



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2443

February 10, 2021 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Arianna G. Guerrero**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Russia; Ukraine

### EDITOR/JOURNALIST DETAINED FOR "CALL TO PROTEST"

The Tverskoi district court has sentenced Sergei Smirnov, a journalist and editor-in-chief of the media outlet *Mediazona*, to 25 days in jail. According to authorities, Smirnov retweeted a post that allegedly contained an illegal call to protest with details about the date and time of an anti-government demonstration. The original post had joked about Smirnov's resemblance to Dmitry Spirin, a pro-Navalny member of the Russian rock band Tarakany!. Around thirty Russian media outlets have voiced their support for Smirnov and called for his release, stating that the sentence was politically motivated. His arrest comes as part of the Kremlin's continuing crackdown on Russian journalists, media outlets, and protests. According to the press release from the International Federation of Journalists, Smirnov told the judge, "A retweet does not equal endorsement," and further stated that he was just sharing a joke, not inciting people to protest. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 3, 2021)

### NAVALNY DOCTOR DIES SUDDENLY

Sergei Maximishin, the chief physician at the Omsk hospital where opposition activist Aleksei Navalny was treated after his poisoning this summer, has died "suddenly" at the age of 55. Maximishin had been in charge of treating Navalny during his medically induced coma, which was deemed necessary after the activist became ill from what was later determined to be intentional poisoning while on an airplane flight. The statement provided by the hospital did not mention a cause of death for Maximishin, but according to a member of the regional health ministry, preliminary data suggests that he died from a heart attack.

The physician's death comes just days after Navalny himself was sentenced to more than two years in prison by a Russian court for violating a mandated court appearance because he was recuperating from the poisoning in Europe. Leonid Volkov, Navalny's chief of staff, suggested that the doctor's death raises suspicions, stating, "He knew more than anyone else about Alexei's condition so I can't dismiss the possibility of foul play." Volkov, however, went on to state that, given the poor condition of Russia's healthcare system, it would be unlikely for any further investigation to take place. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 5, 2021)

### DIPLOMATS BOOTED OVER PROTEST PARTICIPATION

The Russian Foreign Ministry is expelling a number of German, Swedish and Polish diplomats from the country because of their alleged participation in recent demonstrations over the arrest of Alexei Navalny. The move was met with immediate condemnations from each country's diplomatic mission. Swedish officials dispute the Russian claims that their diplomat participated in the rallies, while the Polish Foreign Ministry contends its diplomat was "performing official tasks" while at the demonstrations. The Swedes and Poles declared *personae non grata*, meanwhile, work in their countries' consulates in Saint Petersburg, another major hub of the demonstrations that took place last month. (*NPR*, February 5, 2021)

### ZELENSKY BANS PRO-KREMLIN MEDIA

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has banned a trio of Ukraine news channels that his administration claims amplify pro-Russian propaganda and sentiments in the country. The three channels in question – *ZIK*, *NewsOne*, and *112* – are officially owned by Taras Kozak, a Ukrainian parliamentarian and member of the pro-Russian Opposition Platform for Life party. However, these outlets are suspected of actually being run by Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian oligarch with close ties to the Kremlin. (*Al Jazeera*, February 5, 2021)

### HARSH PRISON CONDITIONS FOR NAVALNY PROTESTORS

Moscow's prisons are overflowing after two straight weekends of demonstrations led to 3,000 arrests. In order to alleviate overcrowding, over 800 detained protestors were transported to a facility in Sakharovo, located fifty miles southwest of the capital. The detention center's distance from the city has made it difficult for families of the imprisoned to deliver goods such as toiletries and changes of clothing, desperately needed by those who were sentenced to as much as a month of jail time for protesting. Relatives and friends wait in line for hours outside the prison walls to drop off their parcels. Photos captured on smartphones smuggled into the prison are circulating on social media and show cells packed with as many as 28 detainees. (*The Moscow Times*, February 5, 2021)