been echoed in various Eastern European capitals. (*The Moscow Times*, December 11, 2020)

FEDERAL AGENCIES HACKED BY RUSSIAN CYBER ACTORS

A total of five federal agencies have been determined to have had their networks breached by Russian hackers as part of a months-long intelligence operation. Thus far, the Departments of State, Commerce, Treasury, and Homeland Security have all reported breaches, as has the National Institute of Health. The hackers gained access to the agencies' computer networks by attaching themselves to software updates for SolarWinds, a management software utilized by some of the nation's most sensitive private and public clients. Investigations into the matter are still ongoing, but experts believe Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, the SVR, is behind the string of breaches. The full extent of the damage done by the breaches has yet to be determined, but digital forensics show the operation stretches as far back as March of this year. (*Washington Post*, December 14, 2020)