



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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

INFORMING ON YOUR CLASSMATES COMES BACK INTO VOGUE

A new reporting policy at one of Russia's universities reflects that the country is regressing further into Soviet police state practices. Penza State University, located in Russia's Volga region, is encouraging students to report "suspicious" peers as part of an effort by Russian authorities to prevent acts of sabotage. The FSB, Russia's notorious internal security service, had flagged a potential attack by a group of students in the region, and the university's administration used that to justify its new policy. The FSB and the Kremlin have repeatedly accused Ukraine and the United States of conducting terror attacks on Russian soil, and of recruiting young Russians to engage in armed violence. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, many Russian enlistment facilities have been the targets of arson attacks, and many Russians who oppose the war have been victims of Soviet-style denunciations by other Russians as part of the government's campaign against internal opposition. (The Moscow Times, May 12, 2023)

THE KREMLIN'S CURIOUS RETENTION POLICY

After nearly a year-and-a-half of conflict with Ukraine, some Russian political elites and civil servants want out, but the Kremlin won't allow it. iStories, an independent Russian media outlet, has published a report showing that the Russian government has, for all intents and purposes, banned many officials from resigning their posts. The Kremlin reportedly sees such desires as a "betrayal," and is threatening to prosecute officials who try to resign. According to the report, at least two regional governors have attempted to resign since February 2022, and some FSB officers have complained that they are being forced to remain with the security service even though their contracts have ended. Other outlets such as Radio Svoboda and The Bell previously reported that some officials and employees of state-run companies had been barred from leaving the country, and that their passports had been confiscated in order to ensure compliance. (Newsweek, May 16, 2023)

CITIZENSHIP FOR SERVICE

Russia's military has suffered severe losses in Ukraine, and Moscow is now taking more desperate measures to try and attract new fighters. Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree simplifying and shortening the application process for Russian citizenship for those foreigners who sign a one-year contract with the Russian military. The decree builds on previously enacted legislation from September 2022 that required new applicants for Russian citizenship to serve for at least 6 months in Ukraine. However, the new decree supercedes this requirement, instead attempting to incentivize military service by proffering expedited citizenship. (Newsweek, May 16, 2023)

NEXT STOP, MINSK

While the world's attention is focused on its war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia has quietly occupied neighboring Belarus, a leading opposition activist has charged. Speaking at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit, Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya outlined that her country risks losing its independence because of Minsk's growing embrace of Moscow. According to Tsikhanouskaya, the regime of President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus since 1994, "is now selling to [the] Kremlin our country piece by piece." Earlier this year, Moscow announced that it will station nuclear weapons in Belarus by July, a move that Tsikhanouskaya urged the West to prevent. Belarus also allowed Russia to launch part of its initial invasion of Ukraine from Belarusian territory. (PoliticoEU, May 15, 2023)

RUSSIA'S BRAIN DRAIN INTENSIFIES

Over the past several years, Russia has experienced a massive "brain drain," as the country's best and brightest – including educators, scholars and scientists – have departed in response to the deepening authoritarianism of Vladimir Putin's rule. This trendline, moreover, has accelerated since the start of the Ukraine war, as both professionals and ordinary Russians have sought to avoid conscription into the Kremlin's war of choice.

All of which has had a major impact on the intellectual health and future potential of the country. Just how much was recently made clear by Valentin Parmon, the Vice President of the prestigious Russian Academy of Scientists. According to him, "no other countries have lost so many workers in the scientific field" as Russia over the past half-decade. That tally, according to Parmon, is a whopping 50,000 people – and it holds dire consequences for the future of the Russian state. "[T]he future depends on knowledge-intensive technologies," Parmon tells Interfax, "[and] Russia as a state has let those who can do it [these specialties] go." (Interfax, May 18, 2023)