



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; SPACE; Global Health

PUTIN SIGNS EXTREMISM LAW, COURT BANS NAVALNY GROUP

Last week, President Putin signed legislation into law forbidding members of "extremist organizations" from participating in elections. The move bans leaders of such groups from running for office for a period of five years, while their employees and benefactors are banned for a period of three years. Just days later, a Moscow court branded Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation an "extremist organization" in a closed-door proceeding, legally extinguishing the electoral prospects of some of Navalny's political allies. The group still plans to proceed with its Smart Voting strategy, honed in 2019, when the organization rallied resources and support behind candidates most likely to defeat members of the ruling United Russia Party. United Russia is entering September's parliamentary elections polling at historic lows. (*CNN*, June 4, 2021; *The Moscow Times*, June 9, 2021)

SPACE CHIEF THREATENS EARLY ISS WITHDRAWAL

Last year, President Trump designated two Russian entities – JSC Rocket and Space Center Progress and JSC Central Research Institute of Machine Building – as companies tied to the Russian military, requiring U.S. firms to obtain special permissions before selling to them, effectively sanctioning the Russian entities. During a speech to the Russian parliament this week, Dmitry Rogozin, the head of ROSCOSMOS, Russia's state space agency, threatened that his government might withdraw from the International Space Station (ISS) as a result. "Either we work together, in which case the sanctions are lifted immediately, or we will not work together and we will deploy our own station," Rogozin warned. (*CNBC*, June 7, 2021)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The threat to abandon the ISS, and therefore space collaboration with the West, isn't necessarily an idle one. Earlier this year, ROSCOSMOS formally signed an agreement with its Chinese counterpart to develop research facilities on the moon and/or in orbit - an effort that observers see as being an alternative to the ISS.]

NEW UKRAINIAN SOCCER JERSEYS SHOWCASE OCCUPIED CRIMEA

The 2021 edition of the UEFA European Championship is set to kick off this week, and a recent jersey design by the Ukrainian national soccer team has politicians in Russia up in arms. The Ukrainian team unveiled brand new jerseys for the tournament featuring a large outline of Ukraine's borders on the front, including Russian-annexed Crimea. The jerseys also displayed the phrases "Glory to the Ukraine" and "Glory to the Heroes," two parts of a famous Ukrainian military greeting. Members of the Russian State Duma and Foreign Ministry issued statements condemning the jersey design, describing it as a "provocation" and nationalistic. In contrast, the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv commended the design, using the hashtag #CrimeaisUkraine on its official Twitter page. (Reuters, June 7, 2021)

ANOTHER OPPOSITION POLITICIAN FLEES THE COUNTRY

Dmitry Gudkov, a noted Russian opposition politician, recently fled Russia for Ukraine. On June 1st, he was accused of property damage and held for three days by Russian authorities, before being released from custody without charges. Gudkov has argued that the case against him is politically motivated and is being used as an attempt to deny him entry into Russia's upcoming legislative elections. Gudkov wrote on his Telegram account that "Several close sources from the presidential administration's circle informed [me] that if I don't leave the country, the fake criminal case will continue until my arrest." Later, on Facebook, he reiterated his message, arguing that the age of public politics is over in Russia. (*Meduza*, June 7, 2021)

RUSSIA WITHDRAWS FROM OPEN SKIES

Vladimir Putin has finalized Russia's decision to leave the Open Skies Treaty. Back in April, the Russian Foreign Ministry warned that the Kremlin was planning on pulling out of the agreement. In turn, the United States exited the Open Skies Treaty on November 22nd of last year, citing "repeated violations of the treaty on the part of Russia." The justification given by Russia for pulling out of the treaty was that its proposals "did not receive support from the United States." The Open Skies Treaty was signed in 1992 and includes over 30 countries. It allows member countries to fly surveillance planes over one another's territories in order to oversee the movements of troops and military hardware, for the purposes of building trust between Russia and the West. (*Novaya Gazeta*, June 7, 2021; Associated Press, June 7, 2021)

CORONAVIRUS SURGES IN MOSCOW AND NATIONWIDE

Cases of COVID-19 are spiking in Moscow to levels unseen since January of this year, during Russia's second wave of the pandemic. Moscow reported over 4,100 new infections on Wednesday, June 9th, and according to Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, nearly 10,000 hospital beds are currently occupied in the capital. In order to combat the surge, city authorities are taking a number of measures, including stricter enforcement of mask-and-glove mandates in public places and transport and the opening of new COVID-19 hospitals. Mayor Sergey Sobyenin stopped short of suggesting a reimplementation of lockdown measures, a strategy used in 2020 but lifted at the start of the current year.

Moscow's health crisis is not an isolated incident. Across the country, over 10,000 new cases were reported in the latest tally, the highest level in at least a quarter year. (*The Moscow Times*, June 9, 2021)