



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; SPACE; Global Health ; Baltics; China; Europe; Russia

A HELPING HAND FROM GROZNY

Contrary to accounts from Russia's LGBTQ network, the arrest and removal of Khalimat Taramova from a support shelter in Dagestan earlier this month was performed in order to prevent her abduction by members of a human rights group, Chechen authorities have claimed. Taramova had fled her home in neighboring Chechnya in order to escape threats of violence due to her sexual orientation. In the days since, Taramova has been returned to Chechnya, where she may face death as part of an "honor killing." During a press conference in the aftermath of the events, Chechen Minister of National Politics, External Ties, and Information Akhmed Dudayev claimed human rights activists are "fifth columns" in Russia and that human rights were strongly respected by President Ramzan Kadyrov. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 14, 2021)

THE MEDIA NOOSE GETS TIGHTER

At his daily press briefing on June 15th, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov was pressed by journalists over the removal of the independent television channel *Dozhd* from the Kremlin press pool. Peskov claimed that the Kremlin was not engaging in political censorship but rather that the Kremlin "considered further interaction with this channel impossible after the channel was no longer in our understanding of a mass media outlet, when it wasn't covering illegal rallies, but calling for illegal rallies de facto." *Dozhd* has denied these allegations, arguing that it had covered protests in Russia in compliance with Russian legislation, and, furthermore, that it has never called for illegal protests. (*Meduza*, June 15, 2021)

A MIEDIOCRE SUMMIT IN SWITZERLAND

Last week, President Biden met with Russian President Vladimir Putin for bilateral talks in Geneva, Switzerland. It was the first such meeting between U.S. and Russian leaders since President Trump met Putin in Helsinki, Finland back in 2018. The summit took place behind closed doors, and members of the press were able only to capture brief glimpses of the meeting room before being herded away by security. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov participated in the opening 90-minute session between the two leaders.

Substantively, Biden and Putin are said to have discussed a range of issues, from arms control to media freedom. The question of cyberwarfare - and Russian-origin attacks on U.S. critical infrastructure - loomed large as well, with President Biden reportedly touting the United States' ability to respond to such activity by Russian state and non-state actors in the future. The gathering ended without a proverbial meeting of the minds, however, and the two leaders eschewed a joint statement and took questions from the media separately after the talks concluded. (*NPR*, June 16, 2021)

CHINESE, RUSSIAN SPACE OFFICIALS LAY PLANS FOR LUNAR STATION

Russian and Chinese space officials shared their vision for an International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) during last week's Global Space Exploration conference in St. Petersburg. The project, which is open to participation from other nations, envisions three phases of reconnaissance and construction before eventually conducting crewed landings in 2036. Candidate sites for the eventual lunar station include the Aristarchus crater and Marius Hills on the Moon's near side, and the Amundsen crater near its south pole. At the conference, representatives of the Russian and Chinese space agencies announced that they had already held discussions with the European Space Agency and France's CNES. The effort is a parallel one to that being explored by Washington; the United States and 11 other nations have agreed to cooperate in lunar exploration as part of the Artemis Accords. (*Space News*, June 16, 2021)

MOSCOW'S VACCINE PUSH

Moscow city authorities announced a new requirement last week, declaring that 60 percent of all workers at businesses in the service sector are required to have had at least the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by July 15th, with a second no later than a month on. The service sector is being defined as businesses that require close contact between employees and customers, such as dining, transportation, education, gyms, salons, and similar types of locations. In a public statement, Mayor Sergei Sobyenin explained the need for the vaccination drive. "We are obliged to do everything we can to carry out mass vaccinations in the shortest possible time to stop this terrible disease," he said. Nationwide, meanwhile, just 13% of Russians are currently vaccinated, largely due to widespread skepticism regarding the efficacy and safety of the Sputnik-V vaccine. (*The Moscow Times*, June 16, 2021)

RUSSIA ENCROACHES ON BALTIC AIRSPACE

Two Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighters violated Estonian airspace on Tuesday, June 15th, near the island of Hiiumaa. According to the Estonian military, the plane transponders had not been turned on, and there was no two way communication between the planes and the Estonian air traffic service. The incident is the fourth such violation of Estonian airspace this year alone. Nor is Estonia an exception; two Russian Su-24 planes violated Lithuania's airspace the same day as well. Notes of protest were sent from both countries to their respective Russian embassies. (Associated Press, June 17, 2021)