



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2440

January 27, 2021 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman**

Related Categories: Arms Control and Proliferation; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Global Health; Europe; Russia

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE FOR NORD STREAM 2

Russian state natural gas giant GAZPROM notified its investors in mid-January that new U.S. sanctions on the still-unfinished Nord Stream 2 pipeline have the potential to make completion of the energy route unfeasible. To date, 93 miles of undersea pipe, comprising six percent of the project's total length, remain to be built. But U.S. sanctions last Fall on Russian ships racing to continue the project, an effort further complicated by a 2019 decision by Swiss investors to withdraw resources under threat of U.S. sanctions. American opposition to the project has been based on the belief that Nord Stream 2, if completed, would imperil Europe's energy independence from Russia. (*Al-Jazeera*, January 19, 2021)

A NEW OLYMPIC ANTHEM FOR RUSSIAN ATHLETES

Athletes and officials in Russia are publicly contemplating the use of a famous World War II patriotic hymn in place of their national anthem for international athletic competitions over the next two years. The song is *Katyusha*, a lyrical ballad closely associated with the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. Late last year, the Court of Arbitration for Sport handed Russia a two-year ban from international sporting competitions such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup due to its history of official doping. Athletes from Russia who are tested and known to be drug free will still be allowed to compete, but may not wear or display Russian flags or symbols. In the view of athletes such as fencer Sofya Velikaya, the song, "...is known not only to Russians, but also to the international community," and should be considered as a substitute - a view that Russian officials support. There has as yet been no word on approval from the International Olympic Committee or World Anti-Doping Agency, however. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 19, 2021)

PUTIN DOCUMENTARY GOES VIRAL

Mere hours after opposition activist Alexei Navalny was arrested upon his arrival at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport, a documentary video was posted to his YouTube channel detailing an extensive investigation into a lush seaside property purportedly owned by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Titled "Putin's Palace: The History of the World's Largest Bribe," the documentary alleges that President Putin financed the massive project using a series of offshore entities and wealth transfers to a close circle of confidants in order to keep it off the books for tax purposes. The documentary garnered 22 million views in its first 24 hours online, and 75 million in its first four days. The Kremlin has dismissed the documentary's allegations as false. (*The Moscow Times*, January 20, 2021)

A LIFELINE FOR NEW START

After pledging to resuscitate the New START nuclear arms agreement with Russia while still on the campaign trail, President Joe Biden is following up on his commitment. The Biden administration has signalled its desire to extend the agreement for five years ahead of its scheduled expiration on February 5th. Signed by Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev back in 2010, New START caps Russian and American stockpiles of deployed nuclear weapons to 1,550 each and mandates steps such as reciprocal inspections. During its time in office, the Trump administration unsuccessfully tried to renegotiate the deal to include additional weapon types such as tactical nuclear weapons - as well as to broaden the agreement to include China as well. New START is the last remaining arms control agreement in force between the United States and Russia. (*Politico*, January 21, 2021)

HUNGARY DEFIES EU, APPROVES SPUTNIK-V FOR USE

Unsatisfied with the speed of vaccination efforts taking place in the European Union, Hungary is now the first country to break with Brussels and unilaterally approve the Russian Sputnik-V vaccine for temporary use within its borders. Only 140,000 Hungarians have been vaccinated thus far with Western vaccine variants - a pace that has Prime Minister Viktor Orban looking for alternatives. Hungary's temporary approval of Sputnik-V circumvents existing EU regulations on vaccine use, but will last only six months and will need to be renewed if authorities in Budapest seek to continue using the vaccine. Russian allies Belarus and Serbia had previously been the only countries in Europe to administer Sputnik-V. (*Guardian*, January 21, 2021)

THOUSANDS ARRESTED IN PRO-NAVALNY PROTESTS

Widespread demonstrations in support of imprisoned political dissident Alexei Navalny have broken out in cities across Russia. 40,000 protesters gathered in central Moscow alone, the largest demonstration held in the city since 2019 rallies against candidate disqualifications ahead of local elections. Navalny ally Lyubov Sobol was arrested by police mid-interview on Pushkin Square, only blocks from the Kremlin. Yulia Navalny, the dissident's wife, was also detained at the protest. Police beatings of protesters have been reported in cities across the country, including Saint Petersburg and Vladivostok. Demonstrators in Yakutsk braved temperatures near -60F to show their support for Navalny. (BBC, January 23, 2021) **Copyrig**