



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2480

August 10, 2021 **Matt Maldonado, Timothy Blinnikov, Ilan I. Berman**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Global Health; Arctic; Russia

RETURN OF THE CLONE CANDIDATES

With Russia's parliamentary elections just a month away, liberal candidates have seen their ability to run for office impeded by a variety of means. Aside from outright bans, some candidates are being duped with a ballot trick from the 1990s. Figures known as "clone candidates" or "technical candidates" are registering to vote with the same or similar names as legitimate candidates in an effort to confuse voters at the ballot box. For example, Boris Vishnevsky, a liberal candidate from the Yabloko Party, is currently facing two additional candidates named Boris Vishnevsky in his Saint Petersburg precinct. According to a *Novaya Gazeta* investigation, one of the dummy candidates is tied to the ruling United Russia Party, and both legally changed their names before registering as candidates. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 1, 2021)

RUSSIA'S CONTINUING CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

According to Russia's latest batch of monthly coronavirus data, which covers periods as recent as this June, the country's fatalities during the pandemic have surpassed 530,000 lives in excess of the country's previous five-year average. June 2021 saw a 26 percent increase in total deaths over the same month a year earlier, indicating the ongoing effects of COVID-19 and now its more virulent Delta variant. (*The Moscow Times*, August 6, 2021)

THE KREMLIN CRACKDOWN ON NAVALNY ALLIES CONTINUES

On Friday, August 6th, Russian courts handed down two more sentences for defendants in the "Sanitary Case." Nikolai Lyaskin, a former staffer for imprisoned opposition activist Alexey Navalny, was given a one-year "restriction of freedoms." Oleg Navalny, the brother of the jailed opposition politician, was given a one-year suspended sentence, accompanied by another year-long probationary period. The "Sanitary Case" was opened in January 2021 against 10 Navalny associates who were found to have violated COVID restrictions by calling on the public to participate in pro-Navalny protests. Charges were dropped against one of the members, Konstantin Yankauskas, after he announced that he wouldn't be running in the upcoming Duma elections. (*Meduza*, August 6, 2021)

BELARUS WANTS INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA... ON ITS OWN TERMS

On August 9th, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko once again raised the prospect of an integration of his country and Russia into a single Union State. The merger Lukashenko envisions, however, is one "without any loss of statehood and sovereignty," he made clear to reporters and public figures. Lukashenko went on to argue that Belarus' incorporation into Russia would be a big headache for Russian President Vladimir Putin. He also made clear that the equal partnership he envisions would require significant economic offsets for his country. After all, Lukashenko posited, "how can we integrate if the price of your natural gas is two-or three-times lower than in Belarus?" (*Itar-TASS*, August 9, 2021)

VILLAGES EVACUATED AS WILDFIRES ENGULF SIBERIA

Russian authorities have begun the evacuation of two villages in Siberia's Sakha-Yakutia Republic, where 155 active forest fires are currently burning. On August 7th, it was reported that the fires had destroyed houses and eight maintenance buildings in the village of Byas-Kuel, as crews of 3,600 people fought to contain fires near the villages of Kalvitsa and Kharyyalakh. Aysen Nikolayev, the governor of Yakutia, ordered officials to clear fire trails around the villages. Scientists have blamed the fires on climate change. Some experts, however, also point to a 2007 decision to disband federal aviation networks that spotted and combated forest fires as a cause for the current disaster. (*Associated Press*, August 9, 2021)

NO LEGAL REMEDY FOR GRUDIN

Russia's Supreme Court has upheld the decision of the country's Central Election Committee to ban Communist Party politician Pavel Grudin from the list of candidates for the Communist Party in the upcoming elections. Communist Party boss Gennady Zyuganov condemned the court's decision as "absolutely incorrect and unfair." Grudin was banned from running after his ex-wife wrote a letter alleging that he held stock in Bontro, a foreign company. Grudin argued that he should be allowed to run as a candidate and submitted documentation that showed he had renounced any stocks in 2017 before the Bontro was liquidated in 2018. (*RIA Novosti*, August 9, 2021)

