



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; CAMCA; Afghanistan; Central Asia; Russia; Southeast Asia; Ukraine

PRICE HIKES AND POSSIBLE SHORTAGES AHEAD

The price of natural gas is peaking in Europe to levels unseen since 2008, and one Ukrainian oil executive is accusing Russia's GAZPROM of manipulating energy supplies to Europe in order to raise prices ahead of the impending completion of the Nord Stream II pipeline. In a statement to the *Financial Times*, Sergiy Makogon, the CEO of Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine, a major Ukrainian energy transit company, insisted that "[Europe] should not follow this blackmail of Gazprom with prices." Earlier this month, GAZPROM turned down the opportunity to increase gas flows through Ukraine at a time when Russia's northern pipelines are preparing to shut down for maintenance in August. The situation could lead to a future winter shortage of gas, given that the summer months are often used to refill reserves needed later in the year. (*Financial Times*, July 1, 2021)

EXPLOITING CRIMEA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

Russia's push to rapidly develop infrastructure on the Crimean Peninsula since the territory's unilateral annexation in 2014 has led to the discovery of significant archeological sites and artifacts, resulting in Moscow capitalizing on the opportunity to assert its claim to the peninsula's long and storied history. The construction of the Crimean Bridge spanning the Kerch Strait and the Tavrida highway to Sevastopol have unearthed over a million historical artifacts from Greek, Scythian, Roman, and Bosporan civilization. Artifacts are being displayed in Crimean Museums and are being transferred to museums in Russia. According to Kyiv, artifacts unearthed on the peninsula are looted property and rightfully belong to Ukraine. A set of Crimean antiquities that were touring Europe when Russia annexed the peninsula is currently in the middle of this dispute. Dutch authorities returned artifacts to a lending museum in Kyiv, but have been holding artifacts borrowed from a museum in Crimea for safekeeping because the museum is now occupied, like the rest of the peninsula. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 4, 2021)

BARD COLLEGE BRANDED "UNDESIRABLE"

After 24 years of educational and cultural exchanges between New York State-Based Bard College and the Smolny Institute of Saint Petersburg State University, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office has branded Bard College an "undesirable organization." The edict has thrown all of the students who hold dual degrees through the institutions' shared program into legal and educational limbo. Those who hold such degrees can now be imprisoned for four years for belonging to such a group, while six years is the penalty for "carrying out the activities of an undesirable organization." Saint Petersburg State University has already cancelled its agreement with Bard College and removed all traces of its decades-old partnership from its website. The move comes as state authorities intensify their crackdown on foreign NGOs operating in Russia. The decision to blacklist Bard College likely stems from the university's links to controversial billionaire philanthropist George Soros, who donated \$5 million to Bard's partnership program with Saint Petersburg State University. (*The Moscow Times*, July 6, 2021)

RUSSIAN HACKERS CONTINUE TO TEST THE U.S.

Just weeks after the summit between Presidents Biden and Putin in Geneva, Russian hackers have been accused of hacking Synnex, a contractor for the Republican National Committee (RNC). According to investigators in the case, the hack was carried out by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the same Russian agency which hacked the Democratic National Committee, the RNC's counterpart, in 2016.

While the extent and motive of the hack remains unclear, the RNC has said that none of its data was accessed. These attacks come after President Biden called on Vladimir Putin to "rein in" cyberattacks against the United States. But while Russia has denied responsibility for the hacks, Putin argued in a July 3rd national security speech that Russia "considers it legitimate to take symmetrical and asymmetric measures" to counter the "unfriendly actions" of foreign states. (*New York Times*, July 6, 2021)

RUSSIA SUPPORTS ASEAN ON MYANMAR

During his visit to Indonesia, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed his support for ASEAN efforts to bring about peace in Myanmar. Meeting with Indonesia's foreign minister, Retno Marsudi, Lavrov argued that ASEAN's position on Myanmar is "a basis for restoring the situation back to normalcy." Marsudi in turn highlighted the importance of implementing the five-point consensus which was agreed upon by Myanmar and ASEAN representatives, and called on Russia to support ASEAN efforts. Lavrov also called for a deepening of economic and political ties, in light of the fact that Indonesia will hold the presidency of the G20 starting next year. Russia and Indonesia likewise also agreed to cooperate on COVID-19 vaccines. (Associated Press, July 6, 2021)

TAJIKISTAN LOOKS TO RUSSIA TO SECURE BORDER WITH AFGHANISTAN

Amid a U.S. drawdown of forces and growing activism by the militant Taliban movement, the government of Tajikistan has called on its allies in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to assist in defending the increasingly restive Tajik-Afghan border. According to Hasan Sultanov, the permanent representative of Tajikistan to the CSTO, "The situation requires that we accurately react within the rules of the CSTO treaty, including taking active measures to strengthen the southern border." President Putin has promised to support Tajikistan bilaterally or through the CSTO in case of an escalation of hostilities on the Tajik-Afghan border. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has already announced that Russia began talks within the CSTO format to solve the "Afghanistan question." (*Novaya Gazeta*, July 7, 2021)