



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Europe; Russia; Ukraine

RUSSIAN DETAINED IN PRAGUE ON CRIMEA-RELATED CHARGES

In early September, Czech and Ukrainian law enforcement agencies coordinated the arrest of Aleksandr Franchetti, a Russian national accused of participating in Russia's 2014 takeover of Crimea, at the Prague international airport. Franchetti is being held in the Czech Republic while Ukrainian authorities attempt to extradite him to Kyiv for what Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleh Nikolenko calls "a number of crimes against our state, including the participation in the Russian occupation of Crimea." Franchetti allegedly worked with Russian military forces to create a paramilitary group that seized power and energy infrastructure during the annexation. Franchetti has held permanent residency in the Czech Republic since 2000. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 12, 2021)

NEW DZERZHINSKY MONUMENTS CAUSE A STIR

Two separate monuments to Felix Dzerzhinsky, the feared founder of the Soviet Union's first secret police force, the Cheka, were erected on September 11th, the 144th anniversary of his birth. The two monuments are located in Krasnodar, in southwest Russia, and Simferopol, the capital of Russian-occupied Crimea. The response within Russia has been mixed. The FSB endorsed the Simferopol statue, stating that "'Iron Felix' not only fought against counter-revolutionaries, but also raised the country out of ruin and poverty." Orthodox Archpriest Leonid Kalinin, however, held a different opinion. "Personally, I'm categorically against the appearance of such monuments in any public spaces in Russia," he said. The memorialization "insults the memory of millions of innocent victims." The former KGB headquarters in central Moscow famously housed a towering statue of Dzerzhinsky until 1991. Several public attempts to return the statue to its former place have been made in the years since, the last as recently as this past February. (*Meduza*, September 13, 2021)

DISSIDENT INVESTIGATION CLAIMS LAVROV MISTRESS

Only a month after Russian state authorities classified it as a "foreign agent," investigative outlet *iStories* hit back at the state in mid-September with a report claiming that Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has a mistress who may be benefiting financially and politically from his position. According to the report, the woman in question is named Svetlana Polyakova and has been a Foreign Ministry employee since 2014. Polyakova has allegedly facilitated the appointment of friends to positions within the Foreign Ministry, while also taking multiple trips with Lavrov to cities like Sochi. As part of its investigation, *iStories* obtained a 2014 video that shows Polyakova standing next to Lavrov and President Putin during a consecration ceremony in a Russian Orthodox church. Polyakova is reported to own multiple luxury properties with a combined value of over \$13.5 million. (*The Moscow Times*, September 14, 2021)

COMMUNIST PARTY WILL NOT RECOGNIZE E-VOTES

The Russian Communist Party will not recognize the electronic voting results of this past weekend's parliamentary elections, in which the ruling United Russia faction claimed a landslide victory. The announcement came after candidates suddenly lost their leads to candidates from United Russia, despite being significantly ahead throughout the voting process. Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov called for supporters to "defend the election results like the Podolsk cadets defended Moscow [during World War II]." The election has brought to light the issue of e-voting, which was introduced during the pandemic, and critics have claimed that it is easier to falsify votes because of it. Kira Yarmish, spokeswoman for jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, tweeted that "electronic voting robbed this procedure of even a hint of reality." (*The Moscow Times*, September 20, 2021)

BELARUS INCLUDED IN THE SCO'S "PEACE MISSION 2021"

It was announced on Monday that members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) had commenced the bloc's "Peace Mission 2021" anti-terror drills in the Ural Mountains. The exercises, held biannually since 2003, include servicemen from Russia, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This year, however, the drills also included a new entrant. Russia's Central Military District head, Colonel-General Alexander Lapin, said that "For the first time ever, the military contingent of the Republic of Belarus is taking part in the drills." Throughout the exercise, which is now underway, troops will test new methods of conducting joint combat operations using 5,500 troops and over 1200 items of armament, military, and special hardware. (Itar-TASS, September 20, 2021)

RUSSIA FOUND RESPONSIBLE FOR LITVINENKO ASSASSINATION

By a vote of six to one, the European Court of Human Rights has found the Russian government responsible for the 2006 poisoning and subsequent death of ex-FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko. Litvinenko fled to the United Kingdom in 2001, where he was granted asylum. He died of polonium poisoning in London five years later. The ECHR ruled that Russia had violated Article 2 of the European Convention - the right to life - in its involvement in Litvinenko's poisoning, and had failed to carry out an "effective domestic investigation" into the circumstances thereafter.

The ECHR ruling has been widely dismissed by Russian officials, including Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who said that the Russian authorities "aren't prepared to listen to such rulings." State Duma lawmaker and suspect Andrey Lugovoy, meanwhile, has called the judgement "most idiotic" and "absolutely politically motivated." (*Meduza*, September 21, 2021)