



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2500

December 20, 2021 Ilan I. Berman, Kate Flaherty

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Resource Security; Middle East; Russia

POTENTIAL OIL SURPLUS EMBOLDENS RUSSIA AND OPEC+

In response to calls from President Biden to increase the global supply of crude oil, Russia has insisted that the world market is not experiencing an oil shortage, and that there may even be a surplus as soon as early 2022. "Inventories have stopped drawing, which shows there is no deficit at the moment," Russian Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin noted, expressing a sentiment shared by other OPEC+ members, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Sorokin added that "everybody is predicting a surplus of supply starting from the first or second quarter." Crude oil prices have begun to rise as global consumption increases, resulting in a parallel increase in OPEC+ production. (*Bloomberg*, November 15, 2021)

ANOTHER ACTIVIST MAKES THE GOVERNMENT'S BLACKLIST

Pyotr Verzilov, a prominent member of the protest band Pussy Riot, has joined the growing ranks of independent media outlets, journalists, and activists who have been labeled as "foreign agents" or "undesirables" by the Kremlin. According to his lawyer, Leonid Solovyov, Verzilov failed to report his Canadian citizenship, landing him on the Russian Interior Ministry's blacklist. Solovyov has insisted that the activist, who was previously married to Pussy Riot's Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, faces fines or community service, rather than imprisonment, for the infraction. Verzilov is also the publisher of the independent news website *Mediazona* which, along with its editor-in-chief Sergei Smirnov, was recently designated a "foreign agent" by Russian authorities. (*ABC News*, November 15, 2021)

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE FINED

Six fines totaling just over \$1,800 have been handed down to Dmitry Muratov and *Novaya Gazeta* by a Moscow court. Muratov, *Novaya Gazeta*'s editor-in-chief and a recent Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was accused of abusing freedom of mass information as well as failing to disclose the status of "foreign agents" mentioned in the paper's articles. The hearing in which the fines were discussed took place without any of the publication's representatives present in court. In fact, *Novaya Gazeta* had not even been notified about the proceedings in the first place. (*Meduza*, November 17, 2021)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The judicial action follows a public warning from the Kremlin. When Muratov won the Nobel Prize earlier this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin signaled that his status as a laureate would not protect him from potentially being labeled as a "foreign agent" if he breaks the law - although he did not specify which laws Muratov was in danger of running afoul.]

NEW CHECHEN LEGISLATION SEEKS TO CHANGE MEDIA LANGUAGE

A new proposal by the regional government of Chechnya is seeking to tighten restrictions on press reporting nationwide. In early November, the Chechen parliament submitted a draft law to the State Duma that would ban the press from mentioning the nationality and religious identity of people who have been involved in or committed a crime. The ban specifically targets amendments to Article 4 of Russia's Law on Mass Media, and was put forward out of a purported "need to preserve interethnic and interfaith harmony and peace" in Russia. (*Meduza*, November 22, 2021)

[EDITORS' NOTE: While the move has the potential to limit the already-beleaguered media sphere in Russia still further, it is also a response to detrimental social dynamics. Recent coverage in the media and on social media has promoted negative attitudes toward marginalized groups, and even encouraged restrictions of their rights or violence against these same people.]

CLIMATE CHANGE WILL SEVERELY IMPACT ST. PETERSBURG

Climate scientists have estimated that, by 2050, the average winter temperatures of St. Petersburg, Russia, a low-lying city built on what used to be marshes, could be as much as 4 degrees Celsius (more than 39 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than the pre-industrial average. In the past 50 years, St. Petersburg's annual temperature has already risen by 1.5 degrees Celsius, and the city can expect to receive 20-30% more snowfall by 2050 and a 40% increase in floods. "This will happen because of global sea levels rising by 0.5 to 1 meter by the end of the century," said Yelena Akentieva, a senior researcher at the Voeikov Main Geophysical Laboratory. "Wind circulation has already changed and southwestern winds, which are what contribute to surge waves, are now dominant." The aforementioned increase in flooding and rainfall, in turn, is expected to severely strain St.Petersburg's existing drainage and flood mitigation measures. (*The Moscow Times*, November 19, 2021)