

# The Moscow Times

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18+





*"If Putin likes Donald Trump, I consider that an asset, not a liability." – President-elect Trump during a press conference.*

Jan. 20

Donald Trump becomes president of the U.S.

3

Number of U.S. presidents Vladimir Putin has worked with before Trump.



The United States' CIA, FBI, and NSA allege that Russia ordered hacking to improve Donald Trump's chances of winning the 2016 presidential election.

## More than a 'Reset'

By The Moscow Times newsreporter@imedi.ru

For the first time in history, the Russian and American presidents are truly on the same page

Russian officialdom is saluting Donald Trump ahead his Jan. 20 inauguration. Meanwhile, the Russian press declared Barack Obama's two terms "a disgrace" at best. These emotions are impressively genuine and overwhelming, but none of it is conceptually new. Much as the bread always lands butter-side-down, Russia welcomes every new president warmly, and U.S.-Russian relations tend to start promisingly — only to end poorly and then to begin anew.

Russia seemed to be getting along with George W. Bush — who once gazed into Vladimir Putin's eyes and saw his soul. But that relationship ended with an awkward confrontation after Russia invaded the Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008.

Then the "reset" initiated by presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama seemed very real. The climate had changed. Russia had turned to the West with a friendly face.

But once Vladimir Putin was reelected as president in 2012, the "reset" was over. A few years later — after the annexation of Crimea, war in Ukraine, and a military campaign in Syria — the U.S. and Russia were a mere step away from direct confrontation, a situation reminiscent of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Relations had reached their lowest point since the Cold War.

Now, it is starting over again. In the recent historical context, this may look like a routine cycle. In fact, it is very different — something



Trump's inauguration is set to launch a new era in Russia's relations with the United States.

the modern world has never before witnessed.

Since the end of the Second World War, every détente has been defined by the Russian leadership's rapprochement with the West. It was Mikhail Gorbachev who brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989. Boris Yeltsin led Russia to join the G8 in 1997 (until 2014, when it was thrown out of the club following the Crimea annexation). And in 2008, during Medvedev's "reset," Moscow, again, was declaring it wanted to be part of the Western world.

Now, with the official start of the Trump era, it's the other way around. Praising Donald Trump, Russia's leadership is celebrating a moral victory over the world's liberal order and

expecting its current values — and interests — to start expanding westward.

In Trump, a populist who seems to be jet-tisoning Western values, Russian leaders may even see something more than a political ally or a vehicle for promoting their interests. They may see a soul mate.

The extent to which Donald Trump and Russian officials use the same language and phrasing is truly striking — as if they are quoting each other or part of the same team. It is hardly a coincidence that the American media are now placing Putin's press conferences under a microscope and learning from Russia's experience.

Vladimir Putin has a very different background and temper from that of Donald Trump. Indeed, what can a morose ex-Soviet intelligence officer and a "colorful" American businessman and showman have in common? Yet they seem to share the same worldview.

They both seem to believe that the world's liberal order merely hides the Western establishment's personal interests under a disingenuous mask of values. They both seem to base their views on a post-truth belief that the facts are, indeed, irrelevant. Politically, they are both opportunists who pursue short-term goals and lack a long-term agenda.

If is difficult, of course, to predict how Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump we get along in person. But as the Trump era launches, it looks like the start of a beautiful friendship. **TMT**



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### READING THE KREMLIN

## Russia vs. The Global Order: What Will Trump's Divided Cabinet Do?

By Vladimir Frolov  
Political analyst



YEVGENY PARTONOV

Speaking at his Senate confirmation hearing, Donald Trump's nominee for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, said that Russia is predictable in its foreign policy goals. Russia wants a seat at the table when global issues are discussed, Tillerson said.

Tillerson then advocated for "an open and frank dialog with Russia regarding ambitions so we know how to chart our own course."

Meanwhile, Trump's nominee for secretary of defense James Mattis took a darker view of the Kremlin's intentions. Mattis argued that Putin is both trying to break the North Atlantic alliance and that his policies represent one of the key threats to the global order since the Second World War.

The argument between Tillerson and Mattis is about the urgency of the Russian threat to U.S. interests. Tillerson grades that threat as number three, Mattis as number one. Tillerson's advantage is that his vision of Russia is more Trumpian, while Mattis makes a more conventional threat assessment.

In terms of military power — and the desire to weaken the United States' position in the world — Moscow is now a strategic adversary of the United States on a par with the Soviet Union in 1970-80s. "Putin believes that the way to restore Russia's great power status is at the expense of an American-led order," William Burns, a former deputy secretary of state and the president of the Carnegie Endowment told a New York Times columnist.

But that is if the United States defines its core national security interests as maintaining global leadership and providing the global goods that underpin the liberal international order.

From this perspective, Russia, which seeks to disrupt and undermine this leadership, is a threat to the United States, but perhaps not an immediate military challenge.

But what if Washington decides to define its core interests as not having to underpin the U.S.-led world order at all costs. Russia could, if schmoozed right, become a willing partner in rebalancing of the United States' responsibilities.

Of course, Moscow is gloating over Trump's victory. It views his naivete as a source of disruption in the U.S. foreign policy process. Russia sees Trump's presidency as a net loss for the United States' global position that Russia should take advantage of.

This would amount to a fire sale of U.S. foreign policy positions where Moscow could get a good bargain.

Moscow's advantage is that it can pivot in the relationship almost instantaneously from foe to friend. In Russia, only one individual decides what is in Russia's national interest and what is not.

The most promising area of cooperation from Moscow's perspective is fighting "Radical Islam," where Russia, with its ease of making use of force decisions could contribute to alleviating the U.S. burden (it could be Russia who will "bomb the hell out of ISIS" on Trump's request).

But Moscow sees this cooperation as contributing to the loss of U.S. influence under the guise of economy of force. It could

be a win-win for Moscow, giving the United States the favor of weakening its geopolitical position under the cover of cooperation. If Moscow plays its cards right and does not get too pushy, it could get Trump do Russia's work in terms of disrupting U.S. alliances.

It is precisely this system of alliances underpinning the liberal international order that Putin aims to dismantle. The goalposts have moved since Putin made his Munich conference speech in 2007. It is no longer enough for Moscow that the West recognizes its security interests and the zone of influence in the former Soviet Union by eschewing further enlargement of NATO and the EU.

Russia sees itself heading toward a new Yalta, where the entire architecture of the world order will be completely rearranged between the two (or three, if we include China) global super-powers.

Yalta as we know it did not envision NATO or the EU, and neither must the next Yalta, Moscow hopes. The Kremlin has told Japan that the price of settling a 70-year-old land dispute over the Kuril islands is a significant devaluation of the U.S.-Japan security treaty, or as Moscow puts it a "more independent Japanese foreign policy" — which is exactly what Russia has been counseling U.S. allies in Europe.

Tillerson is right that Russia is seeking a "rightful role in the global world order." What he misses, is that Moscow actually aims at destroying it. Mattis, though, gets the whole picture. Where Trump stands on this is anyone's guess. **TMT**





*“By an agreement between Patriarch Kirill and myself, the cathedral will retain its educational functions” – St. Petersburg governor **Georgy Poltavchenko**.*

133

buildings given to the Orthodox Church in 2016.



March 2019 – the deadline for completing the transfer of St. Isaac's from the state to the Russian Orthodox Church.

40 years

how long it took to build St. Isaac's Cathedral between 1818 and 1858.

# Heavenly Real Estate

By **Ola Cichowlas** o.cichowlas@imedia.ru, Twitter: @olacicho

St. Isaac's Cathedral, Petersburg's iconic landmark, is gifted to Russian Orthodox Church



SERGEI NIKOLAEV / TASS

The future of St. Isaac's Cathedral, one of Russia's most important historical sites, is uncertain. The imperial monument in St. Petersburg has served as a state museum for ninety years. But now, city authorities plan to transfer the building to the control of the Russian Orthodox Church, causing a bitter dispute between the people of St. Petersburg, conservationists and clerics.

On Jan. 10, St. Petersburg's governor Georgy Poltavchenko announced that the state would gift the landmark to the church in an agreement which will last 49 years.

St. Isaac's is known for its lavish interiors and golden domes, which provide some of the best views on Russia's former imperial capital. It took 40 years to build, largely overseen by the repressive reign of Nicholas I and finally finished under Alexander II in 1858. In the 1930s, the Soviets turned the building into an anti-religious museum. But since the fall of the USSR, the UNESCO world heritage has housed a state museum with a permanent exhibition while also hosting religious sermons.

Church officials have said that in the West, pointing specifically to Italy and the Vatican, cathedrals are operated by religious authorities. They have also promised that the cathedral will remain open to the public. In a press conference, the spokesman for the Orthodox Church Vladimir Legoida said it plans to scrap the 250 ruble fee to enter St. Isaac's and pledged to “guarantee access” to it.

But opponents of the move doubt that these promises will be kept.

## Little Faith in the Church as a Conservationist

“It will be destroyed,” says Nikolay Burov, the museum's current director. He clarifies that nobody will literally destroy the building but that the new management will be unable to cope with its maintenance. “I am a realistic man of the 21st century, I know how the economics of this place work,” says Burov, adding that St. Isaac's requires constant renovation and employs almost 400 people.

Burov worries that under the authority of the church, St. Isaac's will lose its “utilitarian function” as a public building open to the people of St. Petersburg.

He is not alone in this opinion — the city did not take the decision well. Over 190,000 people have signed an online petition against the decision. The day after Poltavchenko announced the news, a few hundred people gathered outside the cathedral in a spontaneous protest demanding city authorities retract the decision.

“St. Isaac's is a symbol of our city and its fate should be decided by the citizens of St. Petersburg,” says Bogdan Litvin, one

of the organisers of the protest. Instead, the decision was made by one person: the governor Poltavchenko.

“We should solve this issue using direct democracy,” says local pollster Roman Mogilevsky. Protesters, who plan another demonstration on Jan. 28, are demanding a referendum on the fate of the building. But city authorities have already dismissed this idea. St. Petersburg's ultra conservative vice governor Mikhail Mokretsov called this idea “an exotic way to fulfill federal law,” further angering protesters.

## Why now?

It is not the first time controversy around the question of St. Isaac's ownership has arisen in the city. Burov says this debate goes back 150 years, when the cathedral was first built. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the church's Synod asked the imperial government to transfer St. Isaac's from the jurisdiction of the interior ministry to the full control of the church — but it repeatedly refused to do so.

Burov sees echoes of the same debate in today's Russia.

Only last Spring, city authorities rejected a church request to hand over the building on economic grounds. Then, local church authorities grew quiet and did not protest the decision. Yet, less than a year later, the St. Petersburg government appears to have made a U-turn.

“This could only have come from the Kremlin,” says Andrei Desnitsky, an expert on the Russian Orthodox Church. “It looks like an exchange for a favour,” he adds. Desnitsky believes the timing of the affair is no coincidence. As Russia enters the centenary year of the Russian revolution, the state will be looking to emphasize national unity over rifts. The Kremlin may be looking to stage a show in which it needs church support.

One of these shows could be burying the remains of Tsarevich Alexei and Grand Duchess Maria, which were found in an Ural forest, separated from the rest of Russia's murdered royal family. Funerals for the pair were repeatedly scheduled and repeatedly called off by the church, which does not recognize the remains as authentic despite scientists largely agreeing on the matching DNA. “Burying them could be a strong political signal for the state this year,” says Desnitsky. In order to do so, the Kremlin would require church participation. Gifting St. Isaac's to the Patriarchy could convince it to agree.

Burov, too, cannot help but draw the parallel to the centenary. “I am a statesman not a revolutionary, but I do not think this is the right way to mark this jubilee,” he says.

## St. Isaac's as a precedent

Since the fall of the USSR, the transfer of religious buildings to the church has been ongoing, but the institution's power as a

landlord has been strengthened significantly under Putin. In 2010, the Duma passed a law allowing major state buildings to return to the church. In 2016 alone, 133 buildings were given to the patriarchy and there are thousands more listed as eligible for the same treatment on the official site of Russia's Federal Agency for State Property.

The more property the church gains, the more conservationists fear for its ability to look after the buildings. “I worry that there are not enough voices inside the church who think about how to look after the buildings,” Desnitsky says. Even the burning of scented candles during religious ceremonies damages interiors.

Konstantin Mikhailov, the head of Russia's conservationist society Arkhnadzor, calls for calm in the situation. “We need to think of the church as a business,” he says, calling for it to put forward a plan on how it will finance and maintain St. Isaac's. Making the plans for the maintenance of the public cathedral, he warns, should happen before, not after, the takeover. “This is a national treasure and we cannot afford to experiment with it,” says Mikhailov.

But Burov remains skeptical: “I am very scared for St. Isaac's as a native of St. Petersburg and as somebody who has been visiting it for sixty years.” **TMT**



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"Russian writers haven't been this subservient since Stalin's era. This is a shameful page in PEN's history." Nobel Prize winner **Svetlana Alexievich**.

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1989

founding year  
PEN Russia.

55

writers have  
signed a protest  
letter.



"There is a group of 'liberal' activists trying to create conflict." **PEN-Russia's press service** after more than 60 of its members sent Putin a request to pardon Oleg Sentsov.

# With Sharpened Pens

By **Eva Hartog** e.hartog@imedia.ru | Twitter: @EvaHartog

The expulsion of a prominent writer for political reasons has brought back ghosts of Soviet censorship

"A person whom we thought was an aesthete has turned out to be one of the sharpest exponents of a distinctly political battle."

In 1958, that description of Boris Pasternak by the literary scholar Kornely Zelinsky at a writers' gathering was deliberately damning. Several days earlier, Pasternak had been expelled from the Soviet Writers' Union for his "anti-Soviet" views. The public pummeling by his colleagues was the final nail in the coffin.

Since then, Pasternak and many other writers who fell foul of Soviet authorities, have been rehabilitated, signaling the country's new commitment to free speech and openness.

But fears that some of those gains are being reversed have sounded once more in Moscow in recent weeks after a prominent journalist was expelled from the Russian branch of the Poets, Essayists and Novelists association, or PEN. Two other members have also received strict warnings for their political activities in a move that is unprecedented in the center's almost 30-year history.

KATERINA LOBANOVA



dreï Bitov, himself a writer with the reputation of being non-conformist.

"Some of those very people who suffered from Soviet authoritarianism are now copying that very behavior," says Nikolai Podosokorsky, a prominent literary critic and a PEN member. He doesn't discount that practical concerns could be involved. "Maybe the management got spooked and thought the center itself could be labeled a foreign agent."

Ulitskaya quit the group and roughly two dozen people followed, including the prominent writer Lev Timofeyev.

The final drop appears to have been an open letter to Putin signed by dozens of PEN members, including Parkhomenko, asking him to pardon Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian filmmaker who opposed the annexation of Crimea and was sentenced to 20 years in prison for "terrorism."

PEN's management distanced itself from the appeal as having come from "a group of 'liberal' opposition activists, who are trying to come into conflict with us and are following their own line."

In response, Parkhomenko slammed PEN's leadership on his Facebook page, which has almost 150,000 followers. "I said it was an embarrassment and a betrayal of the principles PEN Russia was founded on," Parkhomenko told The Moscow Times. Weeks later he was expelled.

## Split

Those looking for Soviet-era undertones in the expulsion, do not have to look too far.

"It appears that Sergei Parkhomenko, who has the reputation of a 'Bolotnaya Square provocateur,' joined our organization only to destroy it from within by turning it into an opposition political party," PEN's board announced in an online statement in late December.

Parkhomenko, a blogger and radio commentator, did indeed play an active role in mass anti-Kremlin protests in 2011 and 2012. He is also involved in the Dissident group which exposes plagiarism, often targeting Kremlin-affiliated officials, and the Last Address project to commemorate the victims of Soviet repression.

But whereas in Pasternak's time the accusation of anti-government activity was enough to make him a pariah, Parkhomenko's expulsion has caused a wave of outrage in Russia's literary community, splitting it into opposing sides.

Almost two dozen writers, including some of Russia's biggest names such as Nobel Prize Winner Svetlana Alexievich and detective writer Boris Akunin, have quit the group in protest. Some 55 more members have called for Parkhomenko's reinstatement in an online letter which also questions the legitimacy of PEN's leadership.

"PEN has taken up a kind of neutral, undefined but overall conformist position that I find unacceptable," Lev Rubinstein, who is among the authors to quit the group, told The Moscow Times. "I'd been delaying the decision, but after Parkhomenko's expulsion I realized I can't stay there anymore."

Others have been even less forgiving. "Russian writers have not been this subservient since Stalinist times. Putin will go, but this shameful page in PEN's history will remain," Alexievich said on an unofficial Facebook page of PEN members.

## 'Unacceptable Position'

At the heart of the conflict is a disagreement over whether the Russian version of PEN, an international association of writers who pledge to defend freedom of speech, is a political organization.

The question goes back a long way. In 1956, culture officials rejected a request by the Soviet Writers' Union to join the PEN group, arguing in a letter that it would put Soviet writers in an "unacceptable position: speak out against censorship, or criticize the government and so forth."

Such concerns took a backseat with the advent of perestroika and glasnost, and in 1989, Russia launched its own PEN Center. On occasions, it was critical of the authorities, speaking out against the second Chechen War, for example.

But in recent years and especially since Russia became embroiled in conflict in Ukraine, PEN Russia's management has steered clear of sensitive topics. "It's become increasingly geriatric," Lyudmila Ulitskaya, a former PEN vice-president and writer, told The Moscow Times.

In an attempt to revive the club in 2014, she invited roughly forty new "young, talented and socially active" members to join PEN, among whom was Parkhomenko, she said.

Under their influence, a significant segment of PEN's 400 members became increasingly politically engaged, publishing open letters against the jailing of Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko, the so-called foreign agents law against NGOs or, more recently, the prosecution of the director of a Ukrainian library for extremism.

While they identify themselves as PEN members, the petitions are signed in their own names, and are often joint initiatives with other rights groups, Parkhomenko told The Moscow Times. Nonetheless, PEN's management has not been pleased with the change in tone.

In the summer of 2014, Ulitskaya was accused of staging a "takeover" and "politicizing PEN" by its then-head An-

## No Revolution

As a young author, PEN Russia's president Yevgeny Popov was ousted from the Soviet Writers' Union and his work banned. But he doesn't see any conflict between his personal experience and his own actions.

"PEN is an apolitical rights organization," he said. "We defend all victims regardless of their political views. But we're constantly being dragged into a political battle of countries and clans."

"We don't want a revolution, there's been enough of that in Russia, we want evolution," he added.

Nevertheless, the conflict risks endangering the symbolic step made by Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, when it was allowed into the PEN club. PEN International, which could revoke Russia's membership, has so far remained silent. But the signs spell trouble; expressed a statement by the American PEN publishing an online statement expressing concern at Parkhomenko's expulsion.

In comments to The Moscow Times, its director, Suzanne Nossel, called the complaints by PEN members against their board "serious." "Their acts of protest reflect both courage and commitment to the core principles that we at PEN America share," she said.

Should PEN Russia be dismantled, Parkhomenko is convinced a different group will arise in its place. "There is a need for politically active writers," he says. But he hopes it won't come to that. "All I expect is from PEN is for it to promote people's rights. If it is going to do that work, I'll try to do my part, too." **TMT**





"We need to achieve 3% growth in 2019 and 4% by 2021-2022. It's possible with accepting the reform plan that we will propose" - **Alexei Kudrin**

2018

the proposed start of the new economic reforms.



Alexei Kudrin served as Russia's Finance Minister from 2000 to 2011

\$280.9 billion

spent on security and law enforcement in 2016

# Trapped in Myopia

Plans to reform Russia's economy are laudable, but they're not enough



Op-Ed by **Boris Grozovsky**  
Economic analyst

Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin deserves the accolade of Russia's greatest optimist: he is once again creating a strategy for the country's development. Heading a group of experts formed at the president's behest, Kudrin is formulating a program for Putin's re-election bid in 2018 that plots the country's economic future. He and his team have until April to complete the task.

In this respect, Kudrin is like an elderly schoolteacher who tries for the umpteenth time to explain a basic lesson to a teenage student. The teen has long been hooked on drugs, runs with a local gang, and has a long criminal record for theft. However, the teacher does not see the student as an incorrigible thug, but as a well-meaning child who is simply having a little trouble mastering the lesson.

Kudrin resigned from government in late 2011 after a falling out with then-President Dmitry Medvedev over military spending. At the time, it seemed more a pretext than a reason for his departure. But it turned out that Kudrin saw where things were headed.

Spending on defense, national security, and law enforcement in 2011 had reached 2.78 trillion rubles (\$46.9 billion), or 25.4 percent of the government's 10.93 trillion rubles in total outlays. The militarization of Russia was in full swing.

But that was only the beginning. Such spending peaked in 2014-2016 at what is surely an unsustainable high. The Finance Ministry has probably managed to cut costs in some areas, but outlays for the siloviki (security agencies) in 2016 were projected to reach 5.7 trillion rubles — a staggering 34.2 percent of a budget totaling 16.64 trillion rubles (\$281.2 billion).

The pendulum has clearly swung to its full amplitude. In demonstrating its military capabilities, Russia made the whole world fear its every move. Now, Russian leaders must demonstrate not their strength, but their readiness to reach reasonable compromise and their determination to modernize.

That's why they called Kudrin back.

His last attempt to devise plan for economic development was five years ago. That project was called Strategy 2020. However, government officials only picked parts they liked from the hefty report and embarked on an opposing strategy — moving into Crimea and the Donbass, scaling back political freedoms, and coming into confrontation with the West.

Kudrin and his associates are very sober in their assessment of the economic situation in Russia. In a recent article, they wrote that one of the main obstacles to development is the way that Russians, lacking any vision of the future, focus only on the immediate short-term situation.

This comes from the shock of the Soviet era, when long-term planning was very popular but ultimately discredited. Until the Russian people "look to the future" again, they will never take concrete actions. Russia's current myopia leads it to embark on impulsive ventures like Crimea and the Donbass, satisfying immediate desires but undermining long-term development.

Speaking at the Gaidar Forum in Moscow in mid-January, Kudrin explained that Russia's technological backwardness and undynamic development are consequences of this short-term thinking, and that the government is a hindrance in the matter. He argued that by subsidizing innovation, the government inhibits rather than accelerates development.

But it is impossible to formulate a long-term goal while the government broadcasts an endless barrage of propaganda and silences opposition. What meaningful discussion can take place if the authorities label it extremism when someone expresses the opinion that Russia's annexation of Crimea was a geopolitical disaster?

A prison cell is not the best place from which to lay the groundwork for the future. In a police state, citizens' lives lie not in their own hands or even in the hands of the law, but in the hands of the police and senior officials. It is said that they have a better view from Moscow and must know what's best. But such an attitude suits authoritarian leaders perfectly: it gives them carte blanche and frees them of all accountability.

As a result, all of Alexei Kudrin's liberal plans will once again amount to nothing more than an unattainable utopia. The authors claim it will improve the effectiveness of the state. Perhaps — although not in serving the needs of the people, but in controlling them. They claim it calls for reforms to the judicial system. Of course, but politicians and state-controlled businesses know perfectly well that even if they violate the law, the courts will dutifully hand down whatever decision they request.

They claim the plan will spur individual initiatives and reduce government regulation of the economy and society. Sure, but the state will retain the most profitable businesses for itself by occupying the "commanding heights" of the economy — including oil, gas, and defense — while continuing to reduce its commitments in such "unprofitable" sectors as healthcare and education. The authors claim the plan will shift authority from the federal center to the regions and spur regional development. Yes, but Moscow will retain all financial and political control while the regions will be tasked with maintaining social stability.

This is how Kudrin's liberal strategy for economic development actually looks because it will find implementation not in a vacuum, but in the unyielding power vertical of Putin's Russia.

Putin and his cronies will never give liberals the right to change a country that they feel belongs to them alone. At most, they will hand liberals control over the unprofitable part of business while retaining a "controlling share" of the rest.

When agreeing to hire on for a job, it is always best to clarify exactly what task your employers actually want you to accomplish, and just how much authority they will give you to do it. **TMT**

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*"I remember meeting people who worked in bars or whatever, even tourists, who thought their phones were tapped. Which was silly."* — journalist **Matt Taibbi**

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**1917**

Founding of the Cheka, predecessor of the KGB.

**35**

Russian intelligence operatives were expelled from the U.S. in December.



The samovar bugged by Russia's FSB helped to uncover a law enforcement official taking a bribe from a Georgian organized crime boss in 2016.



# Is Big Brother Watching?

By **Matthew Bodner** and **Matthew Kupfer** [newsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:newsreporter@imedia.ru)

State surveillance of foreigners in Russia is real, but spy mythology and false perceptions often overshadow reality

**M**ost foreigners who have spent extended periods of time in Russia can recall advice given to them before their arrival. For government officials, it comes as an institutionalized briefing from their security services. For journalists, scholars, and students, it often comes as wisdom passed down from previous generations of Russia watchers.

For both, the mantra is the same: assume you are being watched.

In modern Moscow, this advice can be easy to forget. The city is a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis like any other. But when Briton Jonathan Haslam first visited as part of a six-month graduate exchange in 1977, the Russian capital was another world. As a foreigner in a closed society, his very presence and interest in the Soviet Union aroused deep suspicion.

"The assumption was that foreigners were spies," he recalls. This was implicit in the way the Soviets handled visitors like Haslam. There were strict restrictions on where foreigners could live, and the authorities monitored their daily life — both covertly and overtly.

"Their aim was largely to deter you, to give you the impression of total coverage," Haslam says.

That was the Cold War. Much has changed since 1977, but the spectre of unwanted government attention still hangs over the ranks of Moscow's foreign population to this day — as recent allegations that Rus-

sia may have blackmail on U.S. President-elect Donald Trump show.

But much like the unsubstantiated Trump allegations, many cases of surveillance remain difficult or impossible to prove. State-sponsored snooping is real, but perceptions greatly outpace reality. The conflict adds a degree of paranoia to daily life in Moscow.

## Back in the USSR

From a historical perspective, foreigners are not wrong to fear surveillance. The Soviets were unparalleled masters of the art, argues Haslam, now a professor at Princeton University and a historian of Soviet intel.

"They had a vast number of people to call upon for following foreigners, something Western services could not match," he says. "Any girl you went out with would be questioned after your meeting, and then obliged to report on you."

In Haslam's time, students from capitalist nations were confined to the first six floors of an Academy of Sciences hotel, which were heavily monitored.

Cleaning staff regularly sifted through papers left by students on their desks. Rooms were obviously bugged. Once Haslam walked into the room to find the housekeeper perched atop a stool, talking to a fire alarm on the ceiling.

The fire alarm, it seems, was wired to a central ner-

vous system of surveillance tech hidden away on one of the hotel's 12 floors. That floor was inaccessible from the main elevator, but Haslam says he once stumbled upon the entrance while exploring the back stairwell. An employee had left the door wide open, and Haslam decided to have a peek. Inside, he discovered banks of tape recorders.

## New Surveillance, New Russia

That chance encounter with an open door offered Haslam a glimpse behind the curtains of Soviet surveillance. But it was just one facet of a broad-spectrum effort that Katy Pearce, an expert on media and surveillance in the former USSR, recently described in the Washington Post as a "tedious, costly analogue process involving phone tapping, stakeouts, following people, and lots of photography and videotaping."

The Soviet collapse in 1991, however, "democratized surveillance," Pearce argues.

What was once the exclusive forte of a monolithic state apparatus became the bread-and-butter of thousands of former KGB agents, sent out into the cold without work. To make ends meet, they began plying their trade in the private sector, working for Russia's emerging class of oligarchs. As a result, blackmail

*Continued on Page 11 →*



# Out & About



January 19 – 25, 2017

7

Weekly round-up of all that's new, delicious and fun in Moscow.



OXUS / FACEBOOK



The closest thing to an Uzbek restaurant in Tashkent is Oxus, which prides itself on its authentic recipes, Uzbek chef, and produce sourced from Central Asia.

## Innovative Uzbek Cuisine at Oxus

By **Andrei Muchnik** artsreporter@imedia.ru

### *Plov, lagman and manti by those in the know*

Located in a two-story mansion right next to an Armenian church in the Maryina Roshcha neighborhood, Oxus presents an alternative take on Central Asian cuisine, distinctly different from ubiquitous chains like Chaikhona #1.

The first floor has a more ethnic feel. There is a circular tapchan, a traditional Central Asian bench for drinking tea, right in the center of the room, complete with plenty of pillows. The second floor, on the other hand, features potted olive trees and several private rooms. On the first floor you are allowed to smoke shisha, while the second floor is strictly non-smoking.

Oxus is the historical Latin name for Amu Darya, the major Asian river that crosses Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Oxus owners claim that they try to source as much produce as possible from these countries. Oxus's chef is Bakhodir Nurmukhamedov from Uzbekistan, who is known for his work at some of the best Tashkent restaurants, including L'Art de la Cuisine and Golubiye Kupola (Blue Domes). Thanks to him, the focus at Oxus is really on Uzbek cuisine.

First, try one of the cold starters, for example, naryn — thin slices of boiled horse meat and noo-

dles served with a piece of horse sausage — or lamb with archa, Uzbek juniper, cooked in a traditional tandyr clay oven (470 rubles).

The hot starters include the more familiar samsa, a version of samosa, a small triangular pastry with lamb (160 rubles each) or mini-chebureki, deep-fried pastries with various fillings (360 rubles for three). You can also get shurpa here, a clear soup with lamb and vegetables (520 rubles).

For your main dish, go for the Samarkand plov. The word means pilaf and consists of rice simmered in meat stock with herbs and spices in a large cooking pot (690 rubles). Oxus's version

includes raisins, chickpeas and yellow carrot. Lagman is another typical Central Asian dish of hand-pulled noodles, served either with or without broth. At Oxus you get the Uyghur version served with lamb and sweet peppers (620 rubles).

If you are feeling celebratory, there's a list of special cocktails to round it all off, including "Persimmon," a gin drink made with fruit and served in a hollowed out, frozen persimmon. **TMT**

**+7 (495) 681 8000**

[oxusmoscow.ru](http://oxusmoscow.ru)

24 Trifonovskaya Ulitsa, Bldg. 1  
Metro Marina Roshcha, Dostoyevskaya

### NEWS & OPENINGS



WAKE CUP CAFE / FACEBOOK

#### Wake Cup Cafe

##### **Hong Kong breakfast in Moscow**

Egg waffles with bubbles, invented in Hong Kong and popular all over Asia, have finally arrived in Moscow. Try them with a cheese and ham filling (168 rubles) or with a variety of whipped cream and fruit fillings and toppings (from 158 rubles). A flat white is 119 rubles, while a cappuccino or a latte is just 100 rubles. The hot chocolate brownie with ice cream is also worth a try (159 rubles).

**+7 (905) 507 3034**

[facebook.com/wakecup.coffeetogo](https://facebook.com/wakecup.coffeetogo)

5/1 Ulitsa Nizhniaya Maslovka  
Metro Savyolovskaya



STEAK IT EASY / FACEBOOK

#### Steak it Easy

##### **Steaks and burgers after shopping**

Located on the fifth floor of AFIMALL shopping center, Steak It Easy is a new venture of the Vasilchuk brothers. The chef is Australian Sebbie Kenyon, who used to work at Voronezh and 354. Sebbie specializes in unorthodox meat cuts — try his excellent picanha or skirt steaks (600 rubles) with mashed potatoes and truffle oil. There's also a wide selection of burgers (from 280 rubles).

**+7 (495) 544 5377**

[facebook.com/steakiteasygrillbar](https://facebook.com/steakiteasygrillbar)

2 Presnenskaya Ulitsa  
Metro Vystavochная, Delovoy Tsentr



NHA / FACEBOOK

#### Nha

##### **Eat, dance, be happy**

Tucked away in a courtyard off Tverskaya, this Vietnamese cafe, bar and club boasts steaming bowls of pho by day and electronic beats by night. Stop off for lunch and munch on crisp Vietnamese spring rolls (290 rubles) and pillowy bao buns or come back later to sip on cocktails in the "club" room — complete with disco balls and DJ decks.

**+7 (985) 014 1848**

[facebook.com/nhamoscow](https://facebook.com/nhamoscow)

6 Stolesnikov Pereulok  
Metro Tverskaya, Pushkinskaya



RMA RU

#### The Local Chefs

##### **Hotpot at Mega Khimki**

The Local Chefs is a new restaurant in the Khimki Mega mall food court, located on the second floor, which focuses on seafood. Try their ravioli with crab meat, tuna tartare (both 390 rubles) or dorado with mint and capers (590 rubles). There's a hot pot option — get two liters of stock (200 rubles) and choose your ingredients (the seafood combination will cost you 690 rubles).

**+7 (495) 787 1877**

39 Leningradskaya Ulitsa, Bldg. 5, Khimki  
Metro Rechnoy Vokzal, Planernaya

## Take it and go!

Four pages packed with the best places in Moscow to eat, drink, walk, shop, listen, watch, dance and sightsee. A new walking route and listings every week! **Take it, use it, save it!**



**7. OKO**

OKO is one of the newest skyscrapers in Moskva-City. To reach it you need to go out of the Federation Tower and head left, past the Eurasia Tower. OKO means "eye" in Russian, and it boasts the highest skating rink in Europe (at 354 meters) as well as the highest restaurant in Moscow, Ruski, which offers innovative Russian cuisine. On the very top of the building, directly above the skating rink, there's an observation deck combined with a helipad, the only open air viewing platform in Moskva-City. Come spring, the skating rink will be transformed into a patio restaurant.

21/2 Perviy Krasnogvardeysky Proezd

**6. Federatsiya (Federation) Tower**

Follow the signs on the second floor of AFIMALL to the direct underpass to the Federation Tower, currently the highest building in Moskva-City. It was built by Sergei Polonsky, a quirky Russian businessman who was once on the Forbes' list of the richest men in Russia but is now awaiting trial at a detention facility. Federation Tower has the highest observation deck, although the views are somewhat obscured by neighboring skyscrapers. Restaurant SIXTY is located on the sixty-second floor and provides great views and decent food, if a bit overpriced.

12 Presnenskaya Naberezhnaya

**4. Gorod Stolits (City of Capitals)**

Take a short walk down the underground tunnel from Imperia to Gorod Stolits (City of Capitals) — two towers named for the two Russia's capitals, the official capital Moscow and the former capital, now called the cultural or northern capital, St. Petersburg. Between them is an atrium with a red tower in the middle. It's actually a model of the never-built Monument to the Third International by Russian avant-garde artist Vladimir Tatlin. There's a cafeteria on the third floor, beloved by white-collar workers who like to save money, and some of the most expensive restaurants in Moskva-City on the ground floor — Panasian Bamboo Bar and Italian Tutto Bene.

8 Presnenskaya Naberezhnaya, Bldg. 1

**5. AFIMALL Shopping Center**

AFIMALL is the gravity point of Moskva-City. To find it, just follow the signs in the tunnel below Gorod Stolits. Some say the navigation is organized so that people who come to AFIMALL will go around in circles, without actually leaving the shopping center. There's a decent food court on the fifth floor (check out Meat & Fish, Steak It Easy or Jaffa), the only Moscow outpost of Crate & Barrel and much more shopping. The only downside is, apparently, the absence of decent shoe boutiques, a claim made by a certain Ksenia, who became famous after telling a story of staying inside Moskva-City for six months straight. She worked in a real estate firm, lived in an apartment in one of the towers and used AFIMALL to socialize.

2 Presnenskaya Naberezhnaya

Perviy Krasnogvardeysky Proezd

6

7





**1. Bashnya (Tower) 2000**  
This walk will take you to the Moscow International Business Center, or simply Moskva-City as it's called by locals. It starts where Moskva-City itself began — at Tower 2000. If the weather is good, walk from Kievskaya metro station down Bolshaya Dorogomilovskaya Ulitsa and then Kutuzovsky Prospekt, a stretch of some of the most expensive Moscow real estate. Turn right at the monument to Bagration, a Georgian prince who became one of the heroes of the 1812 war with Napoleon, and you can't miss Tower 2000. In bad weather you can just follow the signs from Vystavochnaya metro station. The tower was finished in 2001, way before the construction of rest of Moskva City began. The viewing platform on the ground level is probably the best spot to check out the whole of Moskva City.  
23A Naberezhnaya Tarasa Shevchenko

**3. Imperia (Empire) Tower**  
The Imperia (Empire) Tower is at the very heart of the Moskva-City. After checking out Masterslavl, go outside to Gorodskaya Ploshchad (City Square). There you'll see Imperia on your left, right behind the Evolution Tower. There are viewing platforms on the 56th and 58th floors, where you can either take in the views or peek into the windows of a mysterious five-story penthouse on top of the Mercury skyscraper. You can also organize a date with that special someone, which includes a meal and champagne. The underground level below Imperia is well-designed, fitted out with potted plants and features some of the best dining options in Moskva-City, including Bread & Meat by the famous Australian-born chef Glen Ballis, who has plenty of comfort food on offer. There's also ABC kitchen, a couple of smoothie and coffee places, and a vape shop.  
6 Presnenskaya Naberezhnaya, Bldg. 2



Presnenskaya Naberezhnaya

Naberezhnaya Tarasa Shevchenko

**2. Evolutsiya (Evolution) Tower and Masterslavl**  
After you are done taking selfies at Tower 2000, enter the Bagration covered bridge. The bridge is lined with 90s style shopping kiosks selling iPhone covers and souvenirs of dubious quality. But that's not what you're here for. Take the traveler and enjoy the views of the frozen Moscow river and the skyline. The Bagration Bridge leads you straight to the twisted, DNA-shaped Evolution Tower, below which you can find Masterslavl, a kids' educational center, where they can learn any profession they are interested in, from fireman to a bank teller to a customs officer. Children aged from 5 to 14 are welcome, there are also various workshops and lectures for adults, too.  
4 Presnenskaya Naberezhnaya, Bldg. 2



# Inside Moskva-City

## A Neighborhood of Skyscrapers and Billionaires

By **Andrei Muchnik** artsreporter@imedia.ru | Illustration by **Oleg Borodin**

Where to shop, dine and get the best views in Moscow's newest neighborhood





**Ingrid Burke**, International Editorial Director at [Tranio.com](#)

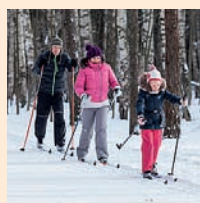
*"I love Koryo, the North Korean place near Leninsky Prospekt. They have the best kimchi and bibimbap in Moscow, and between the propaganda videos and identically dressed and styled waitresses, dining there is a truly unique experience."*



VOLLEN

## Hitting the Slopes and Cross Country Skiing in Moscow

Moscow might not be the French Alps, but low altitudes don't mean an end to your dreams of hitting the slopes this winter. Whether you're a seasoned snow-bunny or someone looking to make the most of a Russian winter, here's our round-up of the best resorts in the region. Every complex offers equipment rental for both snowboarders and skiers.



MESHCHERSKY PARK

### Meshchersky Park

[Ideal conditions for cross-country](#)

Just outside the city limits in Odinstovo is a relatively new park in a remarkably pristine country environment. The parkland — 465 hectares, or about 1,150 acres — is a nice mix of forests and fields with a large pond. Most of it is left in a pristine state for outdoor fun, but they also maintain some paths and routes for cross-country skiing — a total of five tracks, ranging from just over a kilometer to four kilometers. The tracks vary in width from three to six meters, making them comfortable for both fast and slow skiers. You can rent skis there or bring your own, and they have trainers on hand to help improve your style. Check out the site for upcoming events, like the 30K race on Feb. 12. Head out this week and start getting in shape for it.

[park-meshchersky.ru](#)

Odinstovsky raion

Bus 883 from Filyovskiy Park to

Merschersky Prud stop

### Leonid Tyagacheva Club

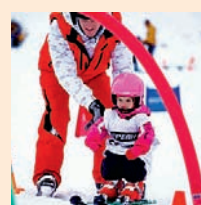
[Where stars are born](#)

Another out-of-town resort, the Leonid Tyagacheva Club can boast of being the oldest ski

resort in Moscow, as well as the training base for many Olympian skiers from the Soviet era. In fact, to this day, the Russian mountain skiing and snowboarding teams still train here. The complex, 40 kilometers north of Moscow, is home to nine ski runs, several cross-country ski trails that remain well-lit into the night, and all the amenities of a country getaway: chalets, a hotel, a spa, tennis courts and an ice rink. The decor hasn't changed much in the last 50 years or so from the looks of it, but that just adds to its old world charm.

[shukolovo.ru](#)

Skukolo Village. Dmitrovskoye Shosse



LISYA GORA

### Lisya Gora

[Something for everyone](#)

Lisya Gora, or "Fox Mountain," is a picturesque named complex, seven kilometers from Moscow, that offers five slopes catering to both beginners and confident skiers. The most advanced slope is 400 meters long with a drop of around 95 meters. Snowboard and ski jumps offer the more adventurous a chance to dabble in some free styling practice when they tire of the slopes. As with most other resorts, tubing is an option if balance isn't your strong point. All runs are open until midnight if you prefer

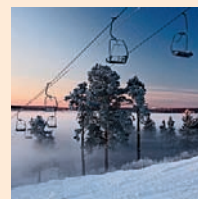
nighttime skiing, and the adjacent forest provides the perfect spot for cross country skiing if you harbor a fear of heights.

[foxrock.su](#)

Balashnika. Leonovskoye Shosse

Bus or mashrutka from metro Vykhino or

Novogireyevo



SOROCHANY

### Sorochany

[Out-of-town professional resort](#)

While this resort might not quite be the slice of Switzerland in Moscow that its website boldly proclaims, it does boast some of the most modern facilities in the region. Fifty kilometers outside of Moscow, the resort offers 10 slopes, the highest of which is 225 meters, and a variety of different runs depending on your ability. While the longest of them is more than one kilometer in length, you can speedily get back to the top with the help of Austrian and Italian manufactured double and quadruple chairlifts. Little ones can take lessons from friendly instructors on the baby slope or enjoy a spot of tubing. The resort keeps its slopes topped up with artificial snow, meaning you can enjoy winter sports through mid-April, whatever the temperature fluctuations over the coming months.

[sorochany.ru](#)

Kurovo Village. Dmitrovskiy Shosse

Bus transfers from Metro Altufyevo

### Kant

[Slopes in the city](#)

Kant, just a five minute walk from Nagornaya metro station, is the best option if you're looking to enjoy an afternoon of boarding or skiing and don't own a car. Nicknamed the "Moscow Alps" by its management, Kant had an unlikely start in life as a city dump and takes its name from the sportswear brand that runs both the shop and slopes. Now an artificial hill, the complex offers 11 ski runs including one trail exclusively for beginners and a number of drag lifts to take you back to the top. The surrounding views of Soviet high-rises aren't exactly alpine, but the runs themselves are well-maintained, lit up at night and open late. Popular with Muscovites for its accessibility, Kant also

offers tubing facilities, a cafe and instructors for newbies.

[kant.ru](#)

7 Elektrolitny Proezd, Bldg. 2

Metro Nagornaya

### Volen and Stepanovo

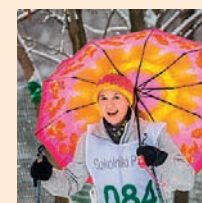
[Weekend stopover](#)

Volen, 60 kilometers to the north of the city, is one of the best-known ski resorts in the Moscow region. A short 15-minute bus ride away is Stepanovo, a smaller complex but still worth a visit if you've made the trip. With Austrian manufactured ski lifts of around 500 meters, a number of different difficulty runs and high quality slope maintenance, you won't regret the trek out of the city once you're here. Both resorts are well-lit for nighttime skiing or snowboarding and top up their runs with artificial snow as and when needed. With an alpine-themed hotel and Russian and Finnish bath houses on site, you could easily make a trip here into a weekend getaway with friends and family. What's more, this January, Volen opened a new, steeper slope catering to daredevils into "extreme skiing."

[volen.ru](#)

1 Troitskaya Ulitsa. Yakhroma Village

Dmitrovskoye Shosse



SOKOLNIKI

### Sokolniki

[Skiing just a metro ride away](#)

If you aren't quite up to a trip outside the city for some cross-country skiing, hop on the metro and get off at Sokolniki Park. The huge park has some of the best skiing in the city. Besides a 2-kilometer track, you can go off it to zip around part of the 45-kilometer ski route. If you have your own skis, it's open 24 / 7 for some early morning or moonlight ski trips. You can also rent equipment for the reasonable fee of 150 rubles for two hours (plus a 1,000 ruble deposit). That's available 9:30 a.m. until 8 p.m. either at the intersection of 6th Luchevoi and Maisky Proseki, or at 11 Mitkovskiy Proezd.

[park.sokolniki.com](#)

1 Ulitsa Sokolnichesky Val

Metro Sokolniki

FREE the second whisky on Sundays and Mondays.

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реклама

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реклама





*"I only learned later that I was, in fact, followed the entire time [in 1977]. But they were so good that I didn't notice."*  
— **Dr. Jonathan Haslam**, historian.

← Continued from Page 6

came to play an outsized role in the topsy-turvy world of 1990s Russia.

Prominent politicians and businessmen had their phone calls surreptitiously recorded and leaked to the press. Rumor and blackmail became tools of the political trade.

In 1999, Russian President Boris Yeltsin even used a sex tape to take down the prosecutor general, who was investigating him for corruption. The man who orchestrated the operation was none other than Vladimir Putin, then the head of the Federal Security Service (FSB).

Such cases bolstered the mythology of surveillance. With high profile surveillance cases proliferating, many foreigners seemed to believe that they, too, were under watch. That was one of the "social oddities" of Moscow life, says Matt Taibbi, an American journalist who worked here in the 1990s and early 2000s.

"Foreigners love to talk about how their phones are tapped," he wrote in a 1997 article in *The eXile*, a popular but now-defunct Moscow-based alternative publication. "They like the idea that someone considers them important enough to be worthy of listening to."

In comments emailed to *The Moscow Times*, Taibbi estimates that 95 percent of expats had nothing to fear. The only real targets were certain prominent businessmen, diplomats, lawyers, and a few journalists.

Taibbi cites his own experience as an example. The *eXile* was notorious for outlandish, sometimes tasteless stunts, and muckraking investigative work. Taibbi once published transcripts of a former Kremlin chief of staff's phone calls. The records were obtained, naturally, through surveillance. For his efforts, he says, he was never followed and his phones were not tapped.

"I had basically begged to be arrested/surveilled," he says. "[The fact that] I wasn't told me that the ordinary expat has little to fear when it comes to surveillance."

## Modern Techniques

Technology has undoubtedly changed surveillance as electronic recording devices (i.e. "bugs") grow smaller or give way to cell phones and other networked devices — offering intelligence services a far more efficient means of tracking their targets. "Everything with bugs has been tried, phones are better," a former U.S. diplomat in Moscow said on strict condition of anonymity.

The methods may have changed, but surveillance — both real and imagined — persists.

In recent years, the Russian government has used surveillance to bust corrupt officials and keep tabs on opposition figures, at times even infiltrating communications mediums like encrypted messenger applications. Russia has also been accused of taking its efforts abroad, hacking networks in foreign countries — such as the recent allegations that Russia hacked to help Trump win the presidential election.

But compared to the Soviet Union, modern Russia is an open society. The average foreigner is not likely to arouse much suspicion. As such, it is diplomats — particularly Americans — who are the prime targets for Russian spooks. In recent years, surveillance and harassment of U.S. diplomats has increased.

The former U.S. Embassy Moscow official recalled being approached by an officer of Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service after he was transferred from Moscow to Beijing. The SVR agent "pitched" the official while he was applying for a Russian transit visa to spend two days in Moscow en route to Europe.

The pitch began as an innocuous request to retrieve medicine for the Russian in Moscow. The diplomat was told he would be provided with additional instructions upon receiving his visa a week later. This was the red flag, and the American sent his secretary to retrieve the visa in his place. When the Russian, undeterred, emailed the diplomat directly to follow up, the American notified embassy security.

The incident, as told by the former diplomat, sparked a minor spy game in Beijing. Embassy security presented him with a photo line-up of known SVR operatives in Beijing, asking him to identify the official. He was in the line-up. After that, American security officials impersonated the diplomat in a reply email and

## 2013

Russian counterintelligence allegedly uncovers a CIA plot.



**Electric kettles** — Russia reportedly discovered chips capable of connecting to WiFi without a password in a shipment of teapots from China.

## 1962

Soviets uncover Oleg Penkovsky, one of the West's most valuable spies.



"Blabbing helps the enemy". The mid-fifties Soviet poster reflects the atmosphere of distrust between the Soviet Union and the West, which emerged in the post-war era.

arranged their own meeting with the Russian, turning the game back on him.

The hundreds of local Russian employees, who help run day-to-day business at the sprawling U.S. Embassy, are also natural targets. One former local employee told *The Moscow Times* of an incident in which he was actively chased by FSB officers through central Moscow.

Another Russian, who asked to remain anonymous, recalls being warned of intense pressure from the FSB when interviewing for a job with the embassy in 2013. Eight months later, the FSB followed up with the Russian to ask if she received the job. She hadn't. But Russians like her are perhaps one of the embassy's biggest security vulnerabilities.

The former U.S. Embassy official, who worked for one of the American security agencies, estimates that "around 50 percent of the local hires probably have some relationship with the FSB."

"They have access to HR files, medical files, everything. The embassy does not have the resources to track them. And the local employees have details on everything that is happening — who is taking part in delegations, what they are going to be doing, where they will be staying, which rooms they will be staying in, etc. Nothing is secret," the former diplomat says.

The U.S. Embassy declined to comment.

## Both Real and Imagined

Russian intelligence's gaze also falls upon Western journalists and academics — albeit with less intensity. And while Russia targets diplomats to coerce and turn them, their interest in journalists and scholars appears to be just as Haslam said of Soviet intelligence: to deter and intimidate.

One Western journalist, on condition of anonymity, told *The Moscow Times* that his apartment was broken into following a particularly contentious reporting assignment in September. Nothing was stolen or damaged, but items were overtly rearranged.

Ilan Berman, vice-president of the American For-

eign Policy Council think tank in Washington, had a different experience in 2013 while visiting Moscow to meet with local government officials and civil society figures. Berman, who has written extensively on the demographic demise of Russia and its implications for the future of the Russian state, says his phone's data plan was abruptly shut off for the entirety of his stay.

Traveling as part of a delegation, Berman says none of the other foreigners with him experienced similar problems. And it wasn't a telecom glitch or widespread outage — he checked with the company.

"I realized that it was just the FSB's way of saying hello... albeit not a very nice one," Berman says. Or was it? It is a thought that crosses the mind of many a foreigner when encountering otherwise mundane or random technological errors. For every successful infiltration of a foreign gadget, there are countless more infiltrations of foreign psyches.

One American resident of Moscow interviewed by *The Moscow Times* recalled coming home one day to find his television turned on. Another — an American working at a human rights organization — said two of his friends received Google alerts of possible hacking from Moscow. Surveillance or strange coincidence?

Such paranoia is common, fueled both by real instances of surveillance and a persistent set of myths and stereotypes about Russian espionage capabilities. The recent furor over alleged Russian hacks of the Democratic National Committee, and unsubstantiated accounts of a certain president-elect's sex romps in a Moscow hotel, have only bolstered the mythology.

But not everyone buys into the hype.

"I've always perceived the Russians to simply be very proficient and professional at intelligence work," says journalist Taibbi. "I wouldn't think you would have all these people in the Russian [security services] blabbing about a piece of [compromising material] on a potential American president," he says. "That doesn't scan to me." **TMT**

The unused building in the U.S. Embassy Compound in 1988



## 'Eight-storey microphone'

The Cold War spy game reached its peak in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the Soviets carried out what can only be described as a masterwork of surveillance. The United States began constructing a new embassy building in 1979. Then, in 1985, American officials discovered that the new building had been so thoroughly bugged by the Soviets as to render it completely unusable. Construction was halted, and the building — deemed the "eight-storey microphone" — stood empty for over a decade. Only in 2000, after spending \$240 million to rebuild it with imported materials, did the new embassy building open for business.





*"When a man beats his wife, it is not as insulting as humiliating a man. Humiliating men is not allowed" - Yelena Mizulina.*

7

months battery of "close family" was a criminal offense.

2 years

Maximum jail time for beating close family without inflicting bodily harm.



Same lawmakers that have put forward the bill decriminalizing battery within families voted for criminalizing it last summer.



DOMINIC LIPINSKI / TASS

# They Fought the Law, but the Law Won

By [Daria Litvinova](#) [d.litvinova@imedia.ru](mailto:d.litvinova@imedia.ru) | Twitter @dashalitvinovv

The story of a law protecting victims of familial abuse that only lasted seven months in Russia

**Y**ou can hear these stories everywhere in Russia.

A wife gets a black eye from her husband, goes to the police, but they refuse to act on it. They say they're not empowered to open a criminal case against the assailant who can only be prosecuted at the request of the aggrieved party.

She realizes she'd have to bring the lawsuit, collect evidence, produce witnesses and prove her case in court on her own to get the abuser convicted. Already morally destroyed by the beatings, the woman doesn't have the strength to add this bureaucratic nightmare to the hell she already lives in. She gives up, and beatings continue, becoming her new, everyday reality.

The problem of domestic violence is rampant in Russia. According to the statistics presented last year by the Presidential Human Rights Council, 40 percent of all violent crimes occur in families. The exact number of people suffering beatings from their family members is hard to calculate, because many don't report it, but the count has reached tens of thousands.

Last summer, activists fighting domestic violence in Russia celebrated a small, unexpected, victory. The country still

had a long way to go to have a separate, long anticipated law on tackling the problem. Yet for the first time in a long while, simple battery toward "close family" that doesn't result in bodily harm was elevated to the level of a criminal offense, punishable by two years in prison.

Their joy didn't last long, however. Seven months later, Russia's parliament has moved to revise this legislation and downgrade to a misdemeanor, moving the fight against domestic violence back to square one — or making the situation even worse than it was before.

Those legislative changes are dangerous in many ways, says women's rights lawyer Mari Davtyan. "More importantly, they send a message that the state doesn't consider familial battery fundamentally wrong anymore," Davtyan told The Moscow Times.

## The Good

It all started in July 2015 as part of the Russian Supreme Court's liberal initiative to reduce criminal conviction rates. Back then, the Supreme Court proposed to introduce softer punish-

ments for low-level crimes that don't bear too much social danger, but still fall into criminal jurisdiction and land people in jail.

Simple battery — assault that doesn't result in substantial health damage — was among the crimes proposed to be downgraded to misdemeanors if committed for the first time. Russian President Vladimir Putin supported the initiative and called on the lawmakers to back it up, too.

They did, but with a few exceptions. One of them distinguished "close family" as a social group and suggested that battery towards family members should remain a criminal offense. The amendment outlined jail time as punishment for it, alongside hooliganism-related battery and hate assault. According to lawmakers, it was aimed at protecting family members from abuse and tackling domestic violence.

Expectedly, the changes elicited outcry from the ultra-conservative senator Yelena Mizulina, the firebrand of Russia's "traditional values," mostly known for successfully lobbying the so-called "gay propaganda law." Mizulina claimed that nothing proves domestic violence is a problem in Russia, and the new legislation will ruin families. Her outrage

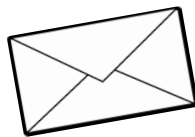




*“It’s better not to slap children, citing traditions,” said **Vladimir Putin** during his annual press conference in December.*

**40%**

of violent crimes occur within families.



Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland expressed concern about decriminalizing domestic violence in Russia in a letter to the Russian parliament.

**\$500**

fine in the new legislation downgrading battery of “close family” to misdemeanor.



ELENA PLOTNIKOVA / FACEBOOK

On Jan. 11 a bill decriminalizing domestic violence passed its first reading. Women’s rights activists demonstrated outside State Duma building that day, hoping lawmakers would reconsider.

## THE WORD’S WORTH

# Kompromat By Any Other Name

*Компромат: dirt*

By **Michele A. Berdy**  
Moscow-based translator and interpreter, author of “The Russian Word’s Worth” (Glas), a collection of her columns.



YEVGENY PARYONOV

didn’t change much at that point, however, and the law came into force.

The change was big. It created at least some protection for women, children and the elderly who often become subject to abuse, says Davtyan. Before, a person who beats up their family members — bad enough for them to have bruises, but not bad enough to claim sick leave, which is a different criminal offense — could only be prosecuted at the request of the aggrieved party.

“It meant that the victim must bring the lawsuit, collect evidence, find witnesses and essentially make the case herself — which is a full-time job, not to mention that it requires legal literacy,” the lawyer says.

The amendments made perpetrators of domestic violence subject to public prosecution, shifting the burden of investigating, proving and presenting the crime in court to law enforcement. Police officers, according to Davtyan, supported the change too. It empowered them to deal with crimes many of them knew about but couldn’t act.

## The Bad

The backlash came from conservative parenting movements that fight against the state interfering in family matters. They accused the State Duma of prohibiting parents from parenting, by obstructing them from carrying out necessary, “non-violent” corporal punishments in the process.

“Families started suffering from this law,” Olga Avetisyan, spokesperson for the All-Russia Parents’ Resistance movement, told The Moscow Times. She mentioned several examples of “justly” punished children complaining to the police and parents becoming suspects of criminal cases resulting in family ties being destroyed.

All-Russia Parents’ Resistance picketed the State Duma building dozens of times since last summer and collected some 213,000 signatures against the legislation. Soon enough, their concerns were backed up by the Russian Orthodox Church — it released a statement saying corporal punishment carried out “lovingly” is not a bad thing. Senator Mizulina turned to law-making and drafted a bill decriminalizing simple battery towards “close family.”

Existing legislation makes simple battery towards a family member a criminal offense, and simple battery towards a stranger — an administrative offense, Mizulina told The Moscow Times. “For a slap, family members might face two years in prison and be labeled criminals, for slapping a stranger on the street, they face a fine of up to 40 thousand rubles.”

Her second attempt to lobby the provision was successful. Inspired by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said during his yearly press conference that sending parents to jail for slapping their kids is an overreach, lawmakers almost unanimously supported it in the first reading. Instead of a two-year jail term, under new legislation abusers would face a 30,000-ruble (\$500) fine; the progressive idea of fighting domestic violence in Russia barely lasted seven months.

## The Ugly

A source close to the State Duma told The Moscow Times that last year’s initiative to criminalize battery within families was



MIKHAIL POCHUEV / TASS

Ultra-conservative senator Yelena Mizulina is known for defending Russia’s “traditional values.”

considered a “blunder” from the very start, and now lawmakers are merely trying to correct it. “This amendment has put domestic battery on the same level as hate assault and hooliganism-related assaults, which are too different in terms of social danger and gravity. The whole thing turned into legal absurdity.”

It will not remain “legal absurdity” for long, however: lawmakers are in an obvious rush to correct it, says political analyst Yekaterina Schulmann. “They allocated 3 days instead of 30 to introducing amendments ahead of the second reading — which means they intend to do it really quickly,” Schulmann told The Moscow Times.

There are articles in the Criminal Code that outline punishment for inflicting bodily harm on family members — hence they will remain protected from domestic violence even after the bill passes, argues Mizulina.

Yet, it’s the bruises that domestic violence starts with, disagrees Davtyan: “Bruises easily turn into more serious bodily harm, and it’s dangerous to draw a line. Not punishing for bruises, but waiting for more serious harm.” Especially when the abuser is a family member and shares a home with the victim, the danger doesn’t go anywhere, she adds.

In addition, the bill might backfire for parents who worry about losing their parental rights for beating their children. “To take a child away from its parents, it isn’t important whether a criminal or an administrative offense took place. The only important thing is proving the fact of violence,” Davtyan explains.

Doing it in the criminal jurisdiction is a challenge, she adds: the prosecution has to collect and provide proper evidence to prove their case, the court has to act under presumption of innocence, and defenders are guaranteed a lawyer even if they can’t afford one.

“With simple battery being an administrative offense it will be much easier to prove, because administrative jurisdiction doesn’t have all these things,” Davtyan says. “So if I were these parents, I would be more concerned now than before.” **TMT**

At the end of last week I was thrilled to learn that along with sputnik, vodka, troika and glasnost, English got a new Russian word. This word is apparently so complex in meaning that it has no English equivalent, and yet somehow, after just three days, everyone in the English-speaking world was using it daily. The word? Компромат.

This is all very silly. Компромат has several English equivalents, from the neutral “compromising materials” to the slangy “dirt.” In fact, компромат is a shortened form of компрометирующие материалы (compromising materials) and there is nothing magical, arcane, complicated or particularly Russian about it. So when a Western journalist writes “Even specific rumors about Russian компромат on political figures are not uncommon,” it’s what Russians call выпендрёж and what English-speakers call grandstanding. Or worse.

But since компромат is hot, we might as well look at it.

With компромат: you can have it, gather it or look for it. У меня, между прочим, компромат на вас всех (By the way, I have dirt on all of you.) Искал на себя компромат, чтобы уничтожить (I looked for compromising material about myself so I could destroy it.) Собрать компромат на человека, который приехал и занимался проведением конкурса красоты — кому это интересно? (Gather compromising material on a man who came here and ran a beauty contest — who would be interested in that?) Answer: Everyone.

Once you have it, the embarrassing material turns into liquid sleaze, which you either leak (сливать, слить) to the press, toss or pour on the person who did the embarrassing deeds. На меня стали выливать тонны компромата (I was inundated with tons of material incriminating me.) В еженедельнике, дружественном мэрии, компромат слили на бывшего главу одного района (In a weekly with links to the mayor’s office, they leaked compromising materials on a former district head.) Они считали тогда, что необходима дискредитация партии коммунистов, вброс компромата на её ведущих игроков (At the time they believed that they needed to discredit the Communist Party by digging up dirt and throwing it on their leaders.)

When there is a lot of компромат on both sides, you can start война компроматов. In English, this can be called a sleaze or smear war, although it’s usually described as dirty politics or mud-slinging: Трамп и Клинтон: война компроматов на выборах президента США (Trump and Clinton: Mud-Slinging Both Ways in the U.S. presidential elections).

But the big question is this: Is компромат true or fake? Well... hard to say. In the old days, when there was honor among thieves and spies, компромат was the real thing. In fact, it’s still defined as публичное оглашение сведений о некотором лице, порочащих его репутацию (publicly revealing information about someone that harms his reputation). But now — sometimes it’s fake, like here: На меня был фантастический компромат, что я чуть ли не Доктор Зло, который контролирует русские ядерные компании и в то же время является агентом британской разведки (They made up incredible stuff on me, like I was Dr. Evil who controlled Russian nuclear firms while being a British agent.) And sometimes it’s hard to tell. Это же чистый компромат, манипуляция общественным сознанием (It’s pure sleaze meant to manipulate public opinion.)

So is that sleaze real or fake? Nobody knows. And that, my friends, is the real power of компромат in any language. **TMT**





Ilia Zdanevich designed fabric for Coco Chanel in Paris.

200

the number of Pirosmeni's extant works.

3 floors

of the Pushkin Museum Personal Collections building display the exhibition.



Lado Gudiashvili is sometimes called the "Georgian Paul Gauguin."



"Green Fairies" by Lado Gudiashvili, one of the most prolific Georgian avant-garde painters. His work is part of the first major exhibition of Georgian art in Moscow since relations between Russia and Georgia almost ceased in 2008.

# Avant-Garde Exhibit Builds a Bridge

By [Andrei Muchnik](#) and [Alyssa Young](#) [newsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:newsreporter@imedia.ru)

## The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts welcomes back Georgian art

Toward the end of 2016, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts opened a major exhibit celebrating Georgian avant-garde art from 1900 to the 1930s. This is the first large-scale exhibition of Georgian avant-garde artists in Russia.

Curators painstakingly collected works from multiple museums and private Georgian and Russian collections to make this exhibit a reality. They assembled over 200 works by such artists as Niko Pirosmenashvili (Pirosmeni) (1863-1918), Vladimir (Lado) Gudiashvili (1896-1980), David Kakabadze (1889-1952) and many others.

Marina Loshak, the museum's director and one of the people behind the exhibition's original concept, said in an interview to The Moscow Times that "there had always been great interest in Georgian avant-garde art, but the opportunity to organize such a massive exhibition only just opened up."

Walking through a sequence of the most influential painters from this unique school of Georgian art is a powerful experience. Kakabadze's mesmerizing abstract compositions, Zygmunt Waliszewski's depictions of scenes in France and Germany, and Kirill Zdanevich's "Orchestral Self-Portrait" make some of the most lasting impressions from the exhibit.

The most fascinating angle of the exhibit is how it captures the Georgian artistic and cultural exchange with Russia and Europe. At the time, the avant-garde movement influenced not just Georgian art, but also literature, music and theatre. Tbilisi, or "Little Paris," was at the center of Georgian artistic activity. Curators have taken great care to show viewers how historical and cultural ties between Russia and Georgia were inextricably linked to the discourse of the Georgian avant-garde movement.

"Georgian and Russian culture have always been close," said Loshak. "At the turn of the 20th century, Georgia was a kind of paradise for Russian artists, poets, and writers — a space where there was somehow more freedom. In the first third of the 20th century, Russians and Georgians studied alongside each other in Paris. It was a veritable 'hotpot' of cultural relations and traditions," she added.

The Georgian avant-garde exhibition echoes another one, "Iliazd, Ilia Zdanevich's 20th Century," held at the Pushkin Museum



"Prince with a Wine Horn" by Niko Pirosmeni, one of the best-known Georgian avant-garde painters of the early 20th century on display at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts.

last year. Ilia Zdanevich was a poet, a designer, an anthropologist, and a publisher. While in Tbilisi, Zdanevich and his artist brother Kirill, first discovered Pirosmeni. Niko Pirosmenashvili was a self-taught painter who worked at a variety of menial jobs, from dairy farmer to railroad conductor. His primitive paintings were rather popular among locals, and that's how Zdanevich's brothers found out about him.

Ilia Zdanevich wrote an article praising Pirosmeni's work for a Moscow newspaper in 1913. That same year, Russian poet Mikhail Le Dantu purchased five of Pirosmeni's paintings and displayed four of them at the avant-garde exhibit "Target" in Moscow, Pirosmeni's first show. You can view the contents of Le Dantu's sketchbook from his visit to Tbilisi, "Caucasian Album," which was largely influenced by Pirosmeni, on the third floor of the exhibit.

Some of Pirosmeni's best-known pieces, such as "Brother and

Sister" or "Prince with a Wine Horn," are also on the third floor of the exhibit. His paintings are noted for their minimalism and animalism. Only about 200 of his works survived until the present day. Pirosmeni is now considered one of the major native style painters of the 20th century along with Henri Rousseau. "Pirosmeni has always been the hero of intellectuals, so there's always an interest in his works. We tried to gather as many of his works as possible," said Loshak.

The second floor of the exposition hosts the works of Lado Gudiashvili, Alexander Bazhbeuk-Melikov, Elene Akhvediani and Kirill Zdanevich. Influenced by Pirosmeni, Gudiashvili's brilliant use of blues and greens captures attention in paintings like "Green Woman." "Gudiashvili is one of the most popular artists among Georgian collectors. After his studies in Paris, he became extremely productive, and there are many works on the market from that period. But the paintings he did in Paris are much harder to find," said Loshak. Gudiashvili stayed in Georgia and lived a very long life, until 1980, although his relationship with the Soviet authorities was rather tumultuous.

Additionally, there is a section of the exhibition that is dedicated to the Georgian avant-garde theater of the time, where visitors can see theatrical costumes and sketches of stage sets. On the ground floor of the exhibit you can see the abstract works of David Kakabadze, as well some introductory videos on the Georgian avant-garde.

The exhibition displayed more Georgian avant-garde works from private collections than from museums. "We couldn't get works from Georgian museums as our countries don't have diplomatic relations," commented Loshak. "Although every step towards each other tends to humanize the dialogue. I believe that cultural bridges like this exhibition can really improve the relationship between our countries. Our love and respect for each other haven't changed, and we miss each other," added Loshak. **TMT**

[arts-museum.ru](http://arts-museum.ru)  
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The exhibition runs till March 3



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# What's On

See [www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com) for more listings.



Space travel and art join forces in Artplay's aptly named "Kosmos.Love" show. Travel to colorful galaxies far, far away — the perfect antidote to the Moscow winter weather.

## January 19 — 25

### EVENT Pushkin Museum Fridays End the week on a high note

Starting Jan. 20, the five museums that make up the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts are holding Friday Nights at the Museum — lectures, special tours and concerts. If your Russian is good and you love art, consider one of their curator talks on the ongoing exhibitions. Or you can sign up for a curator-led tour. If that is a bit of a linguistic strain, then come to hear music in one of the museum venues, from the best students from one of Moscow's prestigious music schools to performances of Yuri Bashmet's New Russia Orchestra. The Museum is also dedicated to welcoming everyone, with special tours for people with visual and hearing disabilities. Start the year off with splendid culture.

[arts-museum.ru](http://arts-museum.ru)  
12 Ulitsa Volkhonka  
Metro Kropotkinskaya

### EVENT Globus Theater Festival

#### Check out some cutting-edge performances

This will be the last weekend of the Globus 2.0 Theater Festival taking place at the MARS Center. The last three performances are by an independent production company "teatr post," organized by Dmitry Volkostrellov. On Fri. Jan. 20 you can see "I Am Free" based on a play by Pavel Pryazhko from Belarus. The performance consists of 535 photographs and 13 captions and is part of the theater's search for "new forms." On Sat. Jan. 21 there is "July" by famous Russian playwright and filmmaker Ivan Vyrypayev, a story of passion told from the point of view of a crazy old man. The last performance of the festival will be "We Are Already Here" on Sun. Jan. 22. It's also based on a play by Pryazhko and devoted to the routine life of the first explorers on Mars.

[centermars.com/projects/specialproject/globe\\_2\\_0/](http://centermars.com/projects/specialproject/globe_2_0/)  
5 Pushkarev Pereulok  
Metro Trubnaya

### EVENT Damien Chazelle Night at the Pioneer Film Theater

#### Two movies from an Oscar hopeful

After a sweeping victory at the Golden Globes, which gave Damien Chazelle's "La La Land" seven awards, the movie is considered the main contender for an Oscar (or a few) this year. You can see this romantic story about the relationship between an aspiring actress (Emma Stone) and a jazz musician (Ryan Gosling) at the Pioneer Theater on Sat. Jan. 21 in English with Russian subtitles. "La La Land" will be followed by Chazelle's previous hit, "Whiplash," which depicts the intense world of jazz music and one drummer's journey to the top. Both films tackle the themes of ambition and its influence on our personal lives.

[pioneer-cinema.ru/ru/event/pionerskaya-noch-damiena-shazella/](http://pioneer-cinema.ru/ru/event/pionerskaya-noch-damiena-shazella/)  
21 Kutuzovsky Prospekt  
Metro Kutuzovskaya

## A Multimedia Voyage into Space at Artplay

By **Ruth Moore** [artsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:artsreporter@imedia.ru)

If gazing at swirling star constellations and listening to the sounds of David Bowie's "Space Oddity" is your idea of an afternoon well spent, a trip to Artplay could be in order. The former factory complex, now a vibrant cultural venue, is hosting the celestially inspired exhibition "Kosmos.Love" through the end of the month. The multimedia exhibition combines contemporary artwork, archival footage and creative video projections to immerse visitors in the infinite wonders of space. According to the exhibition's organizers, the various elements of "Kosmos.Love" reflect the diverse ways mankind has responded to the mysteries of the universe.

"The idea was to show the development of human perceptions of space," said Yasha Yavorskaya, the curator of the exhibition, in an interview with The Moscow Times. "We decided on the time period from the late 19th to early 20th centuries — from the enthusiastic ideas of philosophers and artists to the conquest of different planets and the realities of the unending empty expanses around the earth."

It was Roscosmos, Russia's space agency, that approached Artplay with the idea for the exhibition. "Kosmos.Love" commemorates the 2016 "Year of Gagarin," an initiative to celebrate the Russian astronaut's historic flight in space 55 years ago. A parallel exhibition has been running for the past month in St. Petersburg. In the first room of the exhibition hall visitors are invited to explore the utopian worlds imagined by avant-garde artists such as Malevich, Tatlin and Chashnik as well as the mathematical and philosophical quandaries that plagued thinkers of the 19th century.

Next, strap on your space boots and experience a tour of the International Space Station courtesy of a VR headset. The gal-

lery worker recommended sitting down at this point — apparently 360-degree views of space have caused more than a few accidents by astonished visitors. Further on you'll discover imaginative responses to the wonders of space from a number of contemporary artists. Following Gagarin's flight it became apparent that mankind wouldn't be forming new colonies on Mars anytime soon, but that hasn't stopped space from fueling the work of artists across every creative field. From Alexandra Ivleva's "Kosmolovelas," a metal rocking chair in the shape of a green humanoid, to Marina Rudenko's "Arkhitex-tochnik," a sculpture made of interlocking stacked cuboids filled with neon liquids, the dark expanses of the universe have proven boundless in their ability to kindle interesting creative responses. "Space is topic that has always inspired, and it still inspires people today — contemporary artists still draw inspiration from it," said Yavkovkaya. "But at the heart of any space research is, most prominently, mankind's dream of flight."



For more information about this and other cultural events, go to our website, [www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com)



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**The Idiot:** On Feb. 12 the Bolshoi Theater presents the premiere of "The Idiot," an opera by the long-neglected Polish-born composer Mieczyslaw Weinberg. There are still tickets available for the rest of the week. On Feb. 19 you can see another Weinberg opera premiere — "The Passenger" — about the chance encounter of a prisoner and a guard from a Nazi concentration camp aboard a cruise ship after the war.

Tickets available at the theater at Teatralnaya Ploshchad or online at [bolshoi.ru](http://bolshoi.ru).