



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2452

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**Related Categories:** Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Corruption; Global Health; Europe; Russia

## PAPERING OVER SIBERIA'S PROBLEMS

In a bid to stave off harsh public criticism of environmental policy before nationwide parliamentary elections this fall, the Siberian branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences classified a recent report on widespread pollution in the far-flung region. The move comes as support for the ruling "United Russia" party has fallen below 30% and foreign pressure over the imprisonment of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny is mounting. The report alleges that Siberia is home to over three-fourths of Russia's most polluted cities, and that conditions there have been linked to cancers and birth defects. According to Kremlin Spokesman Dmitri Peskov, the Siberian scientists independently decided to classify the report. (*The Moscow Times*, March 29, 2021)

## HACKERS TARGETED EMAIL ACCOUNT OF DHS HEAD

Based on information obtained by the Associated Press, the cyber actors who breached U.S. government systems during last year's SolarWinds hack gained access to the email accounts of Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf and senior members of his staff. The Biden administration has been quiet about the scope of the attack, but the AP interviewed over a dozen current and former government employees to ascertain the information. Other affected government agencies include the Department of Energy and the Federal Aviation Commission. Despite prohibitions on sending classified materials over email, experts believe valuable intelligence could still have been gleaned from the breach, such as official meeting schedules. While Washington has claimed Russia was behind the attack, Moscow has continued to deny any involvement. (*Guardian*, March 29, 2021)

## FATHER OF TOP NAVALNY ALLY ARRESTED

Ivan Zhdanov, a close ally of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, has blamed the Kremlin for his father's recent arrest, stating that the measure was taken in retaliation for his own political activity. Zhdanov, who works as the head of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said authorities had detained his retired father in Rostov-on-Don for recommending social housing to a family who had already received a housing subsidy in the past. According to Zhdanov, the police hadn't found anything suspicious when they had probed the canceled social housing agreement back in 2020. "I have no doubts that this criminal case is linked to me and to what I do," stated Zhdanov, who has been actively involved in mobilizing support for the upcoming spring anti-Kremlin protest. Yury Zhdanov, 66, now faces up to four years in prison for alleged abuse of office. The younger Zhdanov expressed his concern over his father's health problems and warned that he might not be able to survive the pre-trial detention. (Reuters, March 29, 2021)

## SLOVAKIA'S PRIME MINISTER RESIGNS OVER RUSSIAN VACCINE SCANDAL

Slovakia's Prime Minister, Igor Matovic, has formally resigned from his position in response to a political crisis brought about by a secret deal to purchase Sputnik V vaccines. The decision makes Slovakia the first European government to collapse due to its handling of the coronavirus pandemic. President Zuzana Caputova has asked Finance Minister Eduard Heger to swap roles with Matovic. However, six ministers have already left the Cabinet and another party announced it will no longer join the coalition unless Matovic leaves government entirely.

The political scandal began after Matovic agreed to order two million Sputnik V doses without receiving the approval of his coalition partners, many of whom claimed the vaccine was a "hybrid war tool." Matovic had defended his actions, saying that buying Russia's "reliable vaccine" was the only solution to ameliorate slow vaccine rollout in the country. To date, Slovakia has received 200,000 Russian jabs, which are still awaiting approval by European medical authorities. (*Al Jazeera*, March 30, 2021)

## **RUSSIAN PHYSICIANS SIGN PETITION TO EXAMINE NAVALNY**

Russian physicians have demanded that officials allow Alexei Navalny to receive immediate medical care as worries over his health increase. According to Oleg Pshenichny, one of the organizers of the petition, around 500 doctors and medical practitioners signed the online form that was published on March 28th. The petition requests that Navalny have the opportunity to be examined by an independent medical expert whom he trusts. The petition also suggests that it would be a good idea to invite German specialists from the Charite Clinic in Berlin where Navalny was treated after he was poisoned last year, given suspicions that his current condition may be a complication of the attack he underwent back then. The petition comes a day after Vladimir Grigoryan, the Public Monitoring Commission's deputy chairman, told *Dozhd TV* that Navalny was faking his illness. Navalny's lawyers have yet to receive the results of the MRI examination Navalny had in a hospital outside of prison a week earlier. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 30, 2021)