



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2484

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Resource Security; China; Russia; Turkey

### UK SANCTIONS SEVEN FOR NAVALNY POISONING

British authorities have imposed sanctions on seven FSB agents in connection to the poisoning of Kremlin critic Alexey Navalny. The seven agents include: Alexey Sedov, the chief of the FSB's Constitutional Protection service; Criminalistics Institute director Kirill Vasilyev; Scientific and Technical Service deputy director Vladimir Bogdanov and and FSB operatives Alexey Alexandrov, Ivan Osipov, Ivan Spiridonov and Vladimir Panyaev. All of the names were made public in a joint investigation by *The Insider* and Bellingcat in December of 2020. Konstantin Kudryavtsev, an alleged FSB agent, earlier gave details of the operation to Navalny himself in a phone call, explaining how the Kremlin had attempted to poison him. Kudryavtsev, however, was not included on the UK's list of sanctioned individuals. (*Meduza*, August 20, 2021)

### A NEW RUSSIA-CHINA BRIDGE

More than seven years after ground was broken on both sides of their common border, Russia and China have celebrated the completion of a new railway bridge connecting the cities of Tongjiang and Nizhneleninskoye, located within Heilongjiang Province and the Jewish Autonomous Oblast respectively. Organizers also plan on building a passenger cable car capable of ferrying tourists across the border in as little as eight minutes, the first of its kind in the world. The new connection to the Russian railway network will cut the journey length from Heilongjiang Province to Moscow by some ten hours. (*CNN*, August 20, 2021)

### BELATEDLY, U.S. SANCTIONS NORD STREAM II

On August 20th, the Biden administration imposed limited sanctions on three Russian ships and companies involved in the construction of Nord Stream II. The sanctions target the Russian ship *Ostap Sheremeta*, the owner of another vessel, the *JSC Nobility*, and construction firm Konstanta OOO. Earlier this year, the Biden administration waived sanctions against Nord Stream AG, the owner of the project, prompting strong bipartisan criticism from members of Congress, who see the pipeline as a Russian power play that will expand the Kremlin's leverage over Europe. (Associated Press, August 20, 2021)

### DOZHD BRANDED FOREIGN AGENT

In late August, the Russian Ministry of Justice added independent Russian news outlet *Dozhd* to its list of "media performing the functions of a foreign agent," signaling the state's intention to take aim at one of Russia's last independent news sources. Under Russian law, any organization that receives funding from abroad may be branded a foreign agent, after which the entity will be subject to intense auditing and scrutiny, as well as mandatory labeling of all its posted content as content from a "foreign agent." Several independent news outlets have been classified as foreign agents this year, including *Meduza*, *VTimes*, and *Open Media*. Another outlet, *Proekt*, was classified as an "undesirable organization," which under Russian law mandates its disbandment. (*The Moscow Times*, August 21, 2021)

### PUTIN CONFIDENT AHEAD OF PARLIAMENTARY VOTE

At a meeting with top officials from his United Russia faction, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he counts on the party to maintain its popularity and that, after the upcoming parliamentary elections on September 19th, it "will be able to make the necessary decisions in the interests of the country at the legislative level." The meeting follows government crackdowns on independent media, human rights groups and opposition supporters - all of whom have, in recent months, faced increased government pressure and persecution. The United Russia party holds a clear majority, 334 seats out of 450, in Russia's lower house of parliament, the Duma. However, recent polling shows that only 27% of Russians plan to support the party come election time. (Associated Press, August 22, 2021)

## **TURKEY TO PURCHASE MORE RUSSIAN SYSTEMS**

According to Alexander Mikheyev, the head of Russia's state arms exporter, ROSOBORONEXPORT, a new contract for units of the S-400 *Triumf* air defense will soon be signed by Turkey. Turkey, a NATO member, has been criticized in the past by the U.S. for its purchase of Russian military hardware, which officials worry could be used to collect intelligence on Alliance members and their capabilities. Turkey has forged ahead despite these concerns, however - first purchasing the Russian S-400 system in 2019 and subsequently sticking with it despite U.S. sanctions. Now, it looks like Ankara plans to acquire more of the same. (*Luxtimes*, August 23, 2021; *Bloomberg*, August 23, 2021)