



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Global Health; China; Europe; Russia; North Africa

AN AILING NAVALNY APPEARS IN COURT

Alexei Navalny has made his first public appearance since going on a hunger strike. During the late April court hearing, the jailed opposition activist looked visibly gaunt while appealing a defamation conviction against him. A photograph showed the opposition leader with a newly shaved head and wearing a prison jacket. "I am a creepy skeleton," said Navalny as he undid his uniform and revealed his thin torso underneath. During the hearing, he accused the government of turning "Russians into slaves" and called Russian President Vladimir Putin "a naked thieving king," a reference to the folk story "The Emperor's New Clothes." Navalny, along with aides Leonid Volkov and Ivan Zhdanov, has been accused of running a non-governmental organization that infringes on citizens' liberties and rights. On the same day as Navalny's court hearing, Volkov announced that the NGO would be dismantling its network of 35 regional headquarters because it had become "impossible" for them to continue to operate as a result of mounting governmental pressure. (*NPR*, April 29, 2021)

SUDAN RETHINKS RED SEA PORT DEAL WITH RUSSIA... MAYBE

Is the Sudanese government backing away from its long-standing relationship with the Kremlin? Confusion has abounded over recent news in Middle East outlets that Khartoum had canceled a recent agreement allowing Russia to build and maintain a naval installation on the country's Red Sea coast for a period of 25 years. Russia's embassy in Khartoum, however, has been quick to deny the claim, stating, "...these statements do not correspond to reality, whatever the so-called sources say. The Russian Embassy in Khartoum has not received any notifications from the Sudanese side." In addition to a presence on the Sudanese coast, the deal in question also permits Moscow to transport weapons into and through Sudan without inspection. (*The Moscow Times*, April 29, 2021; *Itar-TASS*, April 29, 2021)

G7 LOOKS TO COUNTER RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is gathering his G7 counterparts in London for the first time in two years to "come together with a rapid rebuttal mechanism" to help combat disinformation and propaganda coming out of Russia. According to Raab, the group is convening, "So that when we see these lies and propaganda or fake news being put out there, we can - not just individually, but come together to provide a rebuttal and frankly to provide the truth..." The effort is an attempt to address a pressing problem, as the U.S. and numerous European states have all identified active Russian disinformation relating to elections as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have been identified in recent months. Raab plans to meet with his counterparts this week, beginning with Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. (Reuters, May 2, 2021)

EU SUMMONS RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR OVER TIT-FOR-TAT SANCTIONS

The European Union has summoned Russian Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov over his government's decision to bar eight high-ranking EU officials, including EU Commission for Values and Transparency Vice President Vera Jourova, from entering the country. EU officials informed Ambassador Chizhov "of the strong rejection and firm condemnation by the EU institutions and EU member states of this decision, which was purely politically motivated," the European Commission said in a statement. The EU called the blacklisting "groundless" and outlined concerns about the impact of the decision on relations between the EU and Russia. The 27-member bloc also reserved the right to respond with appropriate measures. (*Deutsche Welle*, May 3, 2021)

MOSCOW GETS A HELPING HAND FROM BEIJING

Russia is turning to China to produce its Sputnik V vaccine in an effort to boost production as demand for the shot soars. In total, Russia has announced three deals with multiple Chinese companies in recent weeks. The Russian Direct Investment Fund recently announced that it had signed contracts with Hualan Biological Bacterin Inc, Shenzhen Yuanxin Gene tech Co. and Tibet Rhodiola Pharmaceutical Holding Co. The new arrangements are intended to help Russia fulfill its promise of providing the vaccine to numerous countries around the world, even as its domestic production of the coronavirus treatment slows. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has confirmed that demand for Sputnik V currently far exceeds Russia's domestic production capacity. (Associated Press, May 3, 2021)

RUSSIAN RIGHTS LAWYER UNDER FIRE

The Russian government has opened a criminal investigation against Ivan Pavlov, a prominent defense attorney who has represented Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, among other clients. Pavlov, who specializes in high-profile cases, was detained on April 30th and brought in for questioning for allegedly disclosing classified information about an ongoing investigation against his client, Ivan Safronov. Safronov, a former journalist, has been accused of sharing classified information about Russian arms sales to the Czech Republic - accusations which he denies. Law enforcement teams searched the St. Petersburg office of Pavlov's legal-aid NGO, Team 29, as well as his wife's apartment and his personal dacha. During the court hearing later that day, the judge approved a prosecution request that prohibited Pavlov from using the Internet or phone to communicate with witnesses from the Safronov case. Many lawyers and activists have condemned the case against Pavlov, equating it to "pressure against human rights as a whole." (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 3, 2021)