



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Resource Security; SPACE; Global Health; Russia; Ukraine

SPUTNIK-V SURGES IN CENTRAL ASIA

In the wake of being declared safe by *The Lancet* medical journal, Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine is making significant inroads in some Central Asian countries, while meeting competition in others. Kazakhstan now ranks as Central Asia's largest importer of the Russian vaccine, with Nur-Sultan planning to inoculate six million of the country's total population of nearly 19 million by the end of the year. In addition to imports, state authorities also plan to begin producing the vaccine locally in the central city of Karaganda. Neighboring Turkmenistan, meanwhile, has also approved Sputnik-V and received its first shipment of doses in January. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are exploring the Russian treatment as well, but are simultaneously looking for other options. Uzbekistan, for its part, is conducting Phase III trials of a Chinese vaccine developed by Anhui Zhifei Longcom Biopharmaceutical after orders of Sputnik-V went unfilled. Kyrgyzstan is trending in a different direction, and is requesting doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine while Sputnik-V remains unapproved by national authorities. (*Nikkei*, February 7, 2021)

CRIMEA RUNNING LOW ON WATER

Politicians in Moscow are scrambling to solve Crimea's water crisis before its severity becomes clear to the wider world. Prior to Russia's occupation of the peninsula in 2014, 85% of the territory's water supply came from the Ukrainian mainland. Now, however, initiatives such as agriculture reform, promised after Crimea's annexation, may have to be shelved and replaced with water rationing and other measures. Local leaders were holding out for melting snow yields to bridge the gap this year, but drought conditions and falling water tables prevented any significant gains.

Local officials, meanwhile, are attributing the shortfall to politics - and Russian domination. When asked what it would take for Kyiv to resume water shipments to the peninsula, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* that "Water will appear after the end of the occupation." (*Window on Eurasia*, February 7, 2021; UNIAN, February 7, 2021)

KYIV REQUESTS TWITTER REMOVE VERIFIED CHECK IN CRIMEA

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry, and its Ambassador to the United States, are urging Twitter to strip the Russian Foreign Ministry's Simferopol office of its "verified" status on the social media platform. Simferopol is the capital of the Russian-annexed Republic of Crimea. In the view of Ambassador Volodymyr Yelchenko and the Ukrainian diplomatic mission in Washington, the account's "blue check" verified status offers international legitimacy to Russia's 2014 annexation of the peninsula. Twitter uses blue checks to denote accounts it judges to be "authentic." The request is part of an ongoing effort by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry to compete with online Russian narratives about the annexation and other aggressions against Ukraine. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 9, 2021)

RUSSIA PLACES GROWING EMPHASIS ON HYPERSONIC SYSTEMS

At an annual operational and mobilization meeting held on February 9th, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that non-nuclear deterrence forces are being strengthened and that hypersonic weapons will "comprise their backbone." A week prior to the gathering, Shoigu met with Russian military commanders to go over the acquisition of increased numbers of high-precision long-range weapons and hypersonic systems. According to Shoigu, the procurement of such weapons is of increasing importance to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The defense minister also stressed the importance of more creative implementations of robotic systems and artificial intelligence technologies in future armaments. These developments come ahead of the upcoming *Zapad 2021* joint strategic drills, which will be held in various geographical regions across Russia later this year. (TASS, February 9, 2021)

RUSSIA TURNS ITS ATTENTION TO NAVALNY ALLY...

The Basmanny District court in Moscow has issued an international arrest warrant for a prominent ally of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Leonid Volkov, who has been residing in Lithuania since 2019, has been accused of prompting people under 18 to join illegal demonstrations, a charge which could carry a sentence of around three years in prison. The Lithuanian government has rejected the court order, however, and Volkov has dismissed the charges. Lithuanian Interior Minister Agne Bilotaite blasted the Russian effort, stating that "using international tools for politically motivated prosecution is a wrong practice." A week earlier, Volkov had prompted the protesters to postpone pro-Navalny demonstrations until the spring in order to minimize the massive amount of arrests and charges being brought by authorities against opposition forces. (Associated Press, February 10, 2021)

...AS OPPOSITION LEADER'S WIFE FLEES TO GERMANY

Russian and German media are reporting that Yulia Navalnaya, the wife of imprisoned politician Alexei Navalny, has fled Moscow for Frankfurt. Navalnaya returned to Russia with her husband on January 17th and was present at his arrest by border guards at Sheremetyevo airport. In the weeks since, Navalnaya was detained twice at street protests in support of the imprisoned Navalny, now serving a 32-month prison sentence at a Russian penal colony.

Lawmakers are contemplating legislation banning the families of "foreign agents" from running for or holding office, effectively barring Navalnaya from running for political office in her husband's absence. The move would represent a preemptive governmental effort to avoid the political problems that have plagued Belarus in recent months; over the summer, Svetlana Tikhonovskaya challenged longtime incumbent Aleksandr Lukashenko for the Belarusian presidency after her husband was barred from running. (*The Moscow Times*, February 10, 2021)