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Maybe It'll All Be Different

Op-Ed by **Artemy Troitsky**



ANNA PAVICH

Let's begin with some takeaways from 2017. **THE CENTENARIES:** Mention 1917 to any Russian and it will conjure up powerful associations — major changes, revolution and calls to depose the country's leadership.

Nothing is more frightening for the current regime than a possible repeat. So every effort was made to ensure that people would not so much as notice — much less celebrate — the events.

YOUTH PROTESTS: The youth have become a new factor in Russian politics and a major headache for the ruling regime. Anti-corruption rallies showed that the new generation differs from the herd of the 2000s, which was content to channel its energy toward beer, legal highs and money.

ALEXEI NAVALNY: Anti-corruption crusader and opposition leader Alexei Navalny was inarguably Person of the Year. He has electoral campaign offices in dozens of cities, organized hundreds of street protests, rallied tens of thousands of volunteers and his videos have been viewed millions of times.

The authorities arrest, detain and provoke him and his supporters, and even resort to violence. This country has never seen such a David and Goliath standoff, even in Soviet times.

But most Russians fear Navalny. Many have a love-hate relationship with what they consider the "rotten intelligentsia." They have been taken in by the Kremlin's clever propaganda that paints Navalny as a U.S. spy, a new Boris Yeltsin or even another Josef Stalin.

FOREIGN POLICY ADVENTURES: Since 2014, Russia has behaved like a bully who terrorizes well-clad, respectable citizens.

In addition to the unpopular and questionable foray into Syria, the Kremlin has started an outright cyber war with the West by employing legions of hackers, trolls and bots.

The goal was to influence the foreign and domestic policies of Russia's Western enemies. The surprise attack worked, but Putin's cyber minions failed to cover their tracks, prompting a counter-response. What's more, U.S. President Donald Trump turned out to be less manageable than Putin had hoped.

THE WEST SHOWS ITS TEETH: Actions the Kremlin finds humiliating — sanctions, blacklists and everything from the arrest of Russian oligarchs to the expulsion of the Russian Winter Olympic team — have become increasingly frequent.



ANTON KARDASHOV / MOSKVA NEWS AGENCY

Unsurprisingly, the Kremlin responds to all of this with indignation — feigned or otherwise — resentment and denials.

What's next in 2018?

The increasingly unstable situation, especially in the economy, complicates predictions, but the following developments seem likely;

ELECTIONS: This year's "new face" (tongue firmly in cheek), Vladimir Putin, will win a sweeping electoral victory with about 70 percent of the vote. He'll even do it without "carousels" or the other usual polling station tricks.

Communist Party leader Pavel Grudinin and Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky will garner 8-10 percent each, Ksenia Sobchak and the Yabloko party's candidate Grigory Yavlinsky will each win 2-3 percent.

Navalny has not been allowed to run, so his supporters will boycott the elections and attempt to disrupt the voting process. They will hold protest rallies right up until Putin's inauguration and riot police will round them up in hordes.

GOVERNMENT: Putin will send Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev into retirement, either just before or just after the election. Medvedev will be replaced by either a liberal technocrat such as

former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin or Central Bank head Elvira Nabiullina.

Alternatively, he might be replaced with a "get out to vote" patriot such as Sergei Glazyev or FSB Major General Georgy Rogozin. Or someone — anyone — who is completely neutral.

FIFA WORLD CUP: It will be the most miserable World Cup in history because nobody really wants it.

After the Sochi Olympics doping fiasco, Russia's leaders know that even the World Cup cannot restore their reputation. Russia's national team will undoubtedly give a mediocre performance at best and the whole enterprise will cost the country a fortune.

Aside from the inconvenience, ordinary citizens have nothing to gain. Foreign fans will arrive in small numbers and with great caution — if they come at all.

FOREIGN POLICY: With peacekeeping as the goal, Russia's foreign policy will proceed slowly and reluctantly, in line with the country's shrinking economy — just as the West hoped it would.

Moscow will continue to haggle over Ukraine, seeking an end to sanctions in return for this or that concession. Russia will also partially fulfill the Minsk agreements and withdraw most of its forces from Syria.

When the team investigating the crash of the MH17 Flight over eastern Ukraine announces its conclusion that a Russian missile downed the Boeing aircraft, Moscow will declare the findings lies and slander.

The Kremlin will similarly deny that Russian hackers and trolls attacked the U.S. elections and democratic processes in Britain and France.

POLITICS AT HOME: The right-leaning, conservative ideological bent will deepen until it starts to resemble monarchism. The 100th anniversary of the assassination of Tsar Nicholas II and his family will be commemorated with pomp and fanfare.

The protest movement will stay strong, focusing its demands on the Moscow mayoral and St. Petersburg gubernatorial races. In addition to Navalny, new opposition leaders will emerge, including familiar faces such as Dmitry Gudkov, and relatively young newcomers. Immediately after the presidential elections, Ksenia Sobchak will disappear from the political arena.

Just rumors

— A new Russian Constitution will be adopted that will allow Putin to stay in power beyond 2024;

— Putin will marry a descendant of the Romanov family;

—The authorities will re-introduce exit visas for Russians;

— Putin will develop multiple sclerosis and hand over power to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov;

— U.S. hackers will influence Russia's elections and the ruble exchange rate;

— Russian oligarchs will write a secret letter to Putin asking him to imprison Rosneft head Igor Sechin;

— The Russian national football team will take a \$1 billion bribe from Saudi Arabia to lose their World Cup game.

And, maybe, everything will turn out differently.

Maybe Putin's ruling regime will begin to show signs of weakness, a Russian Orthodox fundamentalist or progressive liberal will come to power, the country's economy will collapse or a new "thaw" will improve Russia's relations with the West.

Let's check back one year from now. **TMT**

Artemy Troitsky is a journalist and writer teaching in Tallinn, Estonia.

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FEBRUARY



Activists protest a law decriminalizing domestic abuse and reclassifying “violence that doesn’t cause significant injury” and happens once a year as a misdemeanor.

ALEXEI NASEDKIN



Ildar Dadin is released from a Siberian prison where he says he was subjected to torture, after serving some 15 months for protesting.

ALEXEI ZWIEGERT / TASS

MARCH



ARTUR NOVOSILTSEV / TASS

In the largest anti-government protests since 2012, tens of thousands take to the streets in cities across Russia. More than 1,000 people are detained and opposition leader Alexei Navalny is handed a 15-day jail sentence. Similar anti-corruption protests take place in June and, coinciding with Vladimir Putin’s birthday, in October.

APRIL

A bomb explodes on the St. Petersburg metro, killing 15. The suicide bomber is a Russian citizen born in Kyrgyzstan.



ANDREI NIKOLAYEV / TASS



YEVGENY FELDMAN

Navalny is attacked with antiseptic green dye known as zelyonka, suffering eye damage.

MAY



SERGE SAVOSTYANOV / TASS

A plan to relocate 1.6 million Muscovites from their Soviet-era “krushchevki” apartments brings thousands out onto the capital’s central Sakharov Prospekt.



ARTYOM GEODAKYAN / TASS

Theater director Kirill Serebrennikov is questioned and his theater, the Gogol Center, searched. Serebrennikov is later put under house arrest for allegedly embezzling state funds. Dozens of prominent cultural figures speak out in his defense and attend his court hearings.



BOLSHOI PRESS SERVICE

A surprise hurricane sweeps over Moscow, killing 16 and injuring several hundred others.



VITALY KUZMICHONOK / TASS

JULY



KIRILL ZYKOV / MOSKVA NEWS AGENCY

Five Chechens are handed sentences for the murder of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov. The man who pulled the trigger is given 20 years behind bars, but Nemtsov’s team argue the masterminds are still at large in Chechnya.

JULY 7: Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump finally meet on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Hamburg. On allegations of Russian election meddling, Trump says: “Every time [Putin] sees me he says, ‘I didn’t do that’ and I really believe that. He really seems to be insulted by it and he says he didn’t do it.”

AUGUST

JULY 28: Russia's Foreign Ministry orders sweeping cuts to U.S. diplomatic staff. In response, Russia is told to close its San Francisco consulate and two diplomatic annexes.



The Kremlin's PR stunt of the year features a bare-chested Vladimir Putin catching a pike with his hands in the far reaches of Siberia.

KREMLIN PRESS SERVICE

OCTOBER



Ksenia Sobchak announces her presidential bid, setting off a storm of speculation on whether she, the daughter of Putin's former mentor, is a "spoiler candidate."

ANDREI LYUBIMOV / MOSKVA NEWS AGENCY

SEPTEMBER



"Mathilde," a film on the love affair of a ballerina and Tsar Nicholas II, hits the screens to the outrage of Duma Deputy Natalya Poklonskaya, who says it offends believers. Orthodox activists set fire to the filmmaker's studio and a parked car in protest.

DMITRY GUDKOV / HQ

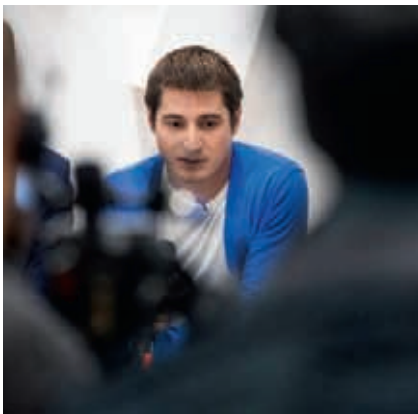
DONAT SOROKIN / TASS



SEPTEMBER: The \$245-million Zaryadye Park near the Kremlin opens to the general public after five years of construction. Bloggers criticize sloppy construction work and say some visitors are stealing part of the plant life.

Russians head to the polls in elections for different levels of government. In the sixteen regions which held gubernatorial elections, United Russia wins every seat. Still, the opposition celebrates a victory as opposition candidates secure seats in ten Moscow districts.

NOVEMBER



Maxim Lapunov testifies he is one of dozens of gay people who were allegedly persecuted and tortured in Chechnya. The republic's leader Ramzan Kadyrov denies the allegations, saying there are no gay people there.

PAVEL GOLOVKIN / AP / TASS



The centenary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution receives little attention from the Kremlin. Across the country, there are bombastic celebrations for a different anniversary: the military parades of 1941, when Soviet troops went to fight the Nazis on the front lines.

SERGEI KISELYOV / MOSKVA NEWS AGENCY

DECEMBER



In front of an audience of car factory workers, Putin announces he will seek a fourth presidential term that would extend his rule to 2024. No one is surprised.

KREMLIN PRESS SERVICE

The International Olympic Committee rules Russia will not be allowed to participate in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics over doping claims. Some officials call for a Russian boycott.



SERGEI FADEICHEV / TASS

DECEMBER 23: World Cup teams are assigned their groups at a star-studded event in the Kremlin that includes Diego Maradona and Gary Lineker.



Former Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev is sentenced to eight years in prison for allegedly taking a bribe from Rosneft head Igor Sechin. The verdict sends shock waves through the elite and smells of a set-up. Spooked by the case, Russian officials reportedly start refusing New Year's gifts.

ANDREI LYUBIMOV / MOSKVA NEWS AGENCY



"We have created conditions for absolutely free and transparent elections." Head of the Elections Commission **Ella Pamfilova**

2

independent candidates, one of whom is Putin

March 18

date of elections and fourth anniversary of annexation of Crimea



Voters were not "looking for something original," IMA-Consulting said of the election logo

The Succession Dilemma

Op-Ed by **Gleb Pavlovsky**

ANNA PAVICH

In late 2016, just as he was all but forgotten, Alexei Navalny announced his presidential bid, forcing Russian politics into the spotlight. His campaign has been the longest in Russian history, but are his rallies proof that President Vladimir Putin has lost his grip on power? Of course not. So why even talk about it?

On Telegram, political insiders continue to obsess over rumors from within the presidential administration. But these Kremlin leaks no longer reflect the political landscape. The authorities are merely putting new clothes on an old presidency — a task so uninteresting that students in Kazan had to be cajoled into meeting Putin. Spin doctors have been dispatched to the regions

to help — but with what? Electing Putin in Putin's Russia is about as difficult as shooting a large fish in a very small barrel.

The key to understanding Russia's political future does not lie with Putin, but with his fatally weak administration.

Solving problems used to be easy: Putin would send one of his friends to speak to another and had them report back. But with money tight these days, there is little to discuss or arbitrate. Of course, Putin cannot just stop overseeing the interests of Russia's elite entirely. The difference with before is that he has become an obstacle to the process, not a facilitator, because no one can assume his role without undermining his authority.

The way the power hierarchy in Russia is organized means the quest for the next president is a bad joke: Everyone understands that while Putin may hand over the nuclear codes, he won't give up his role as arbiter-in-chief.

Meanwhile, the fate of Putin's most trusted inner circle depends entirely on him staying in the Kremlin. For them, prolonging his presidency is of primary importance. But there is nowhere to discuss the succession question: not in Kremlin circles, not anywhere, except maybe on a yacht far out at sea with fellow billionaires.

As a consequence, there is also little progress on the important question of who will head the government after the elections. Whoever replaces Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev will

automatically be seen as Putin's intended successor. Naturally, that person will look to strengthen the government.

Putin, of course, can easily keep that process in check, but weakening the Cabinet will make it impossible to push through much-needed reform. Just consider the failure of Putin's "May decrees." Having first adopted an unrealistically ambitious reform program, Putin then deprived the government of the ability to act without constantly looking over its shoulder at a suspicious Kremlin.

Under Boris Yeltsin, we in the Kremlin understood that picking a successor was more than just selecting a name. Yeltsin put in place all the necessary mechanisms and resources for his successor, even before he knew the identity of the frontman. That sort of preparation is now lacking in the Kremlin.

And so ahead of the March 18 presidential elections the Kremlin is already burdened with an issue it cannot even discuss in public: that of who will come after Putin.

The program for the next six years still has to be decided and already its main instrument, a strong executive branch, is absent. Medvedev's shaky Cabinet is powerless to do anything of substance, but will nonetheless serve as the arena for infighting around a weak president.

If that shaky government is also tasked from above with putting through reforms, the country will find itself in a perfect storm of administrative chaos. Such an inherently unstable ruling regime will not last more than a year or two.

Putin is no longer the solution to any of the problems facing Russia, even the problem of picking his own successor. He himself poses a problem to his inner circle, which cannot exist without him. Sooner or later, this game without rules or referees will break out onto the political surface which Navalny has exposed.

The looming conflicts in this Kremlin drama are as inevitable as their ultimate resolution is veiled. **TMT**

Gleb Pavlovsky is a political scientist and a former aide to Boris Yeltsin.



ANNA PAVICH

'NOT VOTING IS A QUESTION OF HYGIENE'

On the March 2018 election

These are not elections. I have known the result for a long time and so has everyone else. The only unknown is the turnout. If there is a low turnout, the victory will feel incomplete.

The Kremlin has to convince itself, the electorate and the outside world that this is a government chosen voluntarily by a large majority. This is why all its resources — including the media and the candidates — have been given only one assignment: to increase the turnout.

On Alexei Navalny's call for a boycott

In 2017, I was excluded from the gubernatorial elections. I said then they couldn't be called elections because there wasn't a single real candidate participating. I am not going to vote in March, because I don't want to participate in non-elections. If Navalny works hard to promote a boycott, he could have a real statis-

tical impact. But, more importantly, not voting is a matter of principle, of hygiene.

On the state of the opposition

There is no political opposition in Russia. Parties like the Liberal Democratic Party and the Communist Party are, in effect, sub-departments of United Russia, the ruling party.

There is only one power vertical and everyone in politics is in it: some as a back-up plan, just in case, some because they expect preferential treatment.

I don't call myself an "oppositionist." I am just a person of common sense. No one appointed me to my post, I was chosen by the majority in competitive elections.

That is why I have more scope to act than government-backed officials. But where I can't bring change, I can share my opinion and not take part in what I oppose. There are many who think what I think, but don't dare to speak out. I know what I'm risking.

On running for re-election in September

If they held the vote tomorrow, I would run and win. But here I'm stuck in a catch-22. There is a law in the

making to cancel direct mayoral elections in Yekaterinburg. If I announce my candidacy, I have no doubt this law will be immediately implemented. If I don't run, maybe they'll leave the direct vote in place. Everyone is watching each other very closely.

On what the future holds

Society is not ready for change. Conditions in the country are worsening, but only gradually.

All hope lies with the youth. They are more free, less scared and less zombied out. They don't watch television, they get their news online and many speak foreign languages.

I am waiting for the moment when I can be useful and tune in. The country is visibly changing. But for now the situation will only get worse, politically and economically. These are times which have to be sat out and survived.

Then again, this is Russia we're speaking about. We could discuss 100 different scenarios but, undoubtedly, it will be the 101st that actually comes to pass. **TMT**



The Moscow Times spoke with opposition politician **YEVGENY ROIZMAN**, who has been the mayor of Yekaterinburg since defeating a United Russia candidate in 2013.



"There's a struggle for power in Putin's politburo. It's getting more intense." Political analyst **Yevgeny Minchenko**

65%

turnout in 2012 elections



If he wins, Putin will become Russia's longest-serving leader since Josef Stalin

\$630,000

spent on the election's PR campaign, including 50 videos and a logo

2018МАРТА

**ВЫБОРЫ
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Monitoring the Election Won't Be Easy

Op-Ed by **Grigory Melkonyants**

Sanctions imposed by the West after Russia's annexation of Crimea, the doping scandal and the decline in Russians' living standards at home mean the president must now prove to the world that he enjoys the unconditional support of the majority. His legitimacy might be the only capital Russia has left.

For that the Kremlin will need international and national monitors. The presidential administration could, of course, decide to obstruct the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights as it did in 2007-08 or bar the Golos election monitoring NGO as it did in 2011-12. But that looks unlikely.

The upcoming presidential elections differ from those in 2012 in multiple ways: The country, the composition of the Central Elections Commission (CEC) and electoral laws have all changed.

In fact, changing the rules ahead of every federal election has become something of a tradition in Russia. Golos has calculated that the authorities introduced 15 amendments to presidential election legislation between 2012 and 2017. In total, 59 out of the law's 87 articles and all four appendices have been changed.

Two of those changes have important implications for the participation threshold. First, the number of signatures required from candidates from non-parliamentary parties and independent candidates has been lowered to 100,000 and 300,000, respectively.

Second, in what is an obvious attempt to prevent political opponents such as Alexei Navalny and Mikhail Khodorkovsky from entering the race, there is an excessively harsh policy that bars candidates with a criminal record from running for office for up to 15 years. The refusal to register them will likely damage the integrity of the election and could lead to unrest. But the Kremlin is apparently willing to accept the fallout as the lesser of two evils.

The voter turnout is going to be an important indicator these elections. The turnout for State Duma elections fell sharply from 60 percent in 2011 to 48 percent in 2016 — reflecting either the electorate's waning interest or less tinkering with the results.

It will be difficult for authorities to reach the 65-percent turnout of 2012. This means they will have to find unconventional ways of getting people to vote and observers will have to monitor those efforts closely for possible abuses.

For example, the CEC estimates that as many as 5 million voters could use a new and vastly more convenient process to register at a specific polling station online. But the system could be abused by bosses at state companies who could coerce their employees into selecting a polling station under their control.

Surveillance cameras will be an important policing instrument. There will be cameras at all polling stations, as in 2012, as well as

at election commissions' regional branches. The "Live Turnout" project also allows anyone to help record the actual turnout in real time. And observers from anywhere in the world can monitor voting in regions with a supposed 90-percent turnout, such as Dagestan or the Kuznetsk Basin, without traveling there.

The presence of observers from federal and regional Public Chambers are a more "exotic" innovation. Although they are supposedly independent, it is no secret that most Public Chamber members are appointed by the authorities. In fact, the authorities could come up with countless "public" observers simply to claim that monitors were in place at all 95,000 polling stations. Meanwhile, civil society organizations are not allowed to send monitors directly to polling stations themselves.

Another change since 2012 is the staff reshuffle at the CEC. Vladimir Churov, who oversaw the scandalous 2012 elections, fell out of favor with the Kremlin and was replaced with Ella Pamfilova, who had a better reputation. Some accuse her of burying existing problems, while others argue she is simply doing what she can to correct the country's rotten electoral system against resistance from other Commission members and officials.

As usual, the authorities will go out of their way to show that everything proceeds fairly on Election Day itself.

It is up to observers, therefore, to shine a light on the entire electoral process: on the abuse of administrative resources, and on whether candidates are allowed to run, are given equal airtime or are obstructed during their campaigns.

For example, the presidential administration is not responsible for managing the elections, appointing election commission officials, selecting political strategists or distributing financing to candidates. There are serious grounds for believing they are doing all this, however. Even more surprisingly, the public now considers it acceptable.

Today, observers should not only respond to violations, they must also take proactive and preventative action. Educating voters is the core of that work. Observers should teach citizens to defend their rights so it becomes natural for them to do the same.

Luckily, many organizations stand ready to help. Russia now has a powerful movement of monitors that have emerged from past presidential elections.

But fighting political corruption will require society's broader support. **TMT**

Grigory Melkonyants is co-chairman of the independent Golos election monitoring group.

5 Warnings for the Next PM



Op-Ed by **Tatyana Stanovaya**

Whoever becomes Russia's prime minister after March will face at least five looming threats.

The first is parliament. In past years, the Kremlin gave the State Duma a "task" which the Duma then "revealed" in the form of a bill to be passed and handed over to the Federation Council. The upper chamber then almost always approved the bill so it could be signed by the president.

The tug-of-war between the government and parliament that exists in developed democracies is almost unheard of in Russia, where everything works within a single integrated system of subordination. The strength of that "unity" will be tested at the first sign of large-scale social tensions. When socio-economic issues arise, the prime minister is vulnerable to attack from both the ruling party and the, for now, government-friendly parliamentary opposition.

The second threat is allegations of corruption. The grilling of Dmitry Medvedev in the spring of 2017 by opposition leader Alexei Navalny was not an exception and the opposition's investigations into abuse of power are likely to continue on a much larger scale. There will probably not be a second "Crimea consensus" and support for the authorities will inevitably erode. The new prime minister and his ministers will be attractive targets for Kremlin critics who see exposing compromising information as a tool of influence.

The case against Alexei Ulyukayev illustrates the third threat. Even though the former economic minister was targeted for his specific conflict with oil giant Rosneft's Igor Sechin, this does not mean other officials are safe. The Ulyukayev case shows how easy it was for Sechin to ensure the downfall of a minister whose only "crime" was to take part in an unpleasant discussion of Rosneft's right to purchase Bashneft. It is a classic case of a politically powerful player colliding with a weak administration. A point of intrigue will be how the political heavyweights of the Putin era, like Sechin, relate to a technocratic and official power vertical that lacks political power.

The future prime minister and his Cabinet will hold the formal reins of power in their politically feeble hands, while real privileges and influence are held by "empowered" players whose actions often go far beyond the letter of the law. Against this backdrop, the intelligence agencies, which can eavesdrop on anyone at any time, will gain influence.

Unpopular reforms are the fourth threat the prime minister faces. Everything will depend on the availability and quantity of resources required for meeting the needs of the state. If money is short, there will be reforms. The future prime minister might have to assume responsibility for implementing unpopular decisions such as changes to the retirement age and flat tax rate, and healthcare reforms.

The fifth and last threat is administrative and political paralysis. In recent years, a weak government, the absence of political will and Putin's preoccupation with geopolitical issues have deprived the Cabinet of energy and kept it from making important decisions. What decisions has Medvedev's government made in the last six years? Only two come to mind: the implementation of the Platon payment system and the sale of Bashneft.

Under the inertia of the current situation, in which oil prices remain relatively stable and there are no looming cataclysms, the future Cabinet risks degenerating into little more than a think tank for the president's administration, stripped of its ability to govern or take initiative.

But considering what has been said above, that is by no means the worst possible outcome. During Putin's fourth (and final?) term, the head of the government will have little choice but to act cautiously, if at all. The future prime minister will be one of Russia's most vulnerable political figures of recent years. **TMT**

Tatyana Stanovaya is a political scientist at the Center of Political Technologies.



"I have just one diagnosis: Your politics today, gentlemen, are a dismal pile of crap." Presidential candidate **Ksenia Sobchak**

13

years since a woman ran for president

11%

of Russians support the idea of a female president



"Strange that in a 'feminine' country like Russia women don't aspire to take up the top posts." Political scientist **Alexei Chesnakov**

Smashing the Taboo

By **Loretta Marie Perera**

More women are running for office, but Russia's feminists still feel left out



In a quiet coffee shop in central Moscow, a small group of women are speaking in hushed, urgent tones.

Nothing about these women in their early thirties sets them apart from the students or young families in the café. No one would guess they belonged to an increasingly politically active movement of Russian feminists.

The women are discussing the trial of Tatiana Sukhareva, a fellow feminist with presidential ambitions. The openly gay activist had taken part in rallies and was a vocal critic of domestic violence, job discrimination and homophobia.

"To a first world citizen these views won't look extreme," says Yulia Alexeyeva, an activist and volunteer at the Sisters sexual assault NGO. "But in Russia, they're almost radical."

Shortly after launching her political career in 2014, Sukhareva was accused of violating the terms of a suspended sentence she received that year for selling fake insurance policies. In December 2017, she was sentenced to 5 years and 4 months for the violations, barring her from running for public office.

With women like Sukhareva sidelined from mainstream politics, Russia's growing community of feminists is struggling for representation.

"It's important for there to be a real choice of candidates, whether male or female," says Natalia Timofeyeva, another activist from the group. "And we don't have that."

United front

The group is varied, and its members hold a range of political views, from radical to liberal. They agree, however, that issues central to women need to be defended in Russia, where feminism remains taboo.

"For some Russians, a feminist is a woman with opinions," says Timofeyeva, who runs the online feminist groups Female-Power and FemView. "In this country, feminism is still a dirty word."

In spite of this, the community has grown in recent years, Alexeyeva adds, and the internet has played a key role in bringing people together. There are women's groups on VKontakte, Russia's biggest social media platform, which have tens of thousands of followers. "And the number is growing," says Alexeyeva.

Some of the support groups are not overtly political, discussing everyday issues like family life, body-positive fashion and supporting young mothers.

The goal is to create a support network for women. "The internet gives them an opportunity to say 'I am not alone,'" Timofeyeva says.

The movement is also taking its message offline. Last year the group staged demonstrations against beauty pageants and sexism on university campuses. On International Women's Day, a group rallied at the Kremlin with signs that read "All power to women" and "We are the majority." Six activists were detained.

Even at events approved by the authorities, however, the women face arrest, fines or confrontations with far-right conservative groups like the Russian Orthodox activist group Sorok Sorokov.

Before protests, they leave instructions with friends and family detailing what to do in case they are detained, and their lawyers' numbers are on speed dial. "We always have the necessary documents and medicine with us," says Alexeyeva. "Just in case."

No representation

Women were dealt a heavy blow at the start of 2017 when President Vladimir Putin decriminalized domestic violence, downgrading it to an administrative offense.

"We lost that fight," says Kira Solovyova, one of the founders of the ONA (She) feminist association. "We also didn't achieve serious changes in other spheres like fighting anti-abortion policies or lifting profession bans on women," she told The Moscow Times, referencing Soviet-era laws excluding women from hundreds of professions.

Even though women are a majority in Russia — 78 million, compared with 66 million men — they remain underrepresented in government.

Health Minister Veronika Skortsova, Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets and Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina are routinely cited as women at the top of Russian politics. A closer look, however, shows they are an exception: Women hold just 61 out of 450 State Duma seats.

Four women will be included on the ballot in presidential elections in March — more than ever before. Among the candidates are activist and former nude model Yekaterina Gordon; the vice-president of a Moscow sausage-making company, Elvira Agurbash; leftist politician Natalya Lisitsina and former reality TV star Ksenia Sobchak.

Sobchak, who is the most high-profile female candidate, has made women's issues a part of her campaign, speaking openly against gender and sexual discrimination. Russia's feminists, however, are skeptical she can bring real change.

"Is it sincere or is she just trying to increase support from minority groups?" Solovyova asks.

"If we assume that a feminist is a woman who lives as she wants, then of course Sobchak is a feminist," adds Timofeyeva. "If a feminist is a woman who fights for the rights of all women, then she is not."

Some within the feminist community have called for a boycott of the elections. Others, however, argue that a female candidate is their best hope for improving conditions for women in Russia. "We have to choose the least of all evils," Timofeyeva says.

Alena Popova, a gender equality advocate, stresses the need for unity. "We have to strategize, to use all the doors we have to promote equality," she told The Moscow Times.

Beyond the ballot

Elections aside, the list of issues Russia's feminists want to make headway on in 2018 is daunting: the domestic violence law, maternity and paternity leave, abortion rights, post-divorce custodial matters, the pay gap — with women earning on average 30 percent less than men — and gender equality.

"We still don't have [a gender equality] law because according to our constitution, women and men are equal," Popova says. "In reality, they're not."

Their biggest obstacle, however, may be their compatriots. In a recent poll by the independent Levada Center, only 11 percent of Russians questioned said they wanted a woman to lead the country. "We should not only focus on protesting against, but also on fighting for something new and more progressive," says Solovyova.

For Popova, the question of whether Russia is ready for a woman president is a statistical one. With women outnumbering men, "Give it five to 15 years," she says.

In the meantime, no fine, prison sentence or threat of confrontation will discourage Russian feminists, says Alexeyeva: "I wouldn't be able to sleep at night knowing I did nothing to help my sisters." **TMT**



"I believe it's my duty to finish the reforms that are taking place in the city." Moscow Mayor **Sergei Sobyenin**

52%

of Russians approve of their governors



Sept. 9 Russia will hold gubernatorial, mayoral and parliamentary elections

11

governors were temporarily appointed by Putin in 2017

Regions of Inertia

Op-Ed by **Natalia Zubarevich**



ANNA PAVICH

When it comes to Russia's regions, 2018 will probably not bring much news. Inertia is huge and little changes year-to-year.

We can, however, give a general forecast of the economic, budgetary and political climate this year.

Unlike in 2015 and 2016, when regions which focused on the defense or food industries boomed, there are unlikely to be any "champions of growth." In 2017, growth stagnated. In 2018 it is likely to grind to a halt altogether.

Defense spending has slowed and the food industry is limited by a 12-percent fall in average real incomes between November 2014 and October 2017. On the other hand, the country's economic crisis has ended and the risk of a recession in the regions is almost nil.

Predicting regional budgets is more difficult. The stabilization of the economy and wage growth means there should be more revenue from profit and personal income tax.

And with the federal budget in decent shape thanks to higher oil prices, the regions will probably get the same financial assistance from Moscow as last year. Funding from central government in January to September 2017 rose 8 percent year-on-year, and ahead of presidential elections in March it is likely to increase further, with Crimea and Chechnya getting the most.

But there are still risks. By redistributing regional revenues to the federal budget, Moscow is effectively dispossessing the regions.

The wealthy Sakhalin region in the Far East has been stripped of most tax on profit from the Sakhalin-2 oil and gas project. But Moscow, which receives only 25 percent of all local revenue from profit tax, has lost the most.

It remains to be seen whether Moscow, with its 2-trillion ruble (\$35 billion) budget last year, will be able to keep a larger slice, arguing that it needs to fund infrastructure projects including a hugely expensive urban renewal project, or whether the dispossession of Russia's wealthiest region will continue.

Following a presidential decree last year, the regions must also give pay rises to state employees, including doctors. And they will have to implement a promise the president made in November to pay parents a monthly allowance for their first child. How much of that bill will be footed by the regions has yet to be determined, but they could end up with budget shortfalls as a result.

Another problem is debt. The regions together owed 2.4 trillion rubles as of November 2017, almost half of which consists of super-cheap loans issued by the Finance Ministry, which will shrink drastically in 2018.

The Finance Ministry will extend the payback period for past loans provided the regions balance their budgets. But it is unclear whether that can continue given the ministry's own growing

spending obligations. However, this will not necessarily lead to defaults. The Finance Ministry has so far been relatively successful at allocating funds to regions on a case-by-case basis.

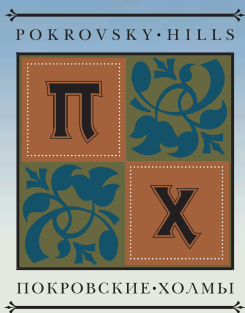
After the presidential elections, the arbitrary reshuffle of regional governors will continue. Interim governors appointed by the president in the fall will be voted into their positions permanently in 2018, just like their predecessors appointed in the spring. The population is eager for new faces, thinking it is the best hope for positive change.

The challenge that most governors face is not winning elections, it is finding a way to manage their regions with severely limited financial resources. The chorus of new governors requesting money from the federal budget will grow ever louder, with Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of Chechnya, as lead singer.

How politically active the regions will be is the most difficult to predict. Any political activity is likely to take place in regional capitals, where residents are the most progressive and demanding of change.

But don't expect any major political upheavals in 2018. Russians' patience has yet to be exhausted. Apathy will reign from Moscow to the periphery. **T.M.T.**

Natalia Zubarevich is a professor at Moscow State University's geography department.



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"If that's really how the Russian football team would perform after doping, just imagine how we would perform without it!" **Vitaly Mutko**

\$11.8Bln

approximate cost of the World Cup

3.2 billion

people (almost half of the world's population) watched the last World Cup



Iceland will become the smallest country ever to compete at a World Cup, with about 336,000 residents. Of Russia's host cities, only Saransk has fewer people

Playing for a Miracle

By **Evan Gershkovich** | Illustrations by **Evgeny Tonkonogy**

Russia might be hosting the World Cup, but it won't lift the trophy

On a crisp, cool morning in early November, the Russian national football team trained on the outskirts of Moscow in preparation for friendly matches against Argentina and Spain, two of the favorites to raise the FIFA World Cup trophy in Russia this summer.

Spirits were high. Jogging around a dewy field in front of a group of journalists, the team broke out in laughter when one player collided with a training mannequin and was sent sprawling to the ground.

Perhaps the players' moods should have been more somber. Hosting its first World Cup from June 14 to July 15, Russia will mark another, less proud record. For the first time in the tournament's 88-year history, the host will field the lowest-ranked team.

The reason for the national team's plight: An overweening Russian state that limits the freedom of the country's professional clubs, coddles Russia's top players and has hollowed out talent, football analysts and managers say.



"This generation of footballers is nowhere near the level of 10 years ago," says Russian football journalist Igor Rabiner.

High hopes

In 2010, when Russia was chosen to host the 2018 World Cup, it all looked very different.

Russian football was riding a triumphant high. During the 2008 European Championship, Russia reached the knockout stages of a major tournament for the first time, and even advanced all the way to the final four teams.

Confidence was so high in the quarterfinal match against the Netherlands, one of the world's strongest sides, that when the Dutch equalized in the final minutes, a Russian commentator simply shrugged it off. "So what?" he cried. "We still have time!"

Within minutes, Russia scored twice, with midfielder Dmitry Torbinsky finishing an inch-perfect pass from striker Andrei Arshavin, who then himself slotted the ball between the goalkeeper's legs soon after. Half a million Muscovites poured into the capital's streets to celebrate.

"That team could compete with England, Germany, Spain — anyone," recalls Guus Hiddink, the team's head coach at the time.

For optimists, the result had augured the beginning of a Russian golden age.

"Seize the moment!" wrote Rabiner, the journalist, after the match. "When have we ever known this — that Europe admires our play?"

Fairytales

In retrospect, however, Euro 2008 was a fairytale run.

Russia had barely qualified after squeaking past a weak Andorra on the final day of qualifying; it would have stayed home if England had not lost to Croatia.

Russia's team was also led by Hiddink, a wizard at squeezing the best out of underdog teams. In 2002, he brought South Korea, which had previously never won a World Cup match, to the tournament's semifinals; and in 2006, he took Australia to the competition for the first time in 32 years.

Yet managers in international soccer come and go, and when Hiddink inevitably departed in 2010, Russia's team faltered.

Two World Cups and two European Championships have passed since then. And each time, Russia has failed to qualify or been knocked out in the group stage.

'Do the math'

The primary reason for the team's perennial mediocrity is a state policy limiting the number of foreign players in Russia's professional football league, say analysts and coaches.



Introduced in 2005 and tightened in 2015, the rule means that at least five of the 11 players fielded by Russian Premier League teams must be Russian citizens.

The aim was to help footballers improve by ensuring that they get time on the pitch. "Do the math," said former Sports Minister and Russian Football Union President Vitaly Mutko in 2015. "You can see how many Russians are playing."

Support for the policy comes from the top. As recently as October, President Vladimir Putin chastised Zenit St. Petersburg for having "eight foreigners running across the pitch" when the team plays in European competition matches.

Many, however, say the logic is flawed. Rather than improve, the guaranteed playing time has meant the best Russian players become "lazy," said former Zenit St. Petersburg coach Andre Vilas-Boas in 2015.



GUUS HIDDINK

The former coach of the Russian national team — which he led to the European Championship semi-finals in 2008 — speaks with The Moscow Times about the state of Russian football.

On the 2008 team

You would have to go back to 2006, when I first arrived. We began forming a good team with very skilled players who were attack-oriented. A few were also very creative. We had a disciplined and organized defense. That team played a pragmatic style of football. And we had some truly great players in Yuri Zhirkov and Andrei Arshavin. I loved working with them. That team could compete with England, Germany, Spain — anyone.

On Russian players tending to stay at home

There are good salaries in Russia, I don't know if players see a need to go abroad. Their life

is good in Russia, so they don't really want to leave. But maybe for their development there is a need to compete where the challenge is higher.

Arshavin and Zhirkov played very well in England. They were truly great during their first few years. I was happy that those players had the guts to go abroad and to go on an adventure.

On developing a strategy for the World Cup

When I was getting ready to leave in 2010, it seemed likely that Russia might be awarded the 2018 World Cup. And I said, "This is such a huge country. Why don't we start preparing and scouting now for the top 15 to 19-year-olds and

working properly with them?" I don't know what has been done since because I have been away from the program. But I really felt that a plan was necessary, so they could have a competitive team.

On Russia's chances

I watched all three of Russia's matches during the Confederations Cup. They had good moments, but there were some vulnerable moments as well. It's a little bit uncertain what the actual performance of the team will be at the World Cup.

One year is a lot of time to prepare for the big advantage that they will have playing at home. If they can cope with the pressure, it will of course be a big plus. **TMT**



Visitors will not need a tourist visa for Russia during the World Cup, though they will need proof of ticket purchase

88

years since first World Cup



"They called us Putin's army ... Putin has met up with us and drunk beer with us." Soccer hooligan **Alexander Shprygin**

June 14

Russia's opening match against Saudi Arabia

The measure also removes players' incentive to move abroad to more competitive leagues where they may have to work harder to get playing time, says Toke Theilade, chief editor of the Russian Football News site.

Plus, the pay in the Russian Premier League is good, averaging \$1.5 million per year, not far off the world's top five leagues, according to a 2014 study. And with the top players hanging around in Russia, there are fewer vacancies for younger up-and-coming players to fill, stifling new talent.

Denis Romantsov, an editor at the site Sports.ru, puts the issue plainly. "In short," he says, Russian players have "started to get worse."

Big state

As a fan, Vladimir Ageyev wants Russia to have a 2008-like run this summer. But as a professional, he wonders if losing all three group stage matches would do the country some good. "Perhaps, then, we will finally change," he says.

For Ageyev, a professor at Moscow State University's Sports Management Center, Russian soccer's problems begin with massive state subsidies.

Eighty percent of Russian clubs' incomes rely on the state, he says. And, according to a report last year by UEFA, European football's governing body, Russian Premier League teams earned only 4 percent of their revenues through ticket sales and 5 percent from television rights — easily the lowest percentages of Europe's top 10 leagues.

That means clubs are not run like competitive businesses, says Ageyev. It also gives huge power to politicians and encour-

ages top football officials who want to feel secure in their jobs to pander to Putin and Mutko.

"It really is a closed club," says Theilade. "It's difficult to get in as an outsider unless you go out and buy your own team."

If the state lets go, Russian football could thrive, says Ageyev. He points to FC Krasnodar, a club in southern Russia founded 10 years ago by billionaire Sergei Galitsky. The club's self-professed aim is to stock its team with players trained in its in-house football academy, and it is already starting to churn out some of the country's best talent.

"We Russians like to say about ourselves that we love

extremes," says Ageyev. "Either we stay in one place, or we totally change."

If left up to him, it's time to tear off the band-aid. "The longer this goes on," he says, "the more painful the revolution will be."

Feeling lucky

Several days after the training session in November, Russia lost its friendly match against Argentina 1-0 — a misleading score considering how thoroughly the Argentines dominated the game.

Following the match, Russia's coach Stanislav Cherchesov was stubbornly optimistic. "We can only start growing when we play at high speeds against the world's leading teams," he said.

The issue, though, is that lately Russia has not had much opportunity for growth. While the other 31 teams in the World Cup have spent the past two years competing to qualify, Russia, as the host, entered automatically.

Still, luck has been on Russia's side, with the December draw in Moscow handing Russia one of the weakest of the eight World Cup groups. Russia's includes a strong team in Uruguay, but also Egypt, which last qualified for a World Cup in 1990, and Saudi Arabia, which last won a tournament match in 1994. Two of the four teams will go through.

Perhaps, then — even with all of its issues — 2018 might be the year that Russia advances out of the World Cup group stage. And after that? Well, fans could witness another miracle. **TMT**



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"We offer more comfort than police cells." Head of a Nizhny Novgorod drunk tank **Mikhail Bulukov**

11

World Cup
host cities

2,400 km

from eastern to western
host cities (Yekaterinburg to
Kaliningrad)

The official 2018 World Cup mascot is Zabivaka the wolf. It was chosen via an online vote

Through the Years



1960

1980

1990

2000

2010

2018

The Russian national team's primary kit has gone through many iterations. There have been pinstripes, shoulder accents, diagonal sashes, checkerboard patterns and versions that combine all of the above. Yet there is a constant: the nation's famous red and white. This summer, the Russian team's uniform will resemble its classic Soviet look — sober red shirts and socks, paired with white shorts.

No Time for Hooligans

Op-Ed by **Marc Bennetts**

ANNA PAVICH

Ever since Russian football hooligans crashed their way into the global consciousness with their display of unashamedly gleeful violence at Euro 2016, I have received regular requests from media outlets eager to meet "ultras" thirsting to sup the lager-rich blood of Englishmen at this year's World Cup.

It is more than a little tiresome. Not to mention pointless. Unless, of course, you happen to be a group of Russian football hooligans, in which case you can now, thanks to the age-old law of supply and demand, command fees of around \$3,500 for a brief explanatory chat to a U.S. television crew on the finer points of sticking the boot in.

The media frenzy was understandable in the aftermath of the spectacular violence in France. Masked Russian ultras threatening "war" at the 2018 World Cup sell papers and attract viewers.

But, with the tournament less than six months away, the chances of large-scale football-related clashes at this summer's event are about as low as the likelihood of Russia's national team lifting the trophy. That is to say, not too high.

While some Russian government officials made no secret about the vicarious thrills they got from seeing their on-tour hools mashing up Marseille, it is a very different thing to have the very same ultras stomping on heads in Moscow in front of the world's television cameras.

Vladimir Putin has exceedingly dubious keepie-uppie skills and he is no football fan. But the World Cup is a(nother) vanity project for Russia's long-lasting leader — one that is designed to showcase Russia to the rest of the planet. Football hooligans are definitely not part of the plan.

Accordingly, well-known Russian ultras have been under police surveillance for some time. Civil rights are not a priority for Russian cops: such is the pressure that some well-known football hooligans are even planning to leave the country for the duration of the World Cup. Their passport exit stamps will act as cast-iron alibis in the unlikely event of trouble. Turkey, I hear, is a popular destination.



THANASSIS STAVRANIS / AP / ITASS

Several dozen Russian fans were deported after violent clashes with England supporters at Euro 2016.

"I'm absolutely certain that nothing even close to what took place in Marseille will happen here," Alexander Shprygin, the man named by British media as the ringleader of Russia's hools at Euro 2016, told me. "There is total surveillance. Even I feel the pressure, and I am an official with a public organization."

Just days after our chat, Shprygin's supporters' association was outlawed, and he was nabbed by masked police while taking a toilet break at a conference at a posh Moscow hotel.

He was questioned over a brawl between rival fans in Moscow before being released. Just for good measure, however, someone set fire to his expensive car that very same evening. The message was clear: No one, and especially not the ultras, will be allowed to get in the way of Putin's vision for the World Cup.

Three English club sides — Tottenham Hotspur, Liverpool, and Manchester United — have visited Russia since Euro 2016. The sound of peace was deafening. In Rostov-on-Don, Manchester United fans were given blankets to keep them warm during their Europa League tie and the English side's official Twitter account thanked Rostov FC for the "warm welcome."

No one is ruling out the possibility of violence altogether, of course. But some believe it is more likely to come from "patriotic" Russians looking to teach evil Westerners a punitive lesson than ultras bouncing off on the skulls of rival fans.

"What are the chances that some pissed off local in the provinces who has been fed a diet of anti-Western television for the last few years will just take an axe and say, 'I'll show those bastards?'" Quite high, I'd wager," Alisher Aminov, a former candidate for leadership of the RFU, Russian football's governing body, told me last year.

And, if that wasn't enough to distract from the actual games, there is also the call for a boycott of the World Cup over the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine.

I am not too convinced by this appeal, which is led by Western critics and Russian human rights figures. Mainly because I have never believed that the World Cup should only be staged in countries with crystal clear records.

That is partly because the first World Cup I remember took place in Argentina, which was ruled at the time by a military junta whose chosen method of combating critics was to throw them out of planes over the Atlantic Ocean.

But also because it is called the "World" Cup — whoever said the world was a good place?

I don't look to FIFA's quadrennial event for moral guidance. Juntas, dictatorships, and unbridled corporate greed fit right in. **TMT**

Marc Bennetts is the author of "Football Dynamo: Modern Russia and the People's Game."



"It's definitely not a disadvantage."
Russia's coach **Stanislav Cherchesov**
on playing on home soil

5

Oleg Salenko's record World
Cup goals in one match



Russia has never advanced into the
knockout stages

10 years

time it took to build
St. Petersburg's
Krestovsky Stadium



ANNA PAVICH

Op-Ed by **Alexei Smertin**

A World Cup to Learn From

It will be a World Cup which will change everything. And if not everything, then a lot.

I remember sitting in front of the screen as a child in an apartment in Barnaul and watching Diego Maradona's magnificent play. Since then, I associate the World Cup with holidays.

I could not have imagined then that I myself would participate in the World Cup one day. I did, in Japan in 2002. Even though it wasn't my best performance, it was a dream come true.

Now this holiday has come our way, to Russia. For a long time it remained some kind of fantasy. But now that it is 2018, there are mere months left until the tournament kicks off.

For me, the World Cup is not just a competition between the world's best teams. This is, first and foremost, a great launching pad for the promotion and development of football in Russia. It is a chance for young football fans to see the best players in the world and take up the sport. It is an opportunity to change football in Russia for the better – in many ways.

It's been almost a year since I joined the Russian Football Union as an anti-discrimination officer. And I remember how it all began; with skepticism in the Western media and online commentators saying nothing could be done about racism in Russian football. But I've always believed in giving it your all, just like you do in football.

Our main achievement this year has been to assemble a team of professionals in the field of combating discrimination. As the Russian expression goes, a lone man in the field is no warrior. And I'm a team player.

Together, we developed a unique internal anti-discrimination monitoring system tested in the Russian championships, which assists inspectors during the match. We present match reports to the Control and Disciplinary Committee and have applied sanctions, including fines and partial stadium closures, to various teams.

But the only way we can encourage a new generation of fans who know what it means not just to support their team but also to respect each other, is through education.

Together with Russia's World Cup Organizing Committee, we have visited schools where we give lessons on combating discrimination. Starting this year, we also teach a course at Moscow State University's philosophy faculty that includes theoretical and practical knowledge on how to promote a policy of anti-discrimination in world football.

I've been impressed by the students, some of whom are far from football but show an understanding of the problems highlighted by the course. Now, together with the Insight educational center, we are developing lessons for teachers of schools nationwide on diversity. These lessons won't just be about football

but about dialogue between different people. And football, in my opinion, is a great platform for dialogue.

Millions of fans from all over the world will come to Russia and see it is a hospitable country. And when the tournament ends, they will return home and tell stories about their fantastic travels to their relatives, friends and colleagues.

They will come back to Russia to enjoy the culture and to see their Russian friends, who, I am sure, will be made by everyone who attends the World Cup, because Russians are friendly.

Of course, there are people who think they can afford to shout insults – but these are a minority of the total number of fans. And often, they do so out of a lack of education, not spite.

These people will not even get to the World Cup stands, since FAN ID passports will only be issued to fans without a record of abusive behavior during matches. Russia's State Duma in November supported a proposal to keep the system in place after the World Cup so that fans understand their share of responsibility when they come to the stadium.

So I encourage everyone to come to the World Cup and be part of this great holiday, become part of history! Plunge into this amazing atmosphere with us. **ТМТ**

Alexei Smertin is the Russian Football Union's anti-discrimination officer and a former Russian national team captain.

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"Our right to privacy is more important than the fear of terrorism." Telegram founder
Pavel Durov

The Moscow Times
January 2018

2 years

Vladimir Timoshenko's sentence for critical VK post

July 2017

Dmitry Medvedev rolls out Digital Economy Program



According to Russia's VPN law, internet services have three days to block access to websites included on the state media watchdog's blacklist

Going Digital



Op-Ed by **Nikolai Suetin**

Of all the technological trends that will affect Russians in 2018, the spread of digital services will be the most important.

For our country with its size and extremely unequal population distribution, digitization is not only "useful" — it is one of the most important instruments for economic development and improving people's lives. Realizing this, the government has adopted a Digital Economy Program to help roll out digital technologies nationwide.

Only the development of digital and telemedicine will give Russians easy access to medical consultations with highly qualified, and foreign, specialists. Further improvement of clinical decision support systems, involving artificial intelligence technology, will bring the best of modern medicine to Russians and protect patients from preventable errors.

In online education, modern algorithms will enhance education on all levels by giving every student a tailored experience. Another expected transformation in the coming years is the emergence of "e-teachers." This online system could provide study materials, generate tasks for students, track and comment on performance, automatically evaluate students' responses and record their grades in an e-journal. The system wouldn't replace humans, but it could free teachers from up to 50 percent of routine tasks.

Artificial intelligence technology will also be widely used to increase the efficiency of state services, from taxation to judicial practice.

One of the most interesting trends here is the development of automation in the legal sphere. There is even a special term, LegalTech, which includes the automatic generation of legal documents, but also the automation and increased availability of legal services, and even the digitization of judicial proceedings.

For Russia, where the legal culture is generally not advanced and attitudes toward the judiciary are generally mistrustful, this technology could radically change — and, in fact, is already changing — the entire image of legal services.

For example, this year, the implementation of the State Automated System "Justice," which allows citizens to file lawsuits in electronic form, has led to a sharp increase in the number of claims. Federal judges can also make rulings in electronic form. With electronic systems analyzing documents for consistency and compliance with the law, the entire legal system is made more accessible and transparent.

Blockchain technology could prove its potential in the field of property ownership, including intellectual property, as well as in the more widespread use of smart contracts without any intermediaries.

Of course, there is a flip side to every innovation. For digital medicine, the main challenge will be how to protect patient data and ensure safe access. For digital technology, there is the threat of online theft, sabotage and cyberterrorism.

In 2016, the cybersecurity company Group-IB estimated the total damage to the Russian economy caused by cybercrime was 203.3 billion rubles (\$3.5 billion). That is 0.25 percent of Russia's GDP. In 2017, Sberbank estimated that cyber attacks had cost Russia between 600 and 650 billion rubles.

Developing methods of control, preventing cyber threats and efficiently investigating offences is becoming a growing priority for the state, businesses and ordinary citizens.

One of the solutions can be found in biometric identification systems or video surveillance technologies for automatic facial identification, including those developed by the Skolkovo-based Vocord Company and VisionLabs.

This is a trend which will stay relevant beyond 2018. **TMT**

Nikolai Suetin is the Vice-President on Science and Education at the state-funded Skolkovo Foundation.



The Kremlin's Ticking Tech Bomb

Op-Ed by **Andrei Soldatov**

For more than five years, the Kremlin has tried to find a way to bring the internet in Russia under its control.

Now under mounting pressure to bring online activity to heel ahead of presidential elections in March, the authorities have developed a distinctive strategy that sets it apart from China or Iran.

The approach rests on two pillars. The first is the use of intimidation: The Kremlin has always been behind the curve in terms of its tech, but it has never lacked the resources for selective repression. Second, rather than targeting individual users, it is going after tech and internet companies. They are easiest to scare because they have the most to lose.

The most scandalous legislation of 2017, banning VPN services which facilitate anonymous browsing, confirmed this strategy. The bill involves internet service providers in the enforcement system by requiring providers to check the state censor Roskomnadzor's blacklist of uncooperative VPNs on a daily basis and take immediate action.

As always, the results have been mixed. Although Roskomnadzor reported that some VPN services have complied with the law, the most popular VPN services have openly defied the legislation.

Meanwhile, 2017 saw a new wave of protests in 80 cities, organized primarily on the VKontakte social network. It was also the year during which a new generation of political vloggers produced content that went viral on YouTube. Neither of these phenomena could have been predicted.

The fact that the Russian authorities were caught off guard on the eve of a presidential election has added more fuel to the Kremlin's already high level of internet paranoia. Drastic action on the Kremlin's part is to be expected — it's an election year, after all. The only question is: What will it do?

The Kremlin has neither the time nor the resources to introduce an effective system of nationwide mass online surveillance before the elections — it wouldn't be able to overhaul the in-

frastructure of the Russian internet in years, never mind a few months.

Imitating the Chinese approach, with its massive and costly system of censorship combined with Chinese technology, does not seem feasible, not least because of the Russian secret services' own reservations toward opening up Russian telecommunications to Beijing and possible Chinese surveillance.

For two years, global internet giants Google, Twitter and Facebook have been tangled in a peculiar dance with Roskomnadzor, and its tone has long become irritatingly monotonous: Roskomnadzor issues a warning forcing the three companies to move their servers to Russia, and the companies send another high-placed official to convey another vaguely formulated promise with no purpose other than to calm down the Kremlin and buy some time.

Time, though, could be running out. A ban on one of the companies — even if it is temporary — has looked like an attractive option for the Kremlin for years, and it will become all the more attractive as the authorities become more desperate in 2018.

The second option, to send more people to jail for their online posts, is also entirely within the capabilities of the Russian secret services.

This could become even more tempting as the Kremlin becomes increasingly conscious of the fact that the most sensitive content distributed on the Russian internet is generated in Russia itself, not in Washington.

The most depressing thing about all of this is that while Russia's censors apparently need Putin's personal permission to go after global platforms — at least some sources have pointed to the president to explain the absence of such a ban until now — repression could be intensified at the drop of a hat.

The technology and resources for that are already in place. **TMT**

Andrei Soldatov is an independent journalist and co-author of "The Red Web."

“That we have tested equipment and weapons under combat conditions is huge. Now we’re confident in our weapons.” General **Valery Gerasimov**



\$49Bln
planned spending on defense in 2017



In 2017, there was a sudden scare that the U.S. was preparing to target Russia with bioweapons. “Why are they doing this?” Putin asked

48,000
Russian service members involved in Syria operations according to official statistics

Starving Wolf No Longer: Can Russia Sustain Its Military?

Op-Ed by **Michael Kofman**



In December 2017, Vladimir Putin triumphantly declared Russia’s victory over terrorists in Syria. Addressing troops during a surprise visit to the Khmeimim airbase, he also announced a partial withdrawal of forces. “The homeland is waiting for you, friends. Godspeed!” he said.

Although Russia’s intervention on the side of Bashar Assad did meet with marked success, Putin’s declaration was little more than political theater timed for the upcoming presidential campaign in March — Russia has already announced troop reductions in Syria three times.

Not only is the military actually unlikely to withdraw from Syria, it will probably continue operations there. The Kremlin next year will also continue to fuel its other major conflict, Ukraine, by supporting proxy forces in breakaway republics in the country’s east.

But even as Russia’s global conflicts look set to roll into 2018 unhindered, its Armed Forces are at a crossroads. Divergent spending priorities, resource constraints and myriad dilemmas loom over the horizon.

Russia’s Aerospace Forces have shown dramatic progress compared to their performance in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. Military reforms launched that same year and a large modernization program in 2011 have left their mark.

They also, however, displayed their limitations. Lacking precision guided munitions, targeting pods to make good use of them and smaller munitions, the Russian air wing’s combat performance is still arcane compared to its Western counterparts. It is effective, but brutish.

Cognizant of these limitations, Russia is now pursuing a new arsenal for non-contact warfare, one based on long range precision weapons and other guided munitions. But moving forward will be no easy feat in the face of its confrontation with the United States.

Western sanctions, which now seem destined to stay in place for many years, are hampering Russia’s access to key technologies. Sanctions have also made the international cooperation necessary for these technological developments more difficult.



What’s more, Russia is having to balance its demand for more advanced weapons with a slew of other priorities.

The war in Syria may have been a testing ground for new generations of weaponry, such as Kalibr sea-launched, Kh-101 air-launched cruise missiles, or KAB-500S satellite guided bombs. But where Russia has capability it often lacks capacity. As the old adage goes, “Quantity has a quality all its own.” Here, the Armed Forces lack significant quantities of precision guided munitions.

The purchase of precision guided weapons en masse will run headlong into a takeaway from Russia’s war in Ukraine: the need for a larger ground force.

Since 2014, Russia has been repositioning forces around Ukraine’s borders, setting up three new divisions and a combined arms army, along with additional brigades. This force has been a drain on men and matériel and shifted spending priorities.

To equip new regiments, like those deployed on Ukraine’s borders, with tanks, armored personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery, Russia has to expand its ground force. This, too, is a costly undertaking. But signs suggest that in the next State Armament Program 2018-27, priorities will shift toward the army and the Airborne Troops.

All the while, Russia’s defense budget has been declining since 2015 even as costs grow. Defense spending in 2017 was planned for around 2.84 trillion rubles (\$49 billion), down from 3.09 trillion in 2016. Even more reductions are planned for 2018 and 2019, and the upcoming State Armament Program also seems quite modest at 19 trillion over 10 years.

Competition for resources is tight. From developing armed drones, to sustaining the space lift program and recapitalizing the strategic bomber force, nearly all sectors of the Armed Forces are vying for attention.

Alongside expanding the ground force and arming them with newer weapons, Russia also wanted to expand the size of the contract share of its military force to 425,000 by the end of 2017. These are the better trained, more specialized servicemen. Smart soldiers are more important than smart weapons.

This lofty goal, which would have required adding as many as 50,000 contracted servicemen to the Armed Forces every year since 2012, began to stall last year, proving impossible to reach. And comments from senior officials indicate they will fall short of reaching the less ambitious 405,000 figure heading into 2018 due to a large number of previously made service agreements expiring.

The Armed Forces may expand, but they are visibly struggling to increase the number of contract servicemen.

Russia’s conflicts in Ukraine and Syria aside, a busy regimen of training exercises and readiness also factors into costs. The Armed Forces are more operational today than they have been since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Here, too, there are sustenance costs and expenses that steadily eat into the budget.

All the while, spending on healthcare, pensions and education threatens to displace defense spending as a national priority. After the March election, Moscow will have to reconcile social and defense spending priorities, making hard choices about the kind of military it wants to field into the 2020s. **TMT**

Michael Kofman is a senior research scientist with the Center for Naval Analyses.



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"I think their intention, coming from the very top with Putin, was to hurt me and to help Trump." Democratic nominee **Hillary Clinton**



68%

of Russians consider the United States an enemy

December

Putin declares victory over terrorists in Syria during a surprise visit



Dmitry Medvedev described new U.S. sanctions against Russia as the declaration of a "trade war," saying they ended hopes for an improvement in bilateral ties

Staying Power

By **Jonathan Brown** | Illustration by **Loom Agency**

Russia's grip on the world order may be tightening, but how long can the Kremlin hold on?

When Vladimir Putin landed in Syria late last year, he was greeted by President Bashar Assad not as a foreign dignitary, but as the guardian of the embattled nation.

"Syria has been preserved as a sovereign and independent state," Putin told soldiers assembled at the Khmeimim airbase, Russia's flag flying alongside Syria's. "You are returning victorious to your homes, your families, parents, wives, children and friends."

However, his mission to declare victory, order troops home and accept the gratitude of a president whose staying power had baffled the entire Western world was just a layover. Next was Egypt and a \$21-billion nuclear energy deal. Then to Turkey, where he and President Tayyip Erdogan chastised the United States for recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

In 2017, Russia took center stage abroad. Moscow strong-armed Syria's peace process and sent the West into a state of collective hand-wringing after revelations about Russian trolls sowed confusion on social networks. The country's state oil giant Rosneft snatched a flurry of high-risk energy deals in warring countries where the West is vying for influence.

But how much longer can Russia keep this pace abroad? "The Russian economy does not match the Kremlin's geopolitical ambitions," says Vladimir Frolov, a Russian political scientist. Russia's foreign policy plays in 2017, he says, might have come cheap but "even the Kremlin's current scrappy influence-promotion abroad has a cost."

What West?

Relations between Washington and Moscow went into a dramatic tailspin after U.S. President Donald Trump signed fresh sanctions against Russia into law last August. When Moscow retaliated by ousting hundreds of U.S. diplomatic staff, Washington shuttered Russia's consulate in San Francisco.

"The U.S.-Russia relationship is non-existent at this point," says Frolov. "It may look like our presidents have a phone relationship, but chances are it does not go beyond pandering to Trump's sense of self-importance."

The possibility of an extension of sanctions later this year will show whether relations can plummet even further. The U.S. Treasury is expected to come up with a list of members of Vladimir Putin's inner circle by February. "The big unknown, of course, is how Putin will react and where the point of impact will be," Frolov told The Moscow Times.

Any thaw between the powers would first require Russia to change its position on Ukraine or convince the U.S. it did not meddle in elections. This would require a "completely off-the-books secret dialogue between two or three trusted advisers," says Frolov. "Unfortunately, neither Russia nor the Trump team have such people or leaders who trust their advisers."

Barring a meltdown in oil prices or an embargo on the sale of Russian oil, Putin can afford to sustain its confrontation with the West well beyond the March elections, which he is expected to win hands down. For now "Putin is invulnerable to external and internal pressure," says Frolov.

Political drilling

Western sanctions against Russia's energy sector after the annexation of Crimea have not stopped the Kremlin from brokering new economic partnerships abroad.

Early last year, Russia's state-run oil giant Rosneft closed a pair of high-risk oil deals in volatile countries that left analysts scratching their heads — they seemed to be motivated less by economics than by politics.

Rosneft's agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government in February came as Iraq was in the throes of ousting Islamic State (IS), the terrorist group banned in Russia. Kurdish authorities, whose deal with Rosneft was the first independent of Baghdad, were also in the middle of planning an independence referendum that threatened civil war.

Although Putin has denied Russia was wading into politics, the deals in Iraq have important political implications, says Livia

Paggi, a Russia specialist at the risk consultancy GPW. "Influence over Kurdish oil not only enables Russia to consolidate its growing influence in the Middle East but also gives it political leverage over Turkey and the United States."

Chris Weafer, an analyst at the Macro Advisory consultancy, noted the geopolitical importance of the deal at the time, describing it as "potentially good economics for Rosneft and good politics for the Kremlin." Rosneft struck similar deals in India, Libya and Venezuela last year.

The state-run oil giant is "absolutely" working to implement Russia's foreign policy aspirations, Paggi told The Moscow Times. "Looking at Rosneft's recent deals, there is no easy way of untangling what is a clear-cut political or economic motivation."

Russia also wants to combat the perception at home and abroad that sanctions have marginalized the country. But, Paggi warns: "The political and economic benefits of these deals will only become clear in the long-term. They are very high-risk and there is significant uncertainty around them."

Russia's Middle East

The Kremlin's new role as the main power broker in the Middle East, sidelining the United States, is not as fragile, says Dmitry Trenin, head of the Carnegie Moscow Center think tank.

Not only did Russia bring rival parties of the Syrian conflict to the negotiating table, but it also solidified relationships with the region's fiercest adversaries Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia, whose king last year made a historic visit to Moscow.

"Russia is not imposing some kind of order that it will have to sustain, like the United States," Trenin told The Moscow Times. "It is projecting its own interests. And that's an entirely different proposition."

Unless Russia takes on a policy goal it is not capable of delivering, like bringing the Israelis and Palestinians to a final peace settlement, its strategy in the Middle East is sustainable, Trenin says.

With IS on the backfoot, however, the Kremlin also faces the prospect of thousands of jihadists who traveled from Russia and Central Asian countries to Iraq and Syria returning home.

In 2017, St. Petersburg was hit by two terror attacks claimed by groups linked to al-Qaida and IS. But fears that Russia will suffer more attacks because of returnees — when it stages presidential elections and hosts the World Cup — are unfounded, says Trenin.

Russia is in constant danger of terror plots. "What is spectacular," he says, "is how few terror attacks there have been since the beginning of Russia's intervention in Syria."

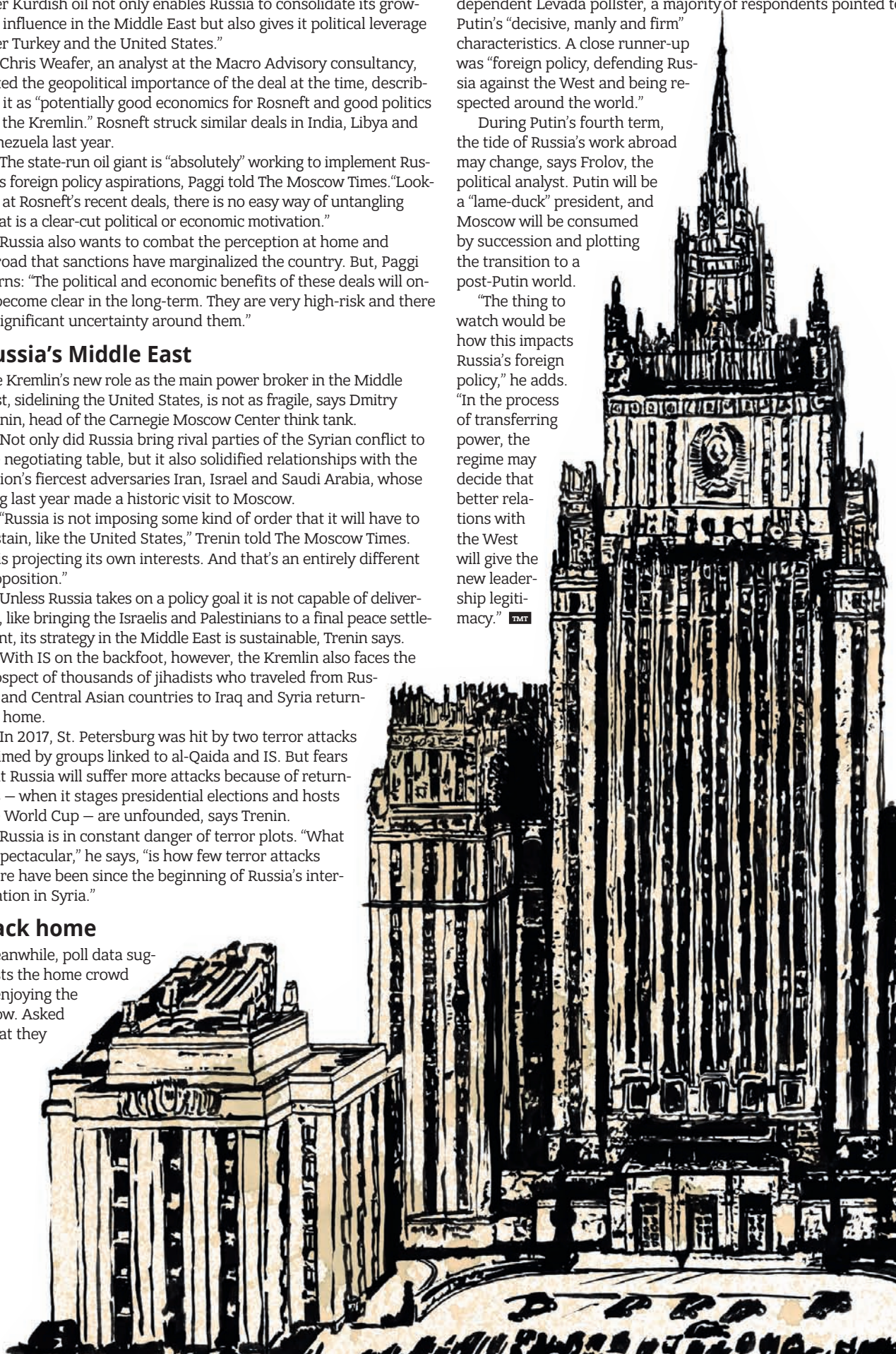
Back home

Meanwhile, poll data suggests the home crowd is enjoying the show. Asked what they

liked most about their president in an October survey by the independent Levada pollster, a majority of respondents pointed to Putin's "decisive, manly and firm" characteristics. A close runner-up was "foreign policy, defending Russia against the West and being respected around the world."

During Putin's fourth term, the tide of Russia's work abroad may change, says Frolov, the political analyst. Putin will be a "lame-duck" president, and Moscow will be consumed by succession and plotting the transition to a post-Putin world.

"The thing to watch would be how this impacts Russia's foreign policy," he adds. "In the process of transferring power, the regime may decide that better relations with the West will give the new leadership legitimacy." **TMT**





"In the 21st century, competition for who shapes the world order has toughened." Foreign Minister **Sergei Lavrov**

9,000

former U.S.S.R. countries' militants in Syria and Iraq



The U.S. branch of the Kremlin-funded RT news channel in November registered as a "foreign agent" under a 1930s law against Nazi propaganda

September

Russia launched Zapad 2017 military exercises with Belarus, for "purely defensive" reasons

We Can and Must Improve Ties With Russia

By **Jon Huntsman**

For a better future for Russians, Americans and the world, we have to begin to find solutions to the common problems

Reflecting on my first months as U.S. Ambassador to Russia and looking forward to the prospects for 2018, I remain convinced that not only can we improve the U.S.-Russia relationship, but we must.

We are making progress, and there is much more we can achieve by rolling up our sleeves and finding a constructive way forward. We all know that the road ahead will be a difficult one, and that the issues that have come between us are complex.

For a better future for Russians, Americans and the world, we have to begin to find solutions to the common problems that confront us around the globe. How do we get there? I think it all comes down to two things: trust and results.

It's no secret that our relationship is at its lowest point in years. People in the United States have made it clear that they expect and demand an improvement in the U.S.-Russia relationship. It's part of my job as a diplomat to get results, and I have pledged that I will do whatever I can in an honest, open, and transparent way to work with my Russian counterparts to discuss the hard issues related to our bilateral relationship the same way that I'm sure Ambassador Antonov is doing in America.

America and Russia can do extraordinary things when we cooperate, whether in space, in concert halls, in laboratories, or in business. This cooperation is the essence of people-to-people diplomacy, which forms the bedrock on which Russia and the United States have built lasting cooperation. So much is possible when we recognize the common ground that unites Russians and Americans. It is far greater than that which divides us.

As in any relationship, when times are difficult and we don't see eye-to-eye, we need more communication, not less. As two great civilizations, we should be maximizing our relationship, not minimizing it. We need to take it to a higher level of trust. And once we achieve greater trust, more doors will open and we'll be able to do more together.

Two areas in which we can and must cooperate are North Ko-



U.S. EMBASSY

rea and Syria. Let's be clear about the situation in North Korea: We simply cannot continue to accept the progress of Pyongyang's nuclear program.

The United States and Russia have a shared view of the danger posed by North Korea's actions, and both of our countries are under real threat from the possibility of an intercontinental ballistic missile fired from there. This is why the international community, including the United States, Russia and China, must commit to a nuclear free Korean Peninsula. This shared view and shared threat is why we are working together with Russia in the United Nations Security Council to condemn North Korea's actions and use every means of influence to change Pyongyang's behavior.

In Syria, we look for opportunities to work with Russia where we can, seek to narrow differences where possible, and stay mindful of the gaps that will inevitably remain. The work we're doing in Syria with our Russian counterparts is good. We've coordinated. We're communicating. The fighting has almost stopped, and this is the work of Russia, the United States, and others.

The next few steps will include finishing the fight against ISIS [a banned terrorist organization in Russia] and bringing an end to the civil conflict through Geneva as outlined in UNSCR 2254, the sole legitimate blueprint for a political resolution. Russia has said that it would help bring the regime to the Geneva process, and we are taking them at their word.

It is no secret that the process of achieving better relations is going to require more work. It is going to require a steady effort at the negotiating table and honesty about the reasons why we are where we are today. It is going to require us to listen to one another and hold honest, frank discussions on Ukraine, election meddling in 2016, and how we have come to our different views of the world.

I have no doubt that if we speak honestly to each other, if we listen, if we commit to finding solutions, then we'll be on the right track.

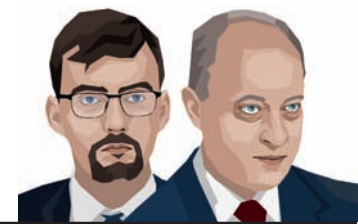
We have to be mindful not to repeat the patterns of the past that take us in predictable cycles and go nowhere. We have a fragile baseline of constructive engagement; now the United States is focused on action. We are looking for real openings in areas that reflect our common interests.

As the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, I believe that in spite of the difficulties we face in the U.S.-Russia relationship, we have no choice but to commit ourselves to working to build trust, identify common ground, get results and move forward. **TMT**

Jon Huntsman is the U.S. Ambassador to Russia.

Russia and the West in 2018

Op-Ed by **Andrei Kortunov** and **Ivan Timofeyev**



ANNA PAVICH

This year is the beginning of a new cycle in Russia's foreign policy. The result of the upcoming presidential election is quite certain: Polls indicate Vladimir Putin has enormous public support.

Many observers say this means there will be few changes in Russia's course abroad. Since the end of the Cold War, however, every presidential election has triggered a review of external affairs — both in theory and in practice.

The upcoming elections are likely to bring a similar rethink. Russia faces a number of forks in the road, which could determine the direction of its foreign policy.

Relations with the West are a priority. The United States and the European Union this year will increase pressure on Russia via sanctions, military deterrence and information warfare. Russia will respond in kind, though the balance of power is significantly skewed in the West's favor.

Broadly speaking, the aim of Western countries is to change Russia's approach to Ukraine. Washington's goals, however, appear to be much more ambitious. They extend to Russia's cyber activities, its role in the Middle East, its approach toward human rights and nonproliferation, among others.

The latest U.S. sanctions define Russia as a key adversary, hinting at a desire to destabilize the Russian political system and fragment its elites. A majority of the American elite seems to share this view.

What could Russia's strategy feasibly be under these conditions? Its first option is to stand tall and adopt a harder line toward the West. The Kremlin understands that sanctions come at a cost, deterrence requires funds and political isolation leads to backwardness. But none of this is fatal to Russia in the short-term.

In reality, pressure from the West increases the Russian leadership's legitimacy. It gives the country a reason to rally around the flag and to funnel scarce resources into maintaining its position domestically and globally.

Indeed, this could become the leadership's principle strategy after the elections, especially if Russian decisionmakers believe the existing liberal world order is about to collapse under its own internal problems.

But what if the West survives the current political crisis and then blossoms? Should Russia have a fallback option if a hard line proves too costly to maintain? In fact, Russia has room to maneuver. It can test the waters of a de-escalation in tensions with the West and still avoid having to make unacceptable concessions.

The Russian leadership could test a rapprochement with the West by exploiting the different approaches taken by the United States and the EU.

Washington is resolved to damaging Russia under Putin as much as it can. The EU is more pragmatic. Its aim is to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine while making its relationship with Russia more

predictable, if not more friendly. With that in mind, Russia could take steps to promote peace in the Donbass via the United Nations peacekeeping operation, for example.

However, trust is a key concern in Moscow.

Would Brussels support for Moscow's initiative? Would this kind of move be sabotaged by Kiev or blocked by Washington? Would the West exploit the Russian attempt at compromise, taking it as a sign of weakness and only increasing its own pressure?

The absence of trust — and the fear of exploitation — could encourage Russia to adopt a hard line, even if it is costly. A lot will depend on Brussels and its ability to show autonomous and mature diplomacy.

This does not mean, of course, that Moscow should try to play the United States and the EU against each other — that is not its business.

U.S.-Russia relations seem doomed to worsen even further. However, even in this nuclear desert there are some tender shoots. Sooner or later, the obsession over Russian meddling in the U.S. elections must calm down.

Newton's Third Law still applies to international politics: For every action, there will sooner or later be an opposite reaction. **TMT**

Andrei Kortunov and Ivan Timofeyev are Director General and Head of Programs at the Russian International Affairs Council.

year of the Yellow Dog

JANUARY

- 1 Several new laws take effect, including a ban on anonymous messaging.
- 23 Andrei Zvyagintsev hears whether he has been nominated for an Academy Award.
- 28 Alexei Navalny to stage mass protests calling for an election boycott.
- 29 U.S. officials to submit report on Russian "oligarchs" facing possible sanctions.



FEBRUARY

FIRST WAVE OF MOSCOW RESIDENTS TO BE MOVED FROM THEIR "KRUSHCHEVSKI" APARTMENTS INTO NEW HOMES.

- 1 Russia to resume flights to Egypt two years after deadly attack.
- 6 Sentencing of ex-Sakhalin Governor Alexander Khoroshavin on bribery charges.
- 9 Russian athletes to attend Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony in Pyeongchang under neutral flag.
- 15-16 Russian Investment Forum.
- 25 Closing ceremony at the Winter Olympics. Will Russian athletes be allowed to carry their flag after all?

MARCH

360-DEGREE PANORAMA PLATFORM TO OPEN IN THE VOSTOK TOWER IN MOSKVA CITY.

- 15 New electronic ID to start being issued to citizens.
- 18 Russians elect a new president.
- 20 Supreme Court reviews Telegram lawsuit against FSB.
- 26 18 years since Vladimir Putin first became president.
- 28 150th birthday of Russian writer Maxim Gorky.



Putin wins

JULY



- 1 The so-called Yarovaya amendments go into effect, requiring telecom operators to store recordings of phone conversations, text messages and users' internet traffic for up to six months.
- 10-11 2018 FIFA World Cup Semi-Finals take place in St. Petersburg and Moscow.
- 15 World Cup finals at Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium.
- 16 On the night of the 16th, 100 years ago, Tsar Nicholas II and his family were assassinated.

AUGUST

- 11 A partial solar eclipse is visible in Russia, Canada, Greenland, Iceland and some Scandinavian countries.
- 7-12 10 years ago war broke out between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia and the secession of Abkhazia.



SEPTEMBER

OPENING OF ST. PETERSBURG LAKHTA CENTER, ONE OF EUROPE'S TALLEST SKYSCRAPERS AT 462 METERS.

- 6-7 Eastern Economic Forum, Vladivostok.
- 9 Gubernatorial elections in 19 regions, two Duma elections, local elections in 17 regions. Moscow picks a new (or old) mayor, as does Yekaterinburg.





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Calendar 2018

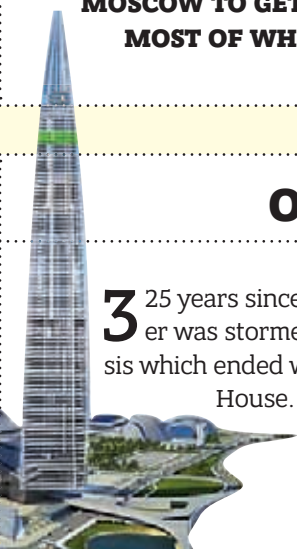
APRIL

HEALTH MINISTRY LAUNCHES PROJECT TO ENCOURAGE HEALTHY EATING.



MOSCOW TO GET 10 NEW METRO STATIONS, MOST OF WHICH ARE SET TO OPEN IN SPRING.

AS



OCTOBER

3 25 years since the Ostankino television tower was stormed during a constitutional crisis which ended with the shelling of the White House.

year of culture with Japan, Qatar, France

MAY

5 Karl Marx was born on this day 200 years ago.

7 Inauguration ceremony for Russia's new president.

9 Victory Day, Russian Cup Final.

24-26 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.



year of Russian ballet

JUNE

12-13 68th FIFA Congress to be held in Moscow.

14 Opening World Cup match between Russia and Saudi Arabia.



NOVEMBER

RUSSIA ATTEMPTS ANOTHER METEOR-M WEATHER SATELLITE LAUNCH, AFTER FAILING THE FIRST TIME.



9 200 years ago, writer Ivan Turgenev was born.

DECEMBER

11 100 years ago, Soviet dissident writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn was born.

18 The first car will traverse the bridge across the Kerch Strait from Crimea to the Russian mainland.

29-30 Russia marks the 5th anniversary of the Volgograd bombings in which 18 people were killed.



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"In the coming years, Russia will be guided by the principles of an open economy." Economic Development Minister **Maxim Oreshkin**

2%

estimated growth in 2018

\$40

expected break-even price per oil barrel



If Russia wants to see growth, it needs to reduce the state's role in the economy, says a proposal from former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin

Russia's Economic Recovery Remains a Challenge

By Ben Aris

Putin's choice of economic model in 2018 will set Russia's course for the next decade

Russia is starting to look like a normal country and 2018 will take it another few steps toward putting its emerging market status behind it.

Having climbed out of a two-year recession in 2017, Russia is still far from the blistering 6-8 percent annual growth of the boom years in the early 2000s. But the outlook for 2018 is gradual improvement and growth as high as 2 percent.

Digging into the details, more and more indicators are starting to look like developed market numbers. Inflation in December was at a record low of 2.5 percent and unemployment was at 5.1 percent. Income per capita in 2016 was \$22,540, on a par with some European Union countries.

The outlier that marks out Russia as not quite there yet is interest rates. The Central Bank policy rate is still nearly 8 percent – an emerging market level. But that too is expected to fall and could go as low as 4-5 percent in 2018.

However, economic recovery remains fragile and in desperate need of deep structural reforms.

Russia's petro-driven growth model was exhausted by 2013, long before the clash with the West over Ukraine, economic sanctions and hysteria over alleged U.S. election meddling. Most observers hope reforms will be launched after presidential elections in March that are expected to hand Vladimir Putin another six years in power.

Putin's choice of economic model will be the main event of the year and set Russia's course for the next decade.

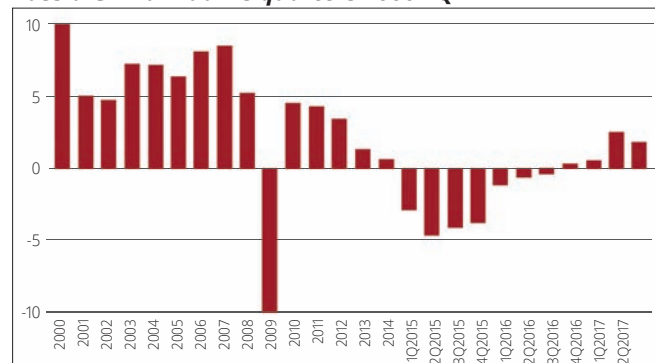
The alternatives are stark. Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin wants investment in infrastructure and society to bolster productivity. Business ombudsman Boris Titov and the Stolypin Club, a policy lobby group which he heads, prefer a massive borrow-and-spend campaign to kick-start growth. Putin may surprise, but Titov's star seems to be rising.

Crisis of confidence

Beneath the structural constraints is another problem. Russia is suffering from a crisis of confidence. People and companies have money but are not willing to spend it.

Real wages are rising and retail borrowing is growing at a double-digit rate. But after sharp falls in average incomes in 2015 and 2016, consumers are more concerned with holding on to what they have than going shopping. The Watcom shopping index, which measures footfall in Moscow's leading malls, is showing the worst year since its inception in 2014.

Russia GDP annual vs quarters 2000-1Q17



Source: bne IntelliNews, Rosstat, MinFin, CBR

Companies are similarly cautious. Many are making money again as the economy revives, but political uncertainty and high interest rates on loans mean corporate borrowing fell through 2016 and has been essentially flat in 2017, keeping investment anaemic.

Both these issues are expected to diminish in 2018. A lower Central Bank interest rate should stimulate borrowing and spending. Middle-class Russians are starting to move upmarket in the food they buy, and the car market, which collapsed during the recession, has seen sales grow through most of 2017.

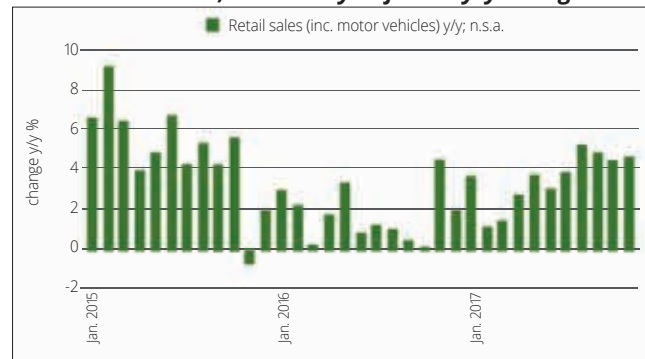
Addiction to oil

One of the biggest changes of 2017 is the health of government finances. Russia has gone a long way in breaking its addiction to oil and that takes a lot of pressure off the Kremlin in 2018.

The federal budget used to require an oil price above \$100 a barrel to break even. After much financial engineering following the collapse of oil prices in 2014, the breakeven price has fallen to \$70 and should reach \$40 over the next couple of years.

In 2016 the situation was so bad that Moscow, unable to tap international capital markets because of sanctions, ended up borrowing money via a faux privatization of a stake in state-owned oil company Rosneft.

Latvia retail trade, seasonally adjusted y/y change



Source: bne IntelliNews, Rosstat, MinFin, CBR

But the budget deficit in the first half of 2017 dropped to 1 percent from around 4 percent in the same period a year earlier and the Finance Ministry can now cover its borrowing needs in the domestic market, insulating it from the effect of sanctions.

Winners and losers

Growth is back, but on the ground the picture is mixed. The winners in 2017 included the steel sector, thanks to a recovery in international commodity prices, and agriculture, with a massive harvest of more than 130 million tons of grain breaking all Stakhanovite Soviet-era records.

Utilities have done well, with many companies completing investment programs, freeing up cash for dividends or other projects and making them a likely hit with investors in 2018.

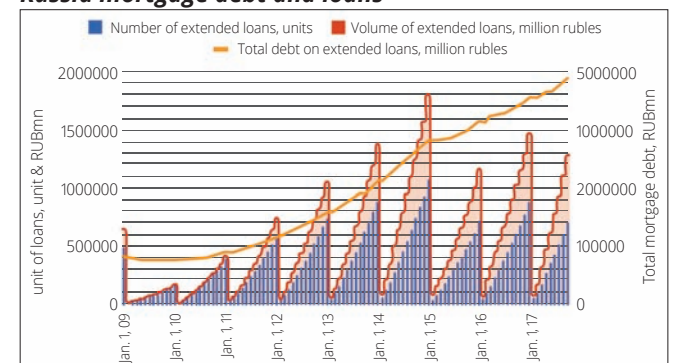
Meanwhile, Russia's biggest companies have used their deep pockets to buy out smaller rivals or drive them out of business through aggressive use of discounts and promotions.

The result is that while Russia's overall economic growth is anaemic, at the corporate level, some companies, particularly in apolitical sectors such as retail and services, are doubling their revenues as they consolidate their position and focus on profitability.

In some more modern sectors, competition is becoming intense – something that will only benefit consumers. A price war between major mobile phone companies has broken out as rivals slash tariffs. The online taxi business has grown so fast and become so competitive that the cost of a ride has plunged.

Slower-moving industries are also starting to show signs of revival. Real estate was particularly hard-hit by the crisis, with completion of new office buildings in Moscow falling to the lowest in at least a decade, according to real estate broker JLL.

Russia mortgage debt and loans



Source: bne IntelliNews, Rosstat, MinFin, CBR

But the market may have reached the bottom. The construction slowdown will help create a shortage of large offices in the Moscow Central Business District and push rental rates up by as much as 25 percent by the end of 2019, says JLL. Vacancy rates are falling, which will only encourage developers to start new projects in 2018.

Residential construction is already doing well thanks to state mortgage subsidies and will only be boosted by falling interest rates.

Public vs private

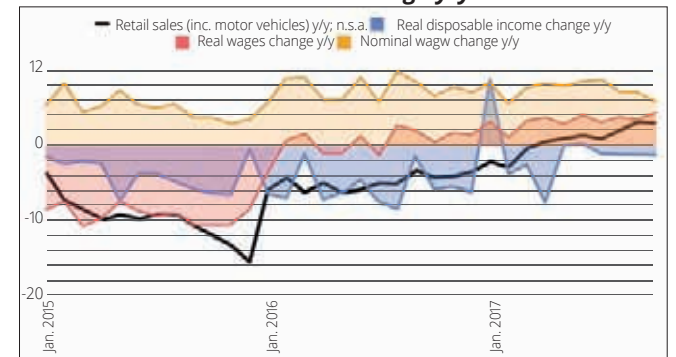
Perhaps the best example of Russia's mixed recovery is the banking sector, where private and state entities are in direct competition.

Lower interest rates and falling inflation have helped improve banks' margins after a period of hell in 2014 and 2015.

But the big winner has been state-owned Sberbank, which in 2017 reported record quarterly profits and said it was targeting earnings of 1 trillion rubles (\$17 billion) a year by the end of the decade – as much as the whole sector used to make in the boom years.

However, while Sberbank was on a roll, overall aggregate profits in the banking industry remained tiny and three large private lenders had to be bailed out by the Central Bank in 2017.

Russia retail sales vs income change y/y



Source: bne IntelliNews, Rosstat, MinFin, CBR

That is why Putin must reform the economy. In less political sectors companies are competing and growing. Where state-owned enterprises remain powerful they are a distortion and suppress the development of genuine businesses.

This could all change in 2018 with a real reform program, but that's not likely. **TMT**

Ben Aris is the founder and editor of Business New Europe.



"Sanctions against oligarchs and state companies would make the Cold War look like child's play."
Sberbank CEO **German Gref** to FT

Dec. 31

Russia's Western food import ban to expire



BB+ Standard & Poor's rating for Russia (low to moderate level of risk)

February

U.S. Treasury to deliver a report to Trump mapping "oligarchs and parastatal entities"

U.S. Sanctions Risk Backing Russia Into a Corner

Op-Ed by **Nabi Abdullaev** and **Emily Ferris**



After 18 years in power, President Vladimir Putin and his close circle of policy advisers are confident they can avert or mitigate any threat in 2018 to their grip on the country and to what they deem to be Russia's national interests. With one exception: the United States.

With a Russian presidential election looming in March, it is clear that Putin has his country's economic and political situation very much under control. The economy has adapted to low oil prices and started to recover, albeit sluggishly. Opposition is divided — occasional protests do little to challenge the status quo and have not translated into widespread civil unrest. The security services frequently assure the public they have thwarted increasing numbers of potential attacks by plotters linked to Islamic State, a terrorist group banned in Russia. Infighting among the political elite does not yet pose a threat to the Kremlin.

The one thing beyond Putin's personal control is the U.S. government. Initial hopes that President Donald Trump could deliver a political rapprochement with Russia have collapsed. Since Trump's inauguration, bipartisan support for U.S. sanctions on Russia has worsened relations with Moscow.

A wide-ranging sanctions law enacted in August includes the threat of expansion and increased severity at any time. This possibility and Russia's likely response to it is one of the most significant geopolitical risks in the region, and it will influence Russia's foreign and domestic politics, economic development and business climate in 2018.

Trigger points

First introduced in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea and military intervention in eastern Ukraine, U.S. sanctions on Russia have expanded to refer to Moscow's alleged involvement in U.S. presidential elections, attempts to influence political processes in Europe, alleged domestic human rights violations and provision of arms to the Syrian government.

They target industries including oil, gas and banking and a range of Russian officials, their family members and businesspeople

with connections to senior officials. The August sanctions law obliges the U.S. administration to report to Congress twice a year detailing Russia's progress and identifying new targets for sanctions if no progress has been made.

Several developments could provoke an expansion of sanctions in 2018. The election — which Putin is expected to win — is likely to come with protests. A harsh response to these or harassment of opposition news outlets and non-governmental organizations could trigger a U.S. response. So, too, could new accusations of Russian meddling in U.S. domestic politics or a military incident, planned or accidental, in eastern Ukraine or Syria.



Russia's response

If the U.S. tightens sanctions, Moscow will retaliate. However, the response would be tailored to avoid damaging relationships with countries the authorities consider within Russia's "national interests."

Russia will not endanger business relationships with Germany, France and Italy, for example. Strategic partnerships with Japan and China will avoid harsh treatment.

Russia is unlikely to respond by escalating military tensions in Ukraine, as this would further alienate Europe from Moscow without giving Russia any edge in its rivalry with the United States.

Playing spoiler to U.S. efforts to de-escalate tensions with North Korea would also be unwise because it would harm strategic relations with China, a key powerbroker, and risk undermining improvements in Russia's relationship with U.S. ally Japan.

Moscow will likely consider cyberattacks against the U.S. government as a legitimate response to further sanctions. This could mean leaking compromising information — real or imaginary — on U.S. officials or attacks on government websites.

Inside Russia, the Kremlin considers most opposition groups a U.S.-backed "fifth column" — a way of undermining Russia's sovereignty. Because of this, the authorities are also likely to crack down on internet freedoms and increase harassment of opposition figures.

Open to investment

Foreign businesses in Russia have not been drawn into the political squabbles between Moscow and Washington. Indeed, the Kremlin makes clear that foreign and U.S. investment remains welcome. This has both the practical purpose of allowing Russia to continue to acquire good-quality technology from abroad and the more strategic aim of preventing U.S. business elites from unifying against Russia.

If the United States does expand sanctions on Russia in 2018, Russian authorities would be unlikely to restrict foreign businesses. To do so would encourage anti-Russian sentiment among potential investors and undermine Russia's ability to exploit divisions between foreign business elites and their governments by appealing to individual countries' self-interest.

Ultimately, backing Russia into a corner will provoke retaliation. The business community may be spared. The brunt of Russia's inevitable response is likely to be borne by the domestic opposition. **TMT**

Nabi Abdullaev is an associate director at Control Risks and a former chief editor of The Moscow Times.

Emily Ferris is a political risk analyst at Control Risks.



Between Mission and Prohibition

Op-Ed by Zoya Svetova



GALINA GUBCHENKO

Like all authoritarian regimes, the Russian authorities fear civil society. The Kremlin believes that NGOs could rally an opposition movement which would take to the streets and demand regime change.

It was the fear of an Orange Revolution which prompted the State Duma to adopt the “foreign agents” law in summer 2012, requiring NGOs to declare foreign funding and label their publications.

With Russian business reluctant to finance civil society projects, the overwhelming majority of NGOs in Russia survived on grants from Western foundations.

The “foreign agents” law essentially cut off that flow of Western funding, forcing Russian NGOs to show their loyalty to the authorities so they could qualify for support from the Presidential Grants Foundation (PGF). It is a well-known formula: Whoever wines and dines a girl gets to dance with her.

At a meeting of the Council for Civil Society and Human Rights in October, President Vladimir Putin announced that the number of “foreign agent” NGOs had halved. He explained NGOs had two ways to get rid of the label: by no longer engaging in political activity or by refusing to receive foreign funding. Most NGOs, Putin said, “are taking the second path.”

During the meeting, the president cited an interesting figure. Over the past five years, the state has allocated more than 22 billion rubles (\$388 million) to support NGOs.

The question is, who are the recipients of those presidential and government grants?

In 2017, 24 million rubles (\$425,000) went to the so-called rights organization Boyevoye Bratstvo (Combat Brotherhood), a group whose



DIMITRY SEREBRENNIKOV / TASS

leadership includes former Moscow Governor Boris Gromov. The Russian Motorcyclists organization, also known as the Night Wolves, received approximately 2.5 million rubles (\$44,000). That group’s leadership includes Alexander Zaldostanov, nicknamed “The Surgeon,” a trusted Putin supporter. The presidential administration also funds its Slavonic World project, which holds synchronized multi-kilometer runs and pilgrimages in Russia and Slavic countries.

Obviously, these so-called NGOs have very little in common with human rights or community service organizations.

To be fair, Rus Sidyashchaya (Russia Behind Bars), which helps prison inmates and their families, received a presidential grant of 3 million rubles (\$53,000) last year.

The head of the organization, journalist Olga Romanova, however, refused the grant out of concern the organization would be charged with the misappropriation of public funds and undergo the fate of Kirill Serebrennikov, the artistic director of the Gogol Center. He is currently under house arrest for allegedly embezzling government grants.

Being labeled a “foreign agent” or having to battle the courts in trying to prove that they are exclusively involved in public service and not political activity has made the work of NGOs more complicated.

Nevertheless, many of the most established NGOs continue their work and Russian civil society is continuing its mission. They are certain to do the same in 2018.

Actors Chulpan Khamatova and Yevgeny Mironov speak to journalists outside the Gogol Center theater after it was raided by law enforcement over the alleged embezzlement of government funds.

Just look at the unprecedented response to two high-profile cases in 2017 against Yuri Dmitriev, the head of the Karelian branch of the Memorial foundation, and Serebrennikov.

Dozens of Russia’s most famous public figures – from Natalia Solzhenitsyna, the acclaimed writer’s widow, to the famous musician Leonid Fyodorov – recorded videos in support of Dmitriev.

Dmitriev is a 61-year-old historian who discovered the mass graves of victims of Josef Stalin in Karelia and it is thanks to his efforts that the Sandarmokh memorial, which marks the graves of more than 9,000 people of 60 nationalities who were shot in 1937, exists.

In December 2016, a supposedly anonymous tip that Dmitriev had made pornographic images of his adopted daughter led to charges against him. The “Dmitriev case” is the first politically motivated prosecution for pedophilia – a charge which law enforcement agencies have long interpreted loosely.

Dozens of public figures have also written letters in support of Serebrennikov and offered to post his bail. This is a testament to the fact that civil society will not tolerate criminal cases as a means of silencing dissent.

NGOs will continue to play an important role in Russia’s political and public life in 2018, despite legislative obstacles, fabricated criminal cases and the forced emigration of several journalists and social activists.

Russian civil society still counts many brave, talented, and charismatic people among its ranks. They are true patriots. **TMT**

Zoya Svetova is a human rights activist.

No One to Follow

Op-Ed by Pavel Chikov



SOFIA MIRODOVA

Cuba’s dash toward liberalism, Venezuela’s liberation from Hugo Chavez and the end of Colombia’s guerrilla war have overhauled the face of South America. In Africa, too, regimes in Gambia and Zimbabwe witnessed peaceful transitions of power last year.

Europe and the former Soviet Union, however, are clinging to values that reflect the worst of the current world order.

Just as in the 1990s, Russia’s human rights agenda today reflects that of the West. The only difference between then and now is that the human rights agenda has become morally obsolete and few players have enough influence to revitalize or promote it.

Preaching anti-migrant views, conservatives in England successfully won the Brexit vote. In the United States, it would once have been impossible to imagine the president attacking the media or opposing traditional liberal values.

The list of President Vladimir Putin’s friends in Europe is growing and now includes Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Czech President Miloš Zeman, and Moldovan President Igor Dodon. His old friends former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder remain influential in their countries.

From the moment Russia’s human rights movement first appeared in the 1970s – when the Soviet Union and other members of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe signed the Helsinki Final Act – its agenda has been shaped by factors at home and abroad.

Under Leonid Brezhnev the Soviet Union committed itself to

upholding human rights and liberal Western values – the same values that Russia’s current leadership has rejected for years.

Some 20 years earlier, as one of the victors of World War II, the Soviet Union co-founded the United Nations, whose Charter championed “international co-operation in ... promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all.”

As such, the Soviet Union was one of the founding fathers of the postwar world order, at the heart of which lies adherence to peace, the security of mankind and human rights and freedoms.

Of course, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries put their stamp on the conception of human rights, pressuring other states to exclude fundamental provisions from covenants guaranteeing the universal right to own property.

Oil in exchange for human rights: That became the arrangement in the 1970s as a weakened Soviet Union gained access to the European market, giving Moscow a taste of the powerful petrodollar and ensuring its survival for another 15 years.

In return, the Soviet leadership formally committed to upholding human rights and freedoms, safe in the knowledge that its total control over domestic politics would remain unchecked.

This all fundamentally changed in the 1980s when Western states gradually adopted foreign policies that pressured countries with an avowed interest in liberal democratic values to adhere to them more closely.

In the 1990s, Russia declared its adherence to human rights

and freedoms, adopted a democratic Constitution and established a whole set of freedoms and institutions previously unknown to Russian law.

At the same time, civic organizations and independent advocacy first appeared in Russia, the media flourished and free elections became part of the political process. Russia’s human rights agenda began to align with that of the rest of the world.

But after Putin came to power in 2000, he ratcheted up the repressive apparatus of the government and strengthened the role of law enforcement and security strongmen, the siloviki.

This caused a prolonged cooling effect and aggressive, anti-liberal rhetoric that culminated in a series of attacks against human rights carried out since Putin returned to the Kremlin in 2012. The brunt of those attacks was aimed at the media, the internet, the political opposition, street protests and civic activism in general.

Now the terms “separation of powers,” “checks and balances,” “federalism,” “rule of law,” and “a law-based government” have all but disappeared from the public discourse.

In their place, we hear “traditional values,” “the power vertical,” and “the dictatorship of law.”

Until recently, this state of affairs elicited strong condemnation from the stronghold of liberalism in the West. But now that world is falling apart too. **TMT**

Pavel Chikov is the director of the Agora international human rights group.



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The sign of a real man

A Tough but Exciting Year

Op-Ed by **Elizaveta Osetinskaya**

SOFIA MIRODOVA

The Russian media landscape this year is likely to be shaped by four trends.

Trend 1: the government extends its reach

Independent media in Russia have started the year with less room to maneuver than in 25 years.

New legislation has given the government greater control over “unfriendly” media organizations based outside Russia that produce Russian-language content. As of late 2017, the Justice Ministry has the power to brand any organization distributing content and receiving foreign funds as a “foreign agent.” An expansion of that legislation could allow the authorities to label individuals “foreign agents” too.

This could become an issue for media that receive funding from foreign governments like Voice of America or Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. But it also affects independent outlets like Meduza or The Bell, my own start-up.

The new rules are a logical continuation of tightening control over the media, which we have witnessed since the mass street protests of 2011 and 2012.

There is also some good news: The Kremlin, while increasing its role, seems to have no intention of following in the footsteps of China or North Korea by imposing a firewall. None of the new draconian measures are universally applicable. Their wording leaves the final call up to officials which, knowing something about the Kremlin's decision-making process, means specific individuals.

It is common knowledge that high-profile officials in the presidential administration monitor the activity of the media and their staff. Decisions based on these new laws will be made on a case-by-case basis, depending on political momentum or emotions in the Kremlin.

How and which media are targeted will depend on Russia's confrontation with the West, the threat of additional U.S. sanctions and even on the turnout in the upcoming presidential elections.

Trend 2: old media, old problems

Traditional media will continue to struggle with the same challenges they have faced for several years. Barring a few exceptions — like the commercially successful RBC media holding — the world of Russian newspapers and glossy magazines will either teeter on the edge of profitability or incur losses.



PIKABAY

Big outlets are likely to lose the battle for public attention to major tech companies like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Google, as well as the “Russian tigers” Yandex and VKontakte.

Media will also compete for talent with the tech and PR world, particularly given Trend 1. Some relatively independent or stand-alone brands with a shaky market position may have to change owners, such as Delovoi Peterburg, which was recently sold.

There are also (unconfirmed) rumors that the business daily Vedomosti and the Russian edition of Forbes could be sold in the near future.

Trend 3: journalists will need to become more creative

Last fall, a former colleague told me that she had left her job at a prestigious media outlet to focus on her channel on Telegram.

Pavel Durov, the Russian founder of VKontakte, initially launched Telegram as an encrypted messaging app. But its channels function has now also become a popular news source among the Russian intellectual, government and business elite, and the service is showing explosive growth.

Some channels already have tens of thousands of subscribers — including the tabloid news channel Mash, which has more than 133,000 followers, and the Kremlin-sympathetic NeZygar channel, with almost 100,000 followers.

The channels can be monetized through takeovers or advertising, like sponsorship or native content. In Russia, there are 8 million Telegram users, about 1.5 million of whom use the platform as a source for news and scoops.

For independent journalists in Russia, online platforms such as Telegram present a huge opportunity. There are no design, development or support costs. The only investment required is content and, in some cases, marketing.

Last year there was huge growth in the number of Russian bloggers and their followings, mainly on YouTube and Telegram. I believe this trend will continue in 2018 so long as there is no government interference.

Some video bloggers have attracted millions of views with cheap, profanity-laced content. But there are other examples of serious journalism, such as the content produced by young journalist and editor Yury Dud, who interviews politicians and celebrities.

Following the growth in popularity of YouTube, VKontakte is also likely to pay more attention to producing video content. The number-one Russian social media platform wants to move away from its reputation as a site for teenagers and position itself as a space for a more mature audience to attract advertisers.

Trend 4: finding a niche

In a recent report, Nieman Lab outlined a variety of successful media strategies for 2018, of which The Bell follows two: to find a niche and focus on the specific needs of your audience, and to publish fewer, but more targeted, news stories.

The Russian market will follow these strategies in its own way — it has little choice given the limited resources and constant pressure from the government.

Some notable examples are opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who first gained notoriety as an anti-corruption blogger. His investigations are few and far between, but each one has a long shelf life in the media. Another success story is the law enforcement monitoring website Mediazona, which recently launched a crowdfunding appeal.

This year will be the year of the media start-up that chooses its niche wisely. **TMT**

Elizaveta Osetinskaya is the founder of The Bell news start-up.

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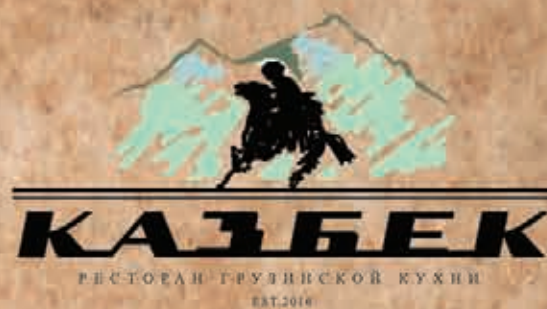
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WHO to Watch, WHAT to Do and WHERE to Go

Illustrations by Sofia Miroedova



Don't say it, rap it!

Last year even the biggest culture snobs were forced to recognize the power of Russian-language hip-hop. In 2018, the genre will decisively emerge from the shadows. And it won't just be Russia's youth moving their heads to the beats.

"There's a market for hip-hop musicians who can appeal to all age groups," says Dmitry Konnov, managing director at Universal Music.



DIY entrepreneurship and social media

Russians are setting up their own businesses and initiatives left, right and center. Who needs sluggish state television channels when there's YouTube? Not online journalist Yuri Dud or opposition activist Alexei Navalny.

And who needs a site when you can launch your own channel on Telegram? [Plug @MTLive here.]



Downshift close to home

Дауншифтинг, or downshifting, has been a trend in Russia for some time, but traditionally required moving to Thailand or other exotic destinations. This year, Russians get to downshift closer to home, as it's all about staying local.

Trips to Lake Baikal or hikes in the Altai steppe are becoming more popular, and arts and crafts are in.

To stay with the theme, the ingredients of 2018 are mushrooms, berries and edible plants and flowers, says Boris Akimov, the co-founder of the LavkaLavka farmers' cooperative. Wait a moment — isn't that just classic babushka fare?

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Protest politics

Granted, no one will raise an eyebrow when Putin emerges as the winner in the March 2018 elections. But in the year that also marks the centenary of the assassination of the Romanovs and the 200th birthday of communist ideologue Karl Marx, politics is in the air.

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his supporters will hold protests before and after the election. And women's rights activists are also increasingly making their voices heard.

Let your inner canine out

According to the Chinese horoscope, 2018 is the year of the yellow mountain dog. And that's no joke to superstitious Russians.

If 2017, the Year of the Rooster, was marked by whims, eccentricity and a fight in the pecking order, the Year of the Dog will be filled with more dialogue, solidarity and cooperation.

Dogs need plenty of physical exercise, so gyms are in business. But adjust your outfit accordingly and throw out those leopard print leggings — dogs can't stand cats. And be warned: In the year after #Metoo, it pays to keep your alpha male behavior on a leash.

Foreign agents

In 2017, a new law made it possible to label media outlets "foreign agents." This year could see that measure put into practice, including against individuals.

"It's clear that the presidential administration sees 2018 and the years after as complicated socially and politically," says Fyodor Kravchenko, from Media Lawyers. "Like a fort preparing for invasion, it has prepared as many tools as possible to control the informational sphere in the country."

The real risk, he says, is that foreign agent media outlets could go on to be labeled "undesirable organizations."

"In that case any person, no matter what his or her citizenship, could face punishment for cooperating with foreign correspondents or even giving an interview."



Cryptoriches

Russians love tech and they love anonymity. Combine that with the prospect of getting rich and you've got a winning currency — especially when Putin seems to have embraced cryptocurrency as the Kremlin's pet project.

"This year will reveal the success rate of companies that raised money via ICOs in 2017," says Sergei Dobryshkin, chief editor of Cryptorusia.ru. "If Russian startups do better than expected, it'll set a good precedent."

Unless Russia's financial regulators get in the way, of course.

Don't Expect

an end to meat

While some are chewing on edible plants, meat is undergoing its own revival. The 2017 trend of meat restaurants such as Zharovnya, Meatless and Myaso & Ryba will continue, says The Moscow Times food writer Andrei Muchnik.

Or, in the words of Akimov, from LavkaLavka: "Pork is the new beef!"

a green energy revolution

Oil-rich Russia has been slow to catch up with the green energy trend, and 2018 is unlikely to be an exception, says Vladimir Chuprov, head of the energy program at Greenpeace Russia.

"We're not expecting a big breakthrough," says Chuprov. "The extraction of oil, coal, gas and nuclear power is still the main focus and it is heavily subsidized."

Russia will increase its renewable energy output in solar and wind in 2018, however, thanks to the completion of projects launched in 2013-14.

Pro Tips for 2018



MASHA FYODOROVA
chief editor Glamour Russia

Keep an eye on dancer Sergei Polunin, for whom even an entire stage is not enough. And look out for white ankle boots, especially in the first three months of the year. Will they become a permanent element of fashionistas' wardrobes following the earlier success of white sneakers?



IRINA MALKOVA
chief editor The Bell

We'll be monitoring cryptocurrencies. Pavel Durov's ICO this year is a sign of things to come. Also, everyone is trying to understand when U.S. economic growth will hit a ceiling. If there's a collapse, the Russian ruble will suffer as investors pull out of developing markets. The oil price is another risk for the ruble: There are plenty of signs the future is not bright. The longer the uncertainty around the tightening of U.S. sanctions continues, the more careful investors will be.



MAXIM KASHULINSKY
chief editor at Republic

The person of the year is Pavel Durov, Russia's genius IT entrepreneur and, on top of that, an idealist. His Telegram service is changing the way we communicate and the media landscape. Who knows what more it'll change in the coming years? An important trend to watch is medical genetics. Last year, a human embryo underwent genetic surgery for the first time. Procedures like this will become common quickly.



TATYANA SIMAKOVA
chief editor The Village

Last year, we all understood that the smallest mistake or a thoughtless statement — even in the distant past — can not only cause a scandal, but it can cost you a relationship, your career or even your life. In 2018, it pays to be conscious of what you do and how you look after yourself. I'll be looking out for Russian rapper Pharaoh. He's been in the shadows but he'll prove himself this year.



ALEXEI BELYAKOV
journalist at fashion blog Allure

Russian design is gaining momentum. Honest and pure design, not the type sponsored by wealthy husbands. There are a lot of designers who sell a limited number of handmade items and have a small but loyal army of fans. Examples are Artem Shumov, Jean Rudoff's Lumiér Garson, Anastasia Dokuchaeva and Katya Komarova. Some of them will undoubtedly become stars.



YEVGENIA ALBATS
chief editor of The New Times

The important question is not who to look out for — those names are already well-known: opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Rosneft head Igor Sechin, economic adviser Alexei Kudrin — since in the current Russian political system they play a marginal role. It is what to look out for. Will the graduates of the KGB and its successor, the FSB, continue to dominate the top layer of Russian officials? As of now, 60 percent of senior officials in the presidential administration and in the government are in epaulets, with all the strings and biases attached.



DARIA VELEDEYEVA
chief editor Harper's Bazaar

In 2018 we'll be watching Gosha Rubchinsky, the main hope of Russian fashion, and his colleagues Andrei Artyomov, from Walk of Shame, and Vika Gazinskaya.

A Theater of the Absurd

Op-Ed by **Yury Saprykin**

ANNA PAVICH

It would be impossible to think of culture and art in 2018 without bearing in mind the case against Kirill Serebrennikov, which casts a shadow over the entire artistic community.

The December premiere of his “Nureyev” ballet at the Bolshoi Theater was a social event without precedent.

The audience was a veritable “who’s who” of the Russian elite: oligarchs, government officials, relatives of former President Boris Yeltsin, and President Vladimir Putin’s closest associates. It was as if everyone but Putin himself was in attendance.

The whole thing was reminiscent of a time when the Bolshoi Theater symbolized the country’s imperial grandeur and members of the imperial family – or, later, Communist Party officials – regularly appeared in the loges.

In the old days, however, it would have been unimaginable for the director of the show to be under house arrest on the day of the premiere, for the performers to make their curtain calls in T-shirts with slogans in support of their embattled colleague, or for government officials in the audience to applaud the show of solidarity.

Serebrennikov’s case embodies the new conflict between the Russian state and the creative elite. In December, both sides of that conflict met in the same auditorium as if nothing had happened. That in itself was a piece of theater – a theater of the absurd.

It is already possible to predict with absolute certainty that the main cultural events of 2018 will also be connected to the Serebrennikov case. They will be played out not on stage, but in the courtroom.

Even now, before investigators have finished their work, the case is beginning to look like one of the most iconic trials of the Putin era, that against Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Back then, the jailing of Khodorkovsky established new rules for how business is done in Russia. Similarly, the recent trial of former Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev defined what is off-limits to government officials. In the same way, the future trial of Serebrennikov and his colleagues will reshape relations between the state and the creative elite.

The show trials of the Stalin era are often compared with dramas; the prosecutors, lawyers, and defendants seemed to act out scripted roles and repeat lines that had been written by some unknown playwright.

In the Putin era, the words spoken in a courtroom are almost inconsequential: the prosecutor can level absurd charges to which the defendant has the right to object. But everyone understands that the plot was written beforehand and the outcome is predetermined.

The details of the case are not as important as the message it sends to the public. And that message is never written out: It is left up to the witnesses and associates of the accused to figure out its meaning.

Serebrennikov’s colleagues understand that the formal accusation that he embezzled state funds is only a cover for some other complaint the authorities have against him and all the defense arguments in the world will not change the verdict in his trial.

Whatever its outcome, the message is also clear, namely that the state agrees to finance cultural institutions and pay creative people for their work, but in return demands absolute loyalty.

What is loyalty in this context?

It does not mean that artists have to vote for Putin or glorify Russia in their productions. Loyalty in 2018 has no connection whatsoever to ideology. This new form of loyalty demands that cultural figures make no public statements or actions that would distance them in any way from the system or suggest that they are critical of it.

Each individual must try to figure out what is acceptable and what is not. One performer might refuse to take part in an international festival held abroad. Another might simply refuse to discuss politics during an interview. A theater manager might avoid working with a director who is known for making bold aesthetic choices or political statements.

In today’s Russia, the authorities do not engage in direct censorship: They create an environment in which cultural figures feel compelled to censor themselves.

As a result, artists spend less time and energy thinking about creativity than they do about how to avoid accidentally overstepping the extremely indistinct line of political propriety. Because, although the rules might be hazy, the punishment for violating them most definitely is not.

Yes, the situation has truly become a theater of the absurd. **TMT**

Yury Saprykin is a journalist and culturologist.



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The Classical Arts in 2018: Not Resting on Laurels

By **Andrei Muchnik**

FEBRUARY 28 Jenufa
Czech treat

The Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater will stage the Leos Janacek opera “Jenufa,” which is quite popular in Europe but hasn’t been performed in Russia for nearly 60 years. It was first produced in Prague in 1916 and is often called the “Moravian national opera.” “Jenufa” (“Her Stepdaughter” in Czech) was the opera that made Janacek a world-famous composer. This is a rare treat for opera lovers and a great addition to the Moscow opera scene. 17 Bolshaya Dmitrovka
Metro Teatralnaya
stanmus.ru

MARCH 23 Anna Karenina
Surprising Anna

The Bolshoi Theater will present “Anna Karenina,” a unique production in cooperation with the Hamburg Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada. It is a ballet in two acts set to music by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Alfred Schnittke and Cat Stevens/Yusuf Islam. Directed by world-renowned choreographer John Neumeier, this is one of the Bolshoi’s major premieres of 2018. Purists should stay home. 1 Teatralnaya Ploshchad
Metro Teatralnaya
bolshoi.ru



Not every arts venue has finalized its schedule for 2018, and perhaps some want to keep a few events secret. But here are some events we’re ready to line up for. Buy your tickets as soon as they go on sale!

MID APRIL Zverev Gala ←
Celebrate an artistic genius

The Zverev Gala will be dedicated to the third anniversary of the AZ (Anatoly Zverev) Museum and will present about 300 works by the artist. The exhibition will cover all the different themes in Zverev’s oeuvre, including famous female portraits, self-portraits, landscapes, suprematism, and still lifes. If you are unfamiliar with the work of this non-conformist artist, this will be a fine introduction. And it is expected to be one of the social highlights of the season. 20-22 2nd Tverskaya-Yamskaya Ulitsa
Metro Mayakovskaya
museum-az.com



JUNE 7 Aleko
An opera revived

Helikon-Opera’s first 2018 premiere is “Aleko,” an opera by Sergei Rachmaninoff directed by Rostislav Protasov. “Aleko” was the first completed opera by Rachmaninoff with a libretto written by Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko based on the poem “The Gypsies” by Alexander Pushkin. The plot concerns the “noble savage” Aleko, who lives with a group of gypsies but doesn’t share their ways. The plot may be old-fashioned, but the talent is extraordinary. 19/16 Bolshaya Nikitskaya Ulitsa
Metro Arbatskaya, Tverskaya
helikon.ru

The Bolshoi Theater has weathered artistic and criminal storms, but is starting 2018 with premieres that should delight the art-loving public.

SEPTEMBER 18 Mikhail Larionov ↓
A blockbuster show

The solo exhibition of Mikhail Larionov, a leading representative of Russian avant-garde, is one of the most anticipated shows at the Tretyakov Gallery in 2018. More than 250 works from Russian and foreign museums including the Centre Pompidou, Tate Modern and Albartine will be presented, covering all the styles the artist worked in: cubism, primitivism, futurism and his own invention: abstract painting called “rayonism.” There will also be a section devoted to his collaboration as a set designer with Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in the 1910s and ‘20s. 10 Krymsky Val
Metro Oktyabrskaya
tretiyakovgallery.ru



SEPTEMBER 17 Il Giardino Armonico ↓
Italian import

The Tchaikovsky Concert Hall presents an evening of baroque and chamber music with Il Giardino Armonico, a Milan-based early-music ensemble. The conductor is the ensemble’s founder, Giovanni Antonini, who also plays the baroque transverse flute. The evening’s program includes music by Antonio Vivaldi, Joseph Haydn and other composers. 31/4 Tverskaya Ulitsa
Metro Mayakovskaya
meloman.ru



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реклама

What's on at the Movies?

By Andrei Muchnik



ROUGH DRAFT

← Yulia Peresild in the sci-fi film "Rough Draft," based on a book by Sergei Lukyanenko.

→ Yevgeny Mironov and Marina Neyolova do star turns in "Thawed Carp," about motherly love.



THAWED CARP

The year 2017 was a fairly exciting one in Russian cinema. "Mathilde" by Alexei Uchitel caused a scandal before its release; "Loveless," a new film by Andrei Zvyagintsev, is heading to the Oscars; and "The Last Warrior," a Russian-made children's film from Disney, broke box office records. Is the Russian film industry going to keep up its successes?

From book to screen

One of the most anticipated films of 2018 is definitely "Dovlatov," a biopic of the rebellious writer who was forced to emigrate from the Soviet Union. It is directed by Alexei German, Jr., who was previously nominated for a Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival for his movie "Garpastum," a turn-of-the-century soccer drama. His new film will focus on Sergei Dovlatov's life in the year preceding his exile to Tallinn from Leningrad in 1971. Dovlatov is played by Milan Maric, a Serbian actor with an uncanny resemblance to the writer. It is expected to open on March 1.

"Selfie," a new film by Nikolai Khomeriki, known for 2016's "The Icebreaker," is based on

a popular book by Sergei Minayev. This is Minayev's second book adaptation. The previous one, "Dukhless," and its sequel "Dukhless 2," were big box office successes. "Selfie" is a story of a writer being gradually pushed out of his own life by a doppelganger. The writer is played by Konstantin Khabensky, who is probably Russia's most popular actor right now.

"Empire V" is another highly anticipated book adaptation, this time from Viktor Pelevin, one of the few Russian contemporary writers regularly translated into English. The story is about a young man who becomes a vampire. One of the main roles — the villain — will be played by Oxxxymiron, the famous Russian rapper. The director is the Russian-American Victor Ginzburg, known for another Pelevin adaptation, "Generation P." Ginzburg seems to be on a Pelevin roll: After this film hits the screens by the end of the year, the director plans to take on another Pelevin book, "S.N.U.F.F."

Sci-fi and sports

If you are into a more traditional kind of sci-fi, "Rough Draft" is the movie for you. Based on Sergei

Lukyanenko's best-selling book of the same name, it is the first film based on one of his books since "Day Watch," which achieved almost a cult status in Russia and abroad. "Rough Draft" tells the story of a computer game designer who discovers one day that all the information about him has disappeared from the computers of the world. He finds that he has become a customs official in a portal between parallel universes. In this reality, present-day earth is just a "rough draft" of a reality in another universe. The film is set to debut in March.

The sports drama is a rare genre in Russian cinema, which is why there are high expectations for "Coach." Directed by Danila Kozlovsky, who also plays the main role, it tells the story of a national soccer player who makes a mistake during a game and is forced to leave the team. He takes on the job of coaching a small provincial team. Making this team a winner becomes his new purpose in life. The cast also includes Irina Gorbacheva, famous for her role in the 2017 blockbuster "Arrhythmia." It is slated to open in April just before Russia kicks off the World Cup.

The art house circuit

For independent cinema lovers, there is "The Humorist," the directorial debut of Michael Idov. "The Humorist" is about a popular Soviet comedian favored by KGB officers but suffering from a lack of creative freedom.

"Thawed Carp" is an indie comedy with a great cast, including veteran Alisa Freindlikh and Yevgeny Mironov. An elderly woman in a provincial town suddenly finds out that she has a disease that could end her life at any moment. Not wanting to disturb her busy son, who works in a big city, she decides to organize her own funeral. The film opened in January.

Finally, historical movie fans might like "Sobibor," a World War II film that is the directorial debut of actor Konstantin Khabensky. In October 1943, Sobibor concentration camp inmates led by Red Army lieutenant Alexander Pechersky (played by Khabensky) launched the only successful uprising in Nazi death camp history. "Highlander" actor Christopher Lambert plays, presumably, one of the bad guys. It will be released in April. **TMT**

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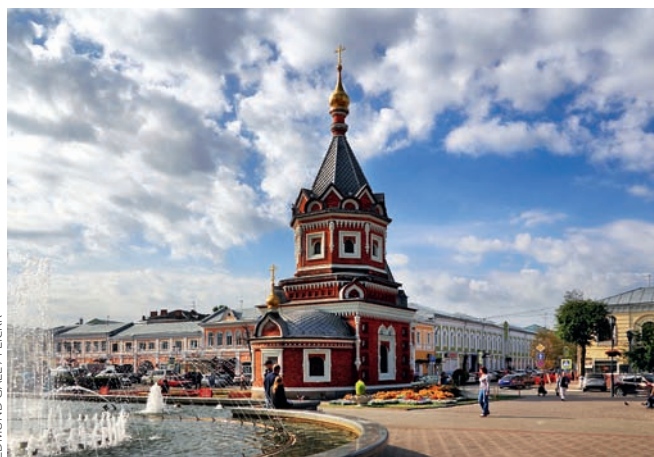


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Cities to Visit in 2018

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EDMUND GALL / FLICKR

Yaroslavl ↑

Jewel of the Golden Ring

Yaroslavl is the largest city in the Golden Ring. Founded by the legendary Kievan Rus prince Yaroslav the Wise around 1010, it is also the oldest city on the Volga River, with a historic center listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. A beautiful park now covers the "Strelka" where the Volga and Kotorosl rivers meet, once the site of a fortress.

Be sure to visit the 16th century Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Savior and enjoy the best views of the center from its bell tower. Two other architectural must-sees are two 17th century churches: the Church of Elijah the Prophet and the 15-domed John the Baptist Church in the neighborhood of Tolchkovo.

Yaroslavl is famous for its beer. Check out Pivovar, which resembles a Bavarian Biergarten and serves the local beer Durdin (14 Revolyutsionny Proyezd). If you prefer art to beer, there is the Yaroslavl Art Museum, which has an especially fine collection of works by impressionist Konstantin Korovin.

Kaluga ↓

Quiet provincial town

If you are tired of Moscow's hustle and bustle, get on an express train at Kievsky Station and visit Kaluga, a quaint old town with vibrant artistry, gastronomy and nightlife. Founded in the mid-14th century, it became a major trading city on the Oka River during the reign of Catherine II. In the 20th century Kaluga became a major industrial center while managing to keep its small-town appeal.

Wealthy merchants filled the city with architectural masterpieces. The former estate of merchant Pyotr Zolotaryov now houses



WIKICOMMONS

a regional history museum and the mansion of Ivan Bilbin is the local fine arts museum.

The recently restored pseudo-gothic market arcade on Stary Torg (Old Market Square) is the hub of the city, with souvenir shops and Gastronom, a great gastropub offering traditional Russian dishes "with a twist." On the other side of the square is the city park with the magnificent Trinity Cathedral.

Moskovskaya and Voskresenskaya streets preserve the provincial atmosphere of past centuries and are great to walk around.

Cafe 1554 has the best coffee and breakfasts in the city (18 Ulitsa Moskovskaya).

Saratov ↓

Volga River resort

Saratov was founded in 1590 near the spot formerly occupied by Uvek, a major Golden Horde city. In the 18th and 19th centuries Saratov became an important shipping port and the center of the Volga German population; it then became a "closed city" during the Soviet period due to its military importance.

The pedestrian street Prospekt Kirova runs through the center of the city with all the main sights clustered around it. Don't miss the beautiful Reineke mansion (now a hospital) designed by art nouveau architect Fyodor Schekhtel, whose parents were Volga Germans. Walk around the Lipki (Linden trees) and catch a concert



FLICKR

at the pseudo-gothic Conservatory. Get your caffeine fix at Coffee 3 (34 Ulitsa Nekrasova) or Trista Barista (15 Ulitsa Kirova).

The Radishchev Museum is one of the first public museums in Russia with a fine collection of 19th century Russian art and interesting temporary exhibitions. Come in the summer to stroll along the Volga embankment, take a boat ride to an island or bask in the sun on one of the city beaches.

Krasnoyarsk

Siberian capital of contemporary art

Krasnoyarsk is usually considered the capital of Central-Eastern Siberia. Founded in the early 17th century, it gradually grew into a large industrial center. After a rough period in the 1990s, the city has cleaned up nicely, with restored parks, churches and an interesting mix of wooden architecture, art nouveau, constructivism and Soviet modernist buildings. It has also become an important center of contemporary art, with its own biennale.

Painter Vasily Surikov, famous for his large-scale historical paintings, was born in Krasnoyarsk and, of course, there is a street, a square and a museum named after him. Located in a splendid art nouveau mansion, the Surikov Museum has a good collection of local icons, paintings and sketches by the artist. Paraskeva Pyatnitsa



MARCO FIEBER / FLICKR

Chapel was built in 1855 in place of a wooden watchtower. Located at the top of the Karaulnaya (Sentinel) hill, it is one of the main symbols of the city with great views of the city center.

If you are interested in culinary tourism, try Siberian specialties and great cocktails at Bulgakov restaurant (12 Ulitsa Surikova). For an outing, go to the right bank of Yenisei River to the "Stolby" (Pillars) nature reserve.

Khabarovsk ↓

The Real Far East

Khabarovsk is Russia's most far-eastern outpost, just 30 kilometers from China. In fact, the area was controlled by China until 1858, when it was ceded to Russia. Named after one of the first explorers of the Amur River region, Yerofei Khabarov, the town was founded as a military outpost, but quickly grew into a major industrial center.

The city center is set snugly along the curve of the Amur River. Both the main street and park are named after Nikolai Muravyov-Amursky, the statesman and diplomat responsible for founding Khabarovsk.

Ulitsa Muravyova-Amurskogo is lined with beautiful buildings designed in every style imaginable. Don't miss the Far Eastern Library (#1), which combines regular red and grey Manchurian brick in what became a local style, and the art nouveau building (#5) that used to belong to a Japanese businessman.

For street art, go to Park Dinamo. Learn about Far Eastern history at the Khabarovsk Territorial Museum, and check out local art at the Fedotov Gallery. There are plenty of good Chinese, Japanese and Korean restaurants all over the city, but if you are looking for excellent coffee and baked goods, go to Muskatny Kit (82 Ulitsa Kalinina). **TMT**



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The Adequate American Leaves Russia

By David Filipov

BOSTON — There's a scene in the 1985 flick "Witness" where an Amish woman tells the profane Philadelphia cop played by Harrison Ford that he looks "plain." It's meant as a compliment: He fits in; he looks like he belongs.

I had a moment like that during my just-completed stint as Moscow bureau chief of The Washington Post. It was the day after I had appeared on the prime-time talk show of Vladimir Solovyov, known for its nightly thrashing of Westerners, Western policies and Westerners.

My once-fluent Russian was rusty after 12 years out of the country, and I had trouble making sense. Solovyov went easy on me, but two other guests, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (who corrected my grammar and syntax mistakes) and political analyst Sergei Mikheyev, laid in to me with the usual abandon.

I didn't really argue, I just tried to say rational things while acknowledging the historical context of post-Soviet disillusionment with the United States. The next morning, I was looking at my Twitter and saw that some of Solovyov's viewers had given a thumbs-up to my performance. "The American is adequate," one tweeted.

Actually, адекватен doesn't really mean "adequate" — it's more "appropriate," but in that context, a better interpretation of "Американец адекватен" might be "the American didn't annoy me," or even better, "the American was OK."

Or, perhaps, "the American looked plain."

However you translate it, that was high praise for an American journalist in Moscow these days. Quite simply, few Russians I've met believe in what we do. Many Russian leaders assume we're working for what they see as a Russophobic



State Duma Deputy Leonid Kalashnikov (right) berates Filipov (left) on state television in September in front of a map of the Baltics.

American establishment bent on blaming the Rooskies for everything.

Vladimir Putin's opponents think that we've lost our minds by fixating on alleged Kremlin interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The Russian Foreign Ministry has picked up on President Trump's line about publications like the Post, and started its own "fake news" page.

There's no way of hiding from the perception that a reporter

for The Washington Post is by definition engaged in a dishonest information war "against Russia." Whatever that means. In my experience, the only time Russians agree about the meaning of Russia is when they define it by who or what is against it.

It's probably too much to ask for Russian media critics to accept that a vague hybrid of news judgment and market forces, rather than institutional prejudices, drives most American news coverage. It's difficult for me even to explain that hybrid. I came to Russia planning to write about some of the 144 million people who aren't Putin; in the end, only two of my stories didn't mention him. No one told me what or what not to write. The Trump-Putin dynamic just ended up being the story in demand.

So I went on Russian TV to see what it was like, but also to have the chance to address those Russians my stories weren't covering.

It's not a great medium. "Western" guests are essentially brought on so that their ideas can be ridiculed. Even when the hosts let me talk, my inaccurate language undercut my analysis. Last time I was on, two State Duma deputies mocked my understanding of geography during a discussion about the Zapad-2017 military exercises.

During one of the breaks, I looked back to plead my case with the studio audience. "I'm not trying to be inadequate," I said to people in the seats closest to me. "It's OK," a woman assured me. "You're adequate."

For a moment, it felt good to be plain. **TMT**

David Filipov was Moscow bureau chief for The Washington Post from September 2016 to January 2018.

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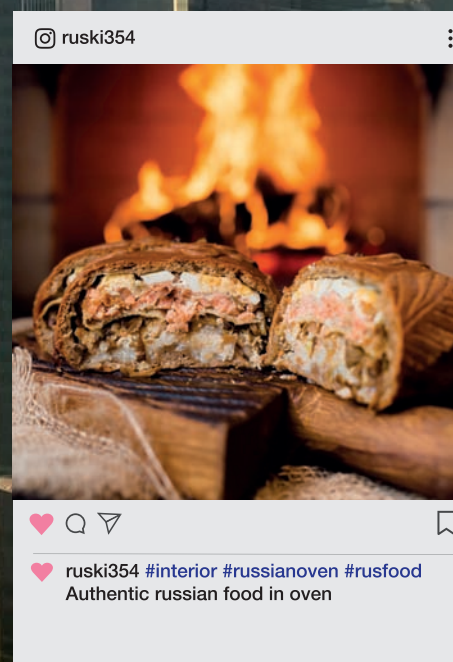
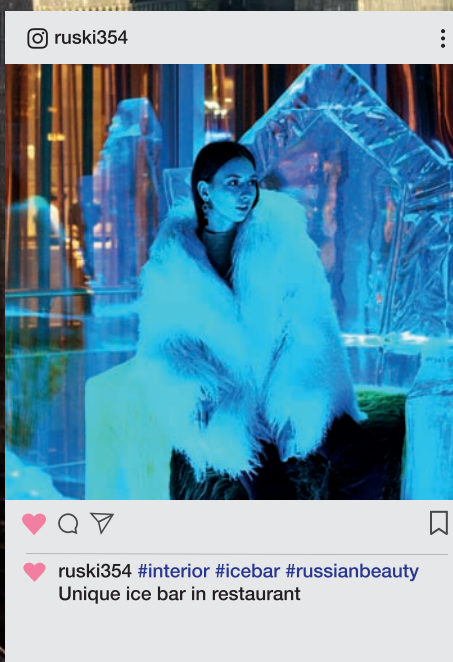
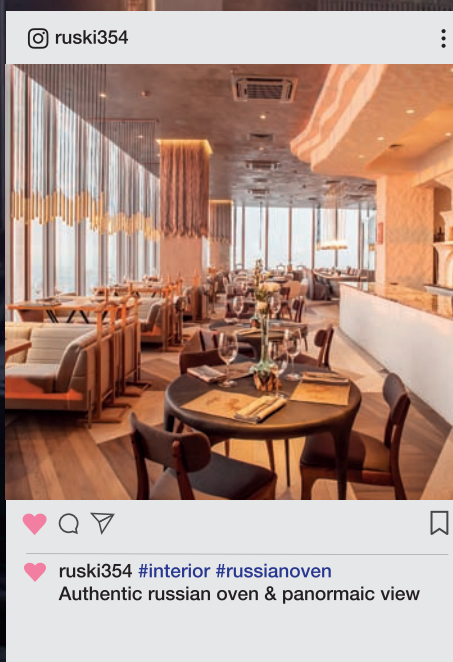
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