



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2471

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Resource Security; Global Health; Europe; Russia; Ukraine

## OSCE CONCERNED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN CRIMEA

In a recent communique to the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the body's acting political chief, Lane Darnell Bahl, delivered a scathing report on Russia's continued human rights violations in occupied Crimea, and detailed the presence of Russian-made jamming and electronic warfare equipment in Ukraine's Donbas region. According to the communique, Russia and its proxies were denying freedom of movement to the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), while using advanced equipment to target UAVs used to monitor the area. Meanwhile in Crimea, access to which has long been denied to the SMM, reports of persecution inflicted upon the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian ethnic minorities are common. (U.S. Mission to the OSCE, June 17, 2021)

## RUSSIA'S GAZPROM BEHIND MASSIVE METHANE LEAK

Russia's state-owned natural gas giant, Gazprom, has taken responsibility for the largest methane leak to take place in the country since 2019. According to Gazprom, the leak occurred on the Urengoy-Center 1 pipeline in Russia's central Tatarstan region during emergency repairs. This is Gazprom's fourth such leak this year, according to Kayrros, a satellite company which monitors methane clouds, and the Russian state firm is under growing pressure from Europe to limit its methane emissions. The consequences for Moscow might be marked; according to VTB Capital, a Russian consultancy, "[t]he situation might be quite negative for sentiment on Gazprom's shares," although it notes that the impact on Gazprom's larger finances and operations will likely be minimal. (*Bloomberg*, June 18, 2021)

## PUTIN SEEKS TO BOLSTER UNITED RUSSIA

Just months ahead of upcoming parliamentary elections, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the party congress of his ruling "United Russia" faction in order to reaffirm his support and pledge big federal spending moves before citizens head to the polls. The presidential effort reflects concerns about the party's flagging fortunes. According to the Levada Center, an independent polling institute, support for United Russia is currently at just 27%. Putin has sought to revitalize the popularity of the faction by proposing a \$1.4 billion coronavirus relief bill, as well as extending a loan program for infrastructure until 2026. (Reuters, June 19, 2021)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Given the effect of Russia's increasingly authoritarian political climate on pollsters and respondents alike, the results of public opinion surveys in Russia should be viewed with some caution.]

## GERMANY ARRESTS RUSSIAN RESEARCHER ACCUSED OF SPYING

Germany's Federal Office of the Public Prosecutor has announced the arrest of a Russian citizen who is accused of passing secrets from a German university, where he worked as a research assistant, to Moscow. The suspect, identified as Ilmur N, was taken into custody on June 18th, and has been accused of "working for a Russian secret service since early October 2020." Specifically, between October 2020 and June 2021, "Ilmur N" had met with a member of Russian foreign intelligence service at least three times, passing information at two of those meetings in exchange for an unspecified amount of cash. He is currently being kept in pretrial custody, pending a possible indictment. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June, 21, 2021)

## MAJOR CITIES HAMMERED BY COVID

As variants of the coronavirus continue to spread in Russia, the country's two largest cities are reporting grim updates on their pandemic situations. Moscow just recorded its deadliest day of the pandemic – 88 dead in a 24-hour period ending June 23rd, matching the death count from the day prior. 6,534 new cases had been reported over the preceding 24 hours. In total, 1,307,243 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in Moscow since the beginning of the pandemic, with 21,686 reported deaths.

In Saint Petersburg, meanwhile, 90% of the city's hospital beds designated for coronavirus patients are currently occupied, while authorities are reporting 800 new hospital admissions a day. Saint Petersburg's efforts to fight emerging variants are being complicated by the city's status as a host city for the Euro 2020 soccer tournament. Organizers have already suspended food sales and plan on limiting attendance at fan zones starting in the tournament's second round. (*The Moscow Times*, June 21, 2021; *Gazeta.ru*, June 23, 2021)

