



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Corruption; Resource Security; Afghanistan; Russia

ROSNEFT MAKES RECORD GAINS

Russian oil and natural gas giant ROSNEFT reported a leap in second-quarter earnings, thanks to the rising global price of crude. The company reported a 55% increase from the last quarter, translating into a net profit of 233 billion rubles (\$3.1 billion). According to ROSNEFT CEO Igor Sechin, the profit recorded was "among the highest" in the history of the company. ROSNEFT has also launched construction on its main infrastructure facilities in the Vostok Oil project in Siberia, a venture described by Sechin as the "world's largest new hydrocarbon project." Production there was set to start in 2024, with the goal of reaching an annual output of 100 million tons by the start of 2030. (*The Moscow Times*, August 13, 2021)

A TIT-FOR-TAT ON JOURNALIST VISAS

Veteran British journalist Sarah Rainsford, who reports for the *BBC* from Moscow, will be forced to leave the country by the end of this month after Russian immigration officials refused to renew her visa. The *BBC* is calling the move an "expulsion," while Kremlin representatives are framing the decision in political terms. According to Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Rainsford is being sent away in retaliation for Britain's practice of restricting the access of journalists representing *RT* and *Sputnik*, two official Russian outlets with large foreign audiences. Rainsford had previously reported from Cuba, Spain, and Turkey. (*BBC*, August 13, 2021)

PRIGOZHIN AT THE MOVIES

Evgeni Prigozhin, the Russian oligarch who serves as the financial benefactor of the Wagner Company group of mercenaries, allegedly bankrolled an upcoming film depicting events that took place on the eve of the summer 2014 insurgency in Ukraine's Luhansk Oblast. The film's title roughly translates to "Sunbaked," and its trailer has already accumulated over 3.3 million views on YouTube. The film has also received attention on pro-Kremlin social media accounts and websites. It is set to premiere on Russian state television this week.

"Sunbaked" is not Prigozhin's first foray into cinema. Earlier this year, another film with alleged financing from the Russian oligarch, "The Tourist," debuted on state television. It depicted Russian mercenaries in the Central African Republic preventing a coup. Experts believe both films are part of a public relations strategy to paint Russian mercenary activity in a more positive light in the wake of recent reports about human rights violations by Wagner mercenaries. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 15, 2021)

RUSSIA "SATISFIED" WITH TRANSFER OF POWER IN KABUL

In an interview with radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, Russia's special representative for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, argued that there was no need to panic in the wake of the Taliban's recent capture of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. According to Kabulov, Russia's ambassador to the country will be meeting with representatives of the Taliban shortly to discuss future prospects for the Russian-Afghan relationship. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed "satisfaction" with the way the Taliban took over, and has signaled that the militant movement's designation as a terrorist group might be removed in the future. (*Ekho Moskvy*, August 16, 2021)

WHELAN'S LAWYERS MAKE LEGAL APPEAL

Lawyers for Paul Whelan, the American convicted in Russia last year on espionage charges, are planning to petition the Moscow City Court to transfer their client to the United States to serve out the rest of his term. Olga Karlova, the head of Whelan's defense team, has argued that the success of the request "depends on the two countries' goodwill if it will be granted." Karlova has also filed a complaint with the prosecution after her attempts to contact Whelan on the phone were denied. (*Itar-TASS*, August 16, 2021)