



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Corruption; Global Health; Caucasus; Russia; Turkey

CORRUPTION INVESTIGATION FOCUSES ON KADYROV RELATIVES

Only days after opposition activist Alexei Navalny's team went viral with their reporting on "Putin's Palace," Russian investigators at *IStories* are blowing the whistle on corruption perpetrated by members of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov's family. According to their findings, multiple members of Kadyrov's extended family own high value apartments in high-rises on Moscow's Leningradsky Prospekt. The Chechen President's sisters, Zargon and Zulay Kadyrova, as well as their families, are believed to own multiple apartments in the area, with one valued as high as \$791,000. The sisters' husbands are the Transport and Communications Minister and First Deputy Chairman of the Parliament of Chechnya, respectively. Between 2011 and 2019, the properties appeared sparingly on the couples' tax declarations, if at all. The new revelations have the potential to be deeply problematic for the Kadyrov clan, because anti-corruption legislation passed in 2008 stipulates that public officials who fail to report property ownership and holdings should be fired. (*Meduza*, January 28, 2021)

SECOND ROUND OF PROTESTS ROCKS RUSSIA, THOUSANDS ARRESTED

Pro-Navalny demonstrations took place in cities across Russia in late January for a second week in a row. This time, protestors were met with greater shows of force than those marshalled by authorities in response to the initial January 23rd protests. A large section of central Moscow was shut down by authorities, who closed streets and shuttered multiple metro stations. Over 5,000 people were arrested nationwide, despite smaller crowds during the second round of rallies. Extreme temperatures in the Russian Far East did not stop protestors from coming out in cities such as Yakutsk and Vladivostok, where over 100 were detained. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and British Foreign Minister Dominic Raab both publicly condemned the police crackdown. (Reuters, January 31, 2021)

WHELAN'S FAMILY HOPES BIDEN CAN FREE ACCUSED SPY

The family of imprisoned U.S. citizen Paul Whelan are holding out hope that the Biden administration will be successful in bringing the former Marine home from Russia. Whelan was arrested and charged with espionage back in December 2018. After being convicted in a closed-door court and sentenced to 16 years of detention, he was transferred to a labor camp in Russia's Mordovia Republic, located in the Volga region. Logistical difficulties and staff cuts at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow have prevented U.S. Ambassador John J. Sullivan from visiting Whelan since last September. Congresswoman Haley Stevens (D-MI-11) is aware of Whelan's situation, and is pressing the new administration to take further action on the matter. "I believe that this kangaroo court and the prison sentence that he's been given is a complete joke that they don't have the evidence," Stevens has said. (*Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 2021)

SPUTNIK-V TRIALS SHOW 92% EFFECTIVENESS

New trial data for Russia's Sputnik-V coronavirus vaccine has been published in medical journal *The Lancet* this week - and the news appears to be good. The large scale trial found that the Russian vaccine has a 92% effectiveness rate against the coronavirus, placing it in the same category of treatments as western variants made by Pfizer, Moderna, and other companies. Russia's vaccine, however, can be stored in temperatures ranging from 36-46 degrees Fahrenheit, making it easier to transport than other vaccines currently on the market. Sputnik-V's secondary booster shot also works differently than other variants. It uses a varied form of the virus, resulting in immunity that its developers believe is longer lasting. The news is a welcome change in coverage for Sputnik-V; the vaccine was initially criticized by experts for the speed of its development and the Russian government's rushed approval process. (*BBC*, February 2, 2021)

NAVALNY RECEIVES PRISON SENTENCE

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been sentenced to more than two-and-a-half years in prison after violating the terms of a suspended sentence for embezzlement charges that had previously been levied against him. At a hearing in Moscow, the presiding judge, Natalia Repnikova, accepted a request for Navalny's 3.5 year suspended sentence to be converted into a prison term, and for the 10 months he has served under house arrest to be counted against that time. Toward the end of the hearing, Navalny delivered a 16-minute statement against Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying that his arrest was illegal and a product of Putin's "fear and hatred." More than 320 people were reportedly detained after gathering outside of the Moscow courtroom on Tuesday. Navalny's team thanked their supporters, urged them to go home, and stated that they would certainly take to the streets again. (Associated Press, February 2, 2021)

JOINT RUSSIA-TURKEY MILITARY CENTER OPENS IN AZERBAIJAN

On the heels of the November 10th ceasefire that ended last year's six-week war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia and Turkey negotiated the establishment of a joint military monitoring center in the area. That facility has now opened, and according to observers it represents an accurate reflection of the current regional *status quo*. The center is the first Russian military presence on Azerbaijani-controlled territory in years, and is the product of new bilateral cooperation between two historical opponents: Russia and Turkey. (*EurasiaNet*, February 2, 2021)