



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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TWO YEARS OF "PAROLE-LIKE" RESTRICTIONS FOR ICONIC PROTESTOR

Olga Misik, a young Russian protester known on the internet and social media as the "Girl with Constitution" for reading the document out loud in front of Russian riot police during Moscow demonstrations in 2019, has just been sentenced to 24 months of "parole-like" restrictions for splashing paint on a booth during a demonstration. According to the terms of her sentence, Misik is not allowed to leave her home between the hours of 10 PM and 6 AM and must remain at her current residence for the duration of her two-year term. Two other protestors, Igor Basharimov and Ivan Vorobyovskiy, also participated in the act and received 21 months of similar restrictions. Misik was only 17 when she first gained notoriety for chanting rights enumerated in the Russian constitution at police. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 11, 2021)

LAVROV, BLINKEN TO MEET IN REYKJAVIK

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is set to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Iceland later this week in what will be the highest-level meeting between U.S. and Russian officials since President Biden took office in January. The meeting will be held on the sidelines of the Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland. In preparation for the in-person meeting, Blinken and Lavrov held a phone call on May 12th in which Blinken advocated for the release of Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed, two former U.S. servicemen currently serving long prison sentences in Russia. The officials also discussed a proposal for an upcoming bilateral summit between Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin. (*CNBC*, May 12, 2021)

GREEN PARTY HEAD TARGETED FOR OPPOSING NORD STREAM II

A social media campaign to discredit Annalena Baerbock, the head of Germany's Green Party, is underway after she publicly proposed that the German government withdraw its support from the Nord Stream II energy pipeline project. According to local media, German and European security experts believe Russian trolls are behind the campaign. Baerbock is the Green Party's leading candidate in Germany's fall federal elections, the results of which will determine the country's new chancellor after the retirement of Angela Merkel. The doctored photos of Baerbock circulating online purportedly show her face imposed on the naked body of another woman, and another showing her with George Soros, perpetuating the lie that Baerbock is part of a global Jewish conspiracy. German political parties and the Bundestag itself have been frequent targets of Russian cyberattacks in recent years. (*The Guardian*, May 13, 2021)

THE MOSCOW METRO CLEANS HOUSE

At least 40 employees of the metro system in Russia's capital have been fired in recent days due to their alleged involvement in April protests in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. This, however, could be just the beginning of a broader purge; Mikhail Timonov, a Duma Deputy from Moscow City, has suggested on social media that the number of those involved, and who might be sacked, could ultimately be in the hundreds. A dismissed metro worker submitted an audio recording to the *Meduza* news portal that captured his exchange with his employer, in which he was given 15 minutes to decide if he wanted to resign or face termination. The worker disclosed to *Meduza* that he had previously signed up for emails from the "Free Navalny" website but never posted about his interest on social media or other channels. (*Meduza*, May 14, 2021; *Meduza*, May 14, 2021)

ANOTHER INDEPENDENT OUTLET DECLARED FOREIGN AGENT

The *VTimes*, an independent Russian-language media outlet founded last year, was declared a "foreign agent" under Russian law last week. The outlet was founded in October of 2020 by former *Vedomosti* employees who left that newspaper after Andrei Shmarov was appointed its acting editor and subsequently banned negative stories about President Putin and last year's vote on constitutional amendments. The *VTimes* is supported by Dutch nonprofit Stichting 2 Oktober, whose director, Derk Sauer, is the original founder of *The Moscow Times*. The *VTimes* is now required by Russian law to submit to rigorous audits of its finances or face heavy financial penalties and other restrictions. Additionally, its content must now carry labels identifying the outlet as a foreign agent. (*The Moscow Times*, May 14, 2021)

PUTIN: UKRAINE BECOMING "ANTI-RUSSIA"

In response to Kyiv's recent decision to place Viktor Medvedchuk, a prominent Ukrainian politician and pro-Russian advocate, under house arrest and freeze his assets, President Putin told Russia's security council that Ukraine is moving in an anti-Russian direction. Ukraine "is slowly but surely turning into some kind of polar opposite [of] Russia, some kind of anti-Russia... who's territory it seems we will constantly receive news requiring our special attention from a security point of view," the Russian leader said. Putin went further, arguing that Ukrainian authorities were cleansing the political space of figures who believe Kyiv should improve ties with Moscow. (Reuters, May 14, 2021)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Notably, while it has drawn Russian ire, the Medvedchuk affair is about far more than political influence. The pro-Russian oligarch has been charged with treason by Ukrainian authorities for unlawfully disclosing information about the movements of Ukrainian military units last year. Medvedchuk and his business partner, Taras Kozak, have also been charged with economic subversion for transferring energy production licenses for holdings in Crimea to Russian authorities.]