



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No.2453

April 7, 2021 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Arianna G. Guerrero**

Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Science and Technology; Corruption; Arctic; Russia

ALL NEW SMART ELECTRONICS NOW REQUIRED TO RUN RUSSIAN APPS

At the start of this month, all smart devices produced in Russia, including cell phones, TVs, computers, and tablets, are required to come preinstalled with software and apps from Russian tech companies. The law necessitating this change was crafted to protect the Russian software industry from American tech giants such as Apple, which last month accepted the legislation after inspecting the Russian substitutes and verifying their safety. The move is in line with recent Russian efforts to develop a "sovereign internet" that can one day be isolated from the global web. (Business Insider, April 1, 2021)

PUTIN SIGNS LAW THAT ALLOWS HIM TO RULE UNTIL 2036

Russian President Vladimir Putin has given final approval for a law that would allow him to stay in power for two more six-year terms, effectively giving himself the opportunity of lengthening his term until 2036. Last month, lawmakers approved the bill as a part of a set of constitutional reforms supported by nearly 78% of voters. Although Putin stated that he would decide later whether he would run again in 2024, he mentioned the extension of the term count was a necessary measure that would prompt his officials to focus on their necessary tasks and not be "darting their eyes in search of possible successors." Kremlin critics have blasted the constitutional reforms as an excuse to allow Putin to become "president for life." Approval of the legislation comes amid months of crackdowns on opposition activists and attempts to police the country's independent media. (Associated Press, April 4, 2021)

RUSSIA EXTENDS SPACE DEAL WITH U.S. UNTIL 2030

Russia has extended an agreement on space cooperation with the United States until the end of December 2030, according to a government statement released on April 3rd. The agreement, which serves as one of the few remaining partnerships between Moscow and Washington, was approved and signed by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. "The extension of the agreement is in the interests of both parties and will contribute to the effective implementation of joint space projects," stated the Russian cabinet. The cooperation comes amid rising tensions between Russia and the over the former's treatment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and persistent allegations of Russia's interference in the 2020 election cycle. The U.S. Commerce Department stated last month that it would impose strict sanctions on some exports to Russia while remaining more lenient with items related to aviation and space. The extension of the proposal is aimed to facilitate the joint exploration of outer space for peaceful purposes. (Deutsche Welle, April 4, 2021)

A RUSSIAN BUILDUP IN THE ARCTIC

Western military experts are raising the alarm over the Kremlin's latest military buildup in the Arctic, as receding ice sheets increasingly open the region for trade and commerce between Europe and Asia. Satellite photos show the steady construction of facilities and runways in regions stretching from Murmansk to waters near Alaska, as well as the presence of military hardware including jet bombers and fighter aircraft. The buildup comes as Russia is nearing the successful completion of next-generation missile technology that will power ordinance such as the Tsirkon hypersonic cruise missile and Poseidon 2M39 torpedo, advanced weapons that are designed to evade western defense systems. Thus far, Russia's Arctic buildup has been confined to its own territorial waters, however, U.S. officials fear Moscow will eventually use its regional presence to control rapidly thawing Arctic shipping lanes. (CNN, April 5, 2021)

KREMLIN TAKES AIM AT TWITTER

Russian authorities announced that they would continue to slow down social media app Twitter until mid-May, but would not block the platform outright for now, given the recent measures it has taken to remove banned content. According to state censor ROSKOMNADZOR, the decision not to ban Twitter was taken after acknowledging that the social media platform has taken steps to change the "principles and speed of its own moderation service in Russia, and the removal of a significant part of the prohibited content." According to the Russian media watchdog, Twitter has already taken down around 1,900 of the 3,100 posts that contained illegal content. With the additional time given, the company is expected to remove all of the prohibited content and bring its operations into full compliance with Russian law. The statement also mentioned that communication between ROSKOMNADZOR representatives and Sinéad McSweeney, vice-president of Twitter's public policy team in Europe, took place via videoconference earlier in the month. (Le Monde, April 5, 2021)

NAVALNY MOVED TO SICK WARD AMID SUSPECTED TB OUTBREAK

Alexei Navalny has been moved to a medical facility to be treated for a potential respiratory illness and has been tested for COVID-19, according to Russian media sources. In addition to the acute back and leg pain he experienced a week prior, the opposition leader is also said to have developed a 38.1 degree Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit) fever and a bad cough. Given the lack of adequate medical attention he had received, Navalny declared a hunger strike in order to demand better care. Navalny also stated on Monday that there had been a tuberculosis outbreak in his ward. According to him, three of his fifteen inmates had gotten infected and he joked that catching the disease might give him some relief from his other ailments. Izvestia, a pro-Kremlin newspaper, later referenced a statement from the state penitentiary service that said that Navalny had been moved to the prison's sanity unit but gave no further details as to his exact location. (Bloomberg, April 5, 2021)