



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Missile Defense; Global Health; Caucasus; India; Russia; Ukraine

COURT FINDS RUSSIA COMMITTED WAR CRIMES IN GEORGIA

More than twelve years after the war was fought, the European Court of Human Rights has determined that Russia committed war crimes during its 2008 offensive against neighboring Georgia. The court found Russian authorities failed to investigate allegations of mistreatment and the execution of Georgian prisoners of war by South Ossetian forces, and did not permit the return of nearly 20,000 Georgians displaced from their homes in South Ossetia after the ceasefire. During the proceedings, witnesses provided evidence of incidents of ethnic cleansing, ranging from the destruction of Georgian villages within South Ossetia to the bombing of civilian targets in the city of Gori. In the wake of the verdict, both sides were instructed to draft plans for reparations. (*Guardian*, January 21, 2021)

FOREIGN MINISTRY FUMES OVER STATE DEPARTMENT ALERT

Russian authorities were outraged in late January after the U.S. State Department specified the time and location of pro-Navalny demonstrations in Moscow and other cities as part of their overseas advisory notification service. The notification read, "...on Saturday, January 23, demonstrations are being planned throughout Russia in support of an opposition activist. These demonstrations are likely to be unauthorized... U.S. citizens should avoid these demonstrations and any demonstration-related activities." The message would go on to specify that demonstrators planned to meet at Pushkin Square at 2PM and march to the nearby Kremlin. According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, the message was meant as a provocation and evidence of Washington's interference in Russian domestic affairs. (*Washington Examiner*, January 22, 2021)

SPUTNIK-V VACCINE: A NEW TOOL AGAINST UKRAINE

Russian health authorities are capitalizing on the availability of initial doses of the Sputnik-V coronavirus vaccines to supply patients on the Crimean Peninsula and in parts of neighboring Ukraine's restive Donbas region. The development comes as leaders in Kyiv are struggling to secure vaccines for their citizens from a variety of international suppliers. To date, none of Ukraine's 42 million citizens has been vaccinated, making it one of the largest European states still to begin the process. By contrast, 145,000 doses of Sputnik-V are expected to arrive in the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk this month, courtesy of Moscow. No international variants of the coronavirus vaccine have received approval from Ukrainian health regulators, and only the makers of Sputnik-V have applied for consideration. (*Bloomberg*, January 25, 2021)

RFE/RL FINED BY RUSSIAN COURT

In early January, Russian media watchdog ROSKOMNADZOR took *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* to court over its failure to comply with the country's recently enhanced Foreign Agent Law. RFE/RL, a nonprofit organization receiving U.S. funding, was subsequently fined 1.1 million rubles (\$14,500) by the Tverskoi District Court in Moscow for failing to register and properly label itself as a "foreign agent." Additional "administrative protocols" from ROSKOMNADZOR are expected to be forthcoming for other assorted irregularities. The growing number of fines could eventually threaten the organization's continued work in Russia, observers say. The restrictions placed on RFE/RL are viewed as part of a broader effort by the Kremlin to undermine independent media reporting in the country. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 27, 2021)

NEW NAVALNY RAIDS IN MOSCOW

Moscow police conducted a series of raids in recent days on properties and offices with known ties to imprisoned opposition politician Alexei Navalny. Navalny's brother, Oleg, was taken into custody, while his wife Yulia had her rented apartment searched. Police also raided the offices and studios of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and the "Navalny Live" YouTube channel. No official comment was given by authorities as to why the properties were searched, but experts speculated that the move was tied to a viral documentary detailing President Putin's alleged ownership of a luxurious villa on the Black Sea. Navalny's allies were planning another round of nationwide protests after demonstrations across Russia resulted in the arrest of 4,000 people on January 23rd. (*Chicago Sun Times*, January 27, 2021)

THE RISKS OF THE INDIA-RUSSIA MISSILE DEAL

India has given the green light to begin sending its soldiers to Russia to train on the S-400 anti-missile system it agreed to purchase from Moscow back in 2018. For India, acquisition of the S-400 is intended to give Delhi a leg up on air defense coverage relating to its long-standing border conflict with China, which has flared since last Spring. The move, however, could adversely affect India's ties to the U.S., given India's involvement in the "Quad" alliance and because Indo-Russian cooperation raises the specter that sensitive data collection could be compromised. (*Nikkei*, January 27, 2021)