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DECEMBER 2018

RUSSIA IN



Igor Ivanov | Maxim Trudolyubov | **Lyubov Sobol**
Mark Galeotti | **Oliver Bullough** | Fyodor Lukyanov
Alexei Levinson | Sergei Kuznetsov | **Laurie Bristow**

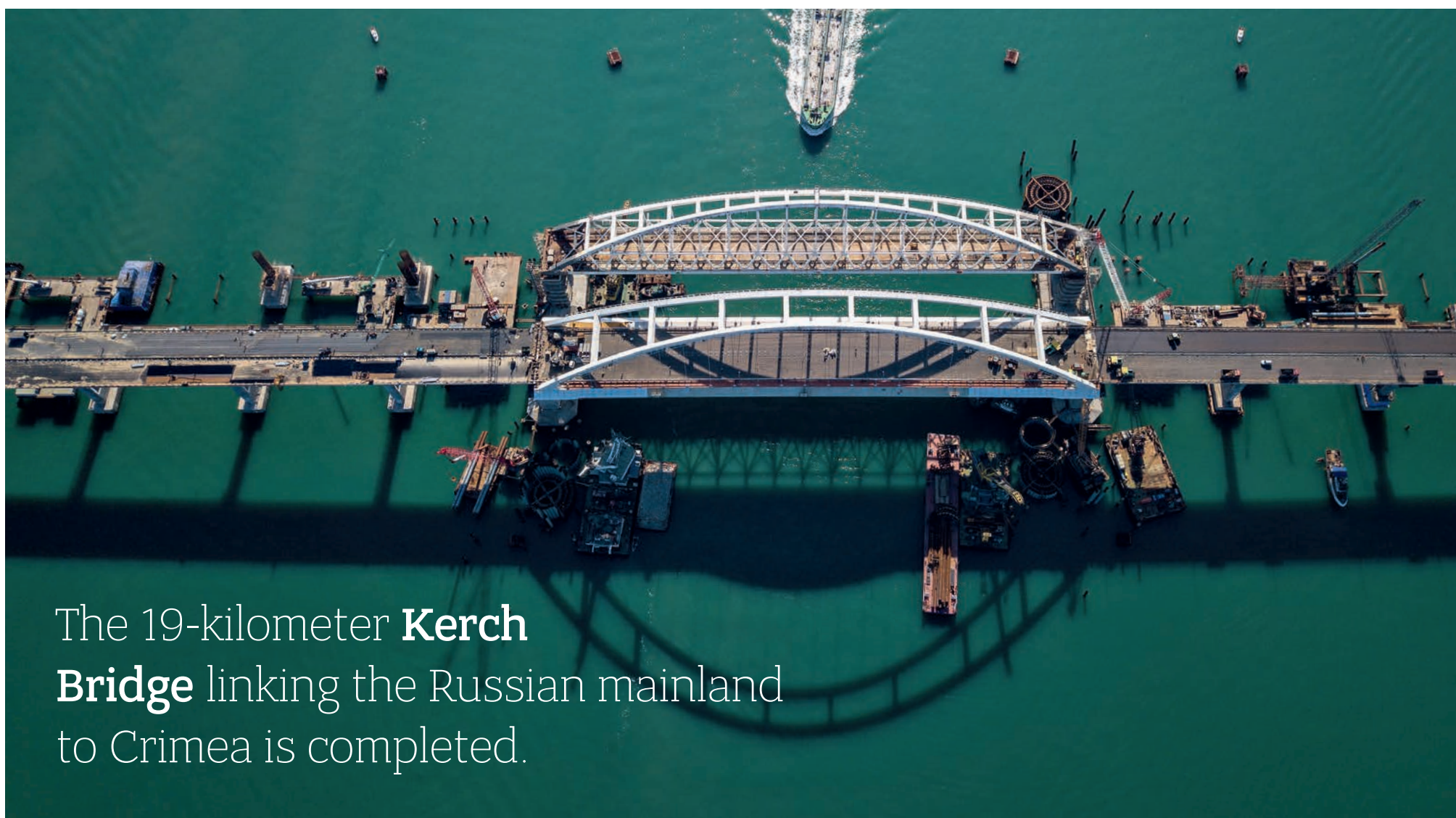
18+

2018 in photos

Russia hosts its first **World Cup** and defies expectations by progressing into the knockout stages.



MATTHIAS SCHRAEDER / AP / TASS



MOSTLIFE



JANUARY Human rights activist Oyub Titiyev is detained on drug charges in Chechnya. | Russia's Culture Ministry bans "The Death of Stalin" two days before it is scheduled to hit Russian cinemas. | U.S. sanctions target 21 individuals and nine companies over Ukraine and the Treasury releases a "Kremlin list" of Vladimir Putin's inner circle.

FEBRUARY A Russian passenger plane crashes outside Moscow, killing all 71 people on board. Investigators blame human error.



MARCH Ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter are poisoned with a nerve agent in Britain. More than 20 countries order dozens of Russian diplomats expelled. Russia retaliates in a tit-for-tat response. | Putin is re-elected in an unsurprising landslide victory. | Media outlets boycott the State Duma after sexual harassment allegations against lawmaker Leonid Slutsky. | In Volokolamsk, locals protest a landfill. | Sixty-four people die in a mall fire in Kemerovo, sparking protests against state negligence and corruption.



APRIL Russia's state media regulator blocks Telegram after it refuses to give security services backdoor access, but ends up taking down scores of other sites too. Telegram calls on its users to throw paper planes out their windows in protest (and install VPNs).



MAY Protests break out across Russia ahead of Putin's inauguration. | Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko shocks friend and foe when he reappears at a press conference after faking his own murder.



JUNE Russia successfully hosts its first World Cup and defies expectations by progressing into the knockout stages. | In less well-received news, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev announces a plan to raise the retirement age.



JULY Twelve Russian intelligence officers are indicted for interfering in the 2016 U.S. election. | Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin play nice at a long-anticipated summit in Helsinki. | Maria Butina is charged with conspiring against the U.S.



AUGUST The U.S. imposes new sanctions on Russia over Skripal. | In a televised address, Putin softens the planned retirement age hike, but only for women.



SEPTEMBER Russians vote in regional elections, while opposition leader Alexei Navalny stages protests. | Two suspects in the Skripal poisoning case appear on state television, saying they were just tourists. Journalists uncover the men as being GRU military intelligence officers.

OCTOBER Putin signs the pension proposal into law as his ratings fall to their lowest levels since 2013. | Dutch authorities accuse four GRU officers of attempting to hack the OPCW headquarters in The Hague.



NOVEMBER Tensions escalate between Russia and Ukraine after Russia seizes three navy ships and their crew near Crimea.



Happy New Year From Your Leader

By Michele A. Berdy

Every year, just before midnight on Dec. 31, about 140 million people across Russia take a break from pouring vodka and dishing out Olivier salad to listen to the president's annual address.

This tradition is not as long-standing or as predictable as you might think. The first radio address was broadcast in 1935 when Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, wished some polar explorers a happy new year. Then it was an off-and-on thing for a while — depending on whether the country was permitting New Year's celebrations or not — until Leonid Brezhnev began his television addresses in 1970. They sputtered along over the years — depending on Brezhnev's state of health and dentures — until 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev cemented the tradition.

But that tradition wobbled at the end of 1991. The Soviet Union had been dissolved several days before the end of the year and no one knew what to do. Writer and comedian Mikhail Zadornov took to the airwaves, but he misjudged the time and the Kremlin chimes were rung a full minute late — a decidedly inauspicious way for the Russian Federation to enter the new year and its new life.

Along came Boris Yeltsin, a New Year's innovator. He raised a glass of champagne at the end of his address and later was filmed with his family — an unprecedented touchy-feely moment for a country raised on men in suits standing alone in a nondescript office. And then he came up with a really special innovation: In his New Year's address in 1999, he ended the century by ending his presidency. He officially resigned and figuratively passed the champagne flute to his prime minister, Vladimir Putin, who said a few words before he became acting president as soon as the Kremlin chimes struck.

Putin was also an innovator. No champagne or family for him — but also no boring office. He does his addresses as stand-ups outside. They are set up ahead of time and filmed regardless of the weather. An hour before the cameras start rolling, special handlers release falcons to scare away the crows that live on the Kremlin grounds so that their cawing doesn't ruin the sound feed.

Putin's earliest New Year's addresses were quite personal, fairly specific about events in the year gone by, and occasionally even a bit whimsical. After reassuring everyone in 1999 that everything was under control — не будет вакуума власти в стране (there won't be a power vacuum in the country) — he said: В Новый год, как известно, сбываются мечты. А в такой необыкновенный Новый год — тем более. Все доброе и все хорошее, задуманное вами, обязательно исполнится. (Everyone knows that on New Year's, dreams come true. This is especially true on such an unusual New Year's Eve. Everything kind and good that you have planned will surely come to pass.)

In the first years, he ended his address with cheery wishes, as if he were your chummy neighbor Vova who had stopped in to raise a glass with you: Счастлива вам! С Новым годом! Успехов вам, любви и веры. С Новым годом вас, дорогие друзья! Удачи! (I wish you happiness! Happy New Year! Success, love and faith! Happy New Year, dear friends! Good luck!)

He also reviewed the year gone by. For example, 2003 “конечно был разным” (2003 was, of course, a mixed year). But in later years, except for a few events like the Olympics or an important anniversary, he stuck to abstract phrases about the outgoing 12 months: Возникли новые проекты, подходы к решению насущных общегосударственных задач (New projects arose along with new ways of solving urgent state tasks). And his wishes got more abstract and uncontroversial, too: Чтобы меньше стало бедных... Чтобы детей было больше и чтобы они были счастливы (We wish for fewer poor people... for more children and for their happiness.)

When he returned to the presidency in 2012, Putin's addresses changed. In the past, he'd occasionally used the first person singular — я (I) — but since 2012 he only uses third person plurals: мы, нас, наши (we, us, ours). There is a bit less about Mom and Pop and a bit more about the Родина (Motherland) and Отечество (Fatherland). Now citizens are encouraged обеспечить движение России вперёд (to provide for Russia's movement forward) and are reminded that Любовь к Родине — одно из самых мощных, возвышающих чувств (Love for the Motherland is one of the most powerful and uplifting feelings). And in 2015 a new theme appeared: Remembering servicemen and -women and anyone on duty: Мы благодарны всем тем, кто днём и ночью, в будние дни и в праздники всегда на посту (We are grateful for everyone who is always on duty, day or night, weekday or holiday.)

And they now end the same way: С праздником вас! (Happy holiday!) С Новым 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 годом! (Happy 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017!)

There probably will not be any surprises this year, but...you just never know! ТМТ

In 2019...



» PUTIN WILL HAVE BEEN IN POWER FOR 20 YEARS |

‘The Rasps of Putin’s Political Machine’ by Maxim Trudolyubov [page 6](#) | Levada Center’s Alexei Levinson discusses Putin’s ratings [page 7](#)

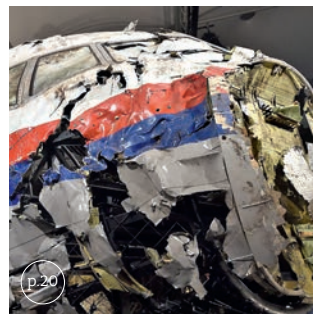


» THE PENSION AGE WILL GO UP

» THERE WILL BE LOCAL ELECTIONS, INCLUDING IN ST. PETERSBURG AND MOSCOW | Evan Gershkovich shadows opposition politician Lyubov Sobol [page 8](#)

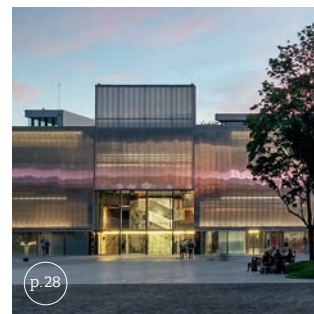


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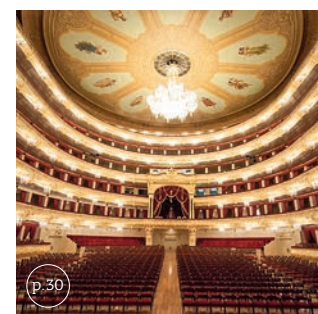
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» THE YELLOW EARTH PIG RULES RUSSIAN HOROSCOPES



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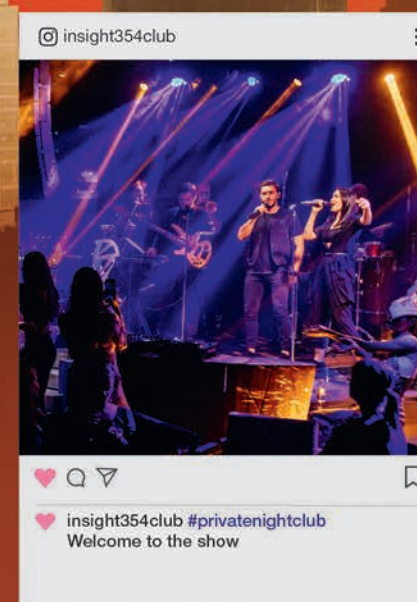
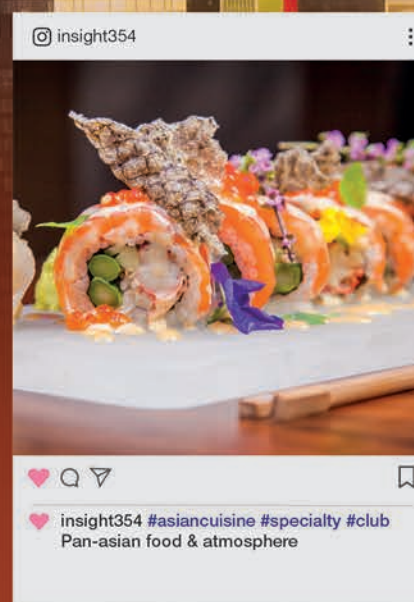
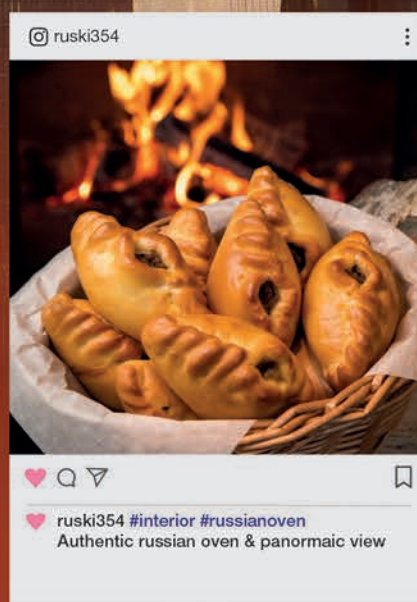
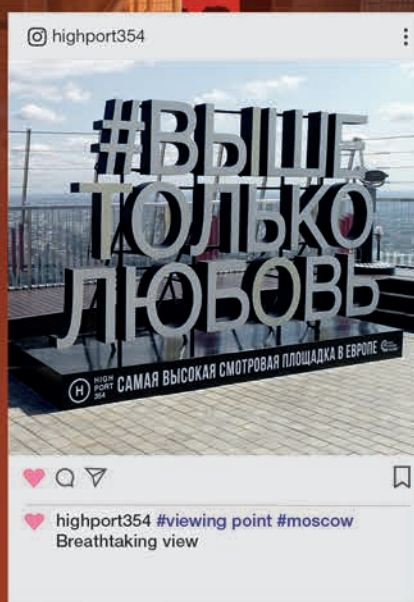
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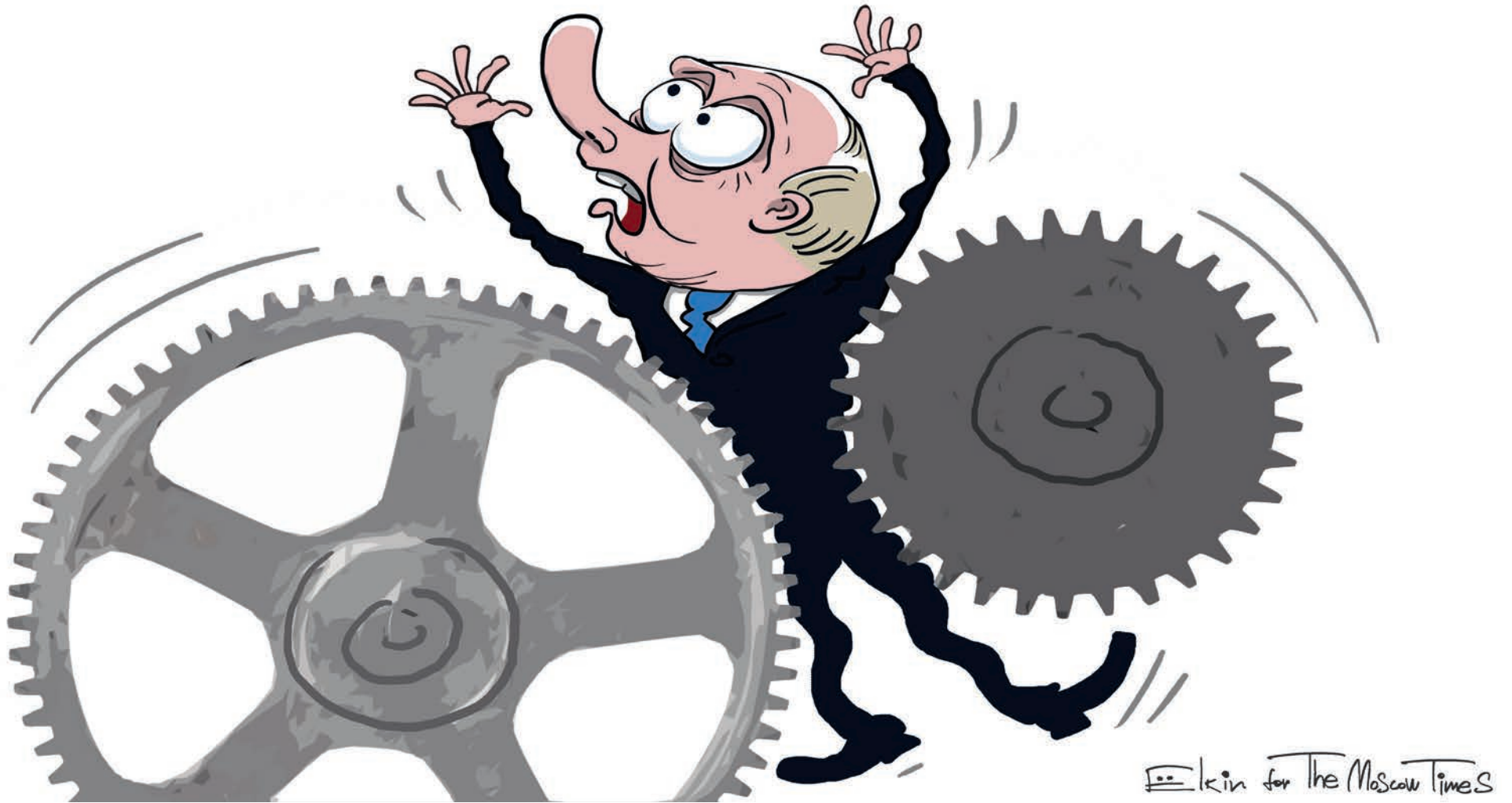
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The Rasps of Putin's Political Machine

Opinion by [Maxim Trudolyubov](#) | @MaxTrudo

The Kremlin's finely tuned gears are rusting over

Anyone who has been watching Kremlin politics for a long time has probably noticed something strange in the air: Russia is too silent. There doesn't appear to be any grand political game unfolding. The average Russian is too busy just surviving and seems to have lost interest in watching Ukraine-bashing or victorious Syrian exploits on Kremlin-run television networks.

Does this mean we should expect Vladimir Putin to launch some new political adventure this coming year?

The Kremlin's plan for Putin's re-election in 2018 was to make sure he got more votes than in any previous election — including in 2008, when Dmitry Medvedev became president. A moderate communist and a television celebrity with some liberal credentials were employed to play supporting roles and diversify the ballot. It was a success. The Kremlin got out the vote — no small feat in a totally uncontested election.

Russia's political management was apparently so overwhelmed with creating drama in a decidedly undramatic race that it took all post-election politics for granted. Unpleasant policy stuff like, say, increasing taxes and the retirement age were postponed until after the election. They clearly believed that no harm could be done once the big event was over.

In fact, it was only after the election that everything began to unravel.

Voters hated the increase of the retirement age. The Kremlin's spy mishaps were highly publicized. Putin's approval rating reached four-year lows. The elections in September went haywire in a number of regions. The Istanbul-based Patriarch of Constantinople decided to heed Ukraine's call to create a local Orthodox church with the center in Kiev, thwarting Moscow's efforts of keeping at least a faith-based authority over Ukraine.

None of these events was fateful in itself.

Spy scandals happen all the time. Ratings go up and down. In the September elections, most regions dutifully played Moscow's game and voted for the candidate endorsed by Putin (just four out of 26 territories that held elections this year didn't cooperate. What are four regions for a country of 80-plus?) And the church issues are no big deal either. In the 21st century, the church does not hold the crowning position it used to.

And yet all of these issues taken together do sound like a rasp produced by a faulty mechanism.

For almost two decades, Vladimir Putin and his inner circle have been driven by a passion to turn their political system into a finely tuned and efficient instrument. They weeded out the unpredictable and the weak. They replaced disloyal officials. They installed competent bureaucrats in place of the incompetent ones. They also harassed, persecuted, prosecuted, jailed and drove into exile those who were too stubborn or out of reach. Political murders in Russia over the past 20 years have never been properly investigated, which is why we will leave them out of the picture for now.

For years, the Kremlin has been busy filtering out rogue actors — rogue from the Kremlin's point of view. Lawmakers who refused to cooperate were phased out to make room for "expert policymakers" on the Kremlin's payroll. Businessmen were expropriated not because Putin was a communist (by no means), but in the name of national security — the Kremlin's security experts will tell you so. Newspapers which refused to cooperate were stopped not because they were independent but because, in the Kremlin's view, they were funded by adversarial, often foreign, interests — the Kremlin's media experts will tell you so.

The public figures, entrepreneurs and journalists who are no longer present in the political scene are absent not because of their beliefs — they hold diverse beliefs — but because they stood

in the way of experts. The Kremlin has no ideology, at least not in the 20th-century sense of the notion. But the Kremlin does believe in the power of expertise. The security expert makes life safe. The policymaking expert runs domestic politics. And media experts finetune the Kremlin's PR, rather than party, line.

But recently, the Kremlin's machine has become too visible and its screeching too loud. We will hear more of it.

Some in Russia expect Putin to embark on a major political adventure. When caught in similarly dire circumstances in the past, Putin has responded by unleashing a crisis of his own making: A military operation abroad or a major political reshuffle at home. What is he preparing this time? Perhaps a falling out with Japan's Shinzo Abe over the Kuril Islands?

The only element missing in the Kremlin's, and often the pundits', calculations is a living person. Actual humans seem increasingly superfluous to the Kremlin's fine statecraft. The political machine has worked so well in past years that the only challenges the leadership saw were exotic problems. Reaching a certain number of votes in an election was a kind of political sport.

It is a mistake to think that authoritarian regimes grow organically, all by themselves. Just like democracies, they have to be nurtured and defended. And just like democracies, they can be easily taken for granted by those who benefit from them.

The Russian regime does not look like that of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban or that of U.S. President Donald Trump.

It looks more like a tired regime, one likely to stir resentment and discontent because it has been around for too long and its leaders have grown too arrogant to listen to the voice of those down below. **TMT**

Maxim Trudolyubov is a senior advisor at the Kennan Institute.

Mr. Popular

By Victoria Dmitrieva | @victoria_dmitr

Alexei Levinson, the Levada Center's head of research, discusses the science behind Vladimir Putin's ratings

To begin with, Levada regularly publishes three types of data on how Russians feel about President Vladimir Putin: popularity, trust and electoral ratings. Which data should we be looking at if we want to gauge Putin's popularity?

First, I would avoid using the term "popularity rating." There's no such thing. The so-called electoral rating is an indication of how many people are willing to vote for a particular candidate. There is also the trust rating, which we compile by asking respondents to name five to six politicians whom they trust the most. Putin traditionally ranks first on that list.

Then, there are those who say they approve of Putin. That number is generally much higher than his electoral rating. That's because the question of approval is quite a personal and emotional one. Whereas, when it comes to electoral ratings, people think: "Why would I go out and vote for someone who will win anyway?" The electoral rating is important, of course, but at the same time, it doesn't reflect the actual number of supporters Putin has.

Voting requires action, whereas expressing support or approval doesn't. Moreover, people know that their approval or disapproval won't influence Putin's behavior. Putin is unlikely to change his political course even if his approval rating goes down. We need to keep in mind that voters here feel they can't influence politics through ratings.

From the Kremlin's point of view, Putin's approval rating helps him when it comes to foreign policy and communicating with other world leaders. It strengthens his position to be able to show his counterparts abroad that they're dealing with someone who has the backing of the people, when they could only dream of similar approval ratings in their own countries. Strong approval could also work in his favor among the elite at home — but nothing more than that.

Keep in mind that Boris Yeltsin ruled the country with an approval rating of between 6 and 12 percent. He started off with figures similar to Putin's but lost popularity while in office. It's only natural for that to happen, whether you're Donald Trump or Emmanuel Macron. In other countries, though, politicians risk losing the following elections. In our case, with the electoral system being controlled, Putin's ratings are inconsequential.

This year, Putin's approval ratings plummeted to around 67 percent, which is about what it was before the annexation of Crimea. What happened?

I agree with those who argue that the slump is directly related to the increase in the pension age. Some sort of accumulated negativity toward Putin might also have played a part. A final factor is

that people might be getting tired of the absence of any political alternative.

What is important to note, though, is that, after dropping to around 65 percent, it has remained there for about three months already. Still, 33 percent of respondents say they disapprove of Putin — that's a lot, according to our standards.

In December 2011, some 36 percent of respondents said they didn't approve of Putin. Within a year, by December 2012, it dropped to 35 percent and a year later it was 34 percent.

So we can say that the current disapproval figures are not the lowest ever, but they are definitely the lowest since the annexation of Crimea. In fact, his approval ratings had been rising gradually, until July 2018, when disapproval skyrocketed from 20 to 32 percent, which is a direct effect of the retirement age hike.

Is the effect of feelings of negativity over the pension age hike fading?

Our polls show that because of the pension law Putin lost the approval of about 15 million people. But the number stopped growing after July and has remained constant since then. Since the law has been passed and we don't expect any new developments on that subject anytime soon, it's not very likely that it will continue to affect Putin's ratings.

Some have suggested that the clash with Ukraine in the Kerch Strait could give Putin's ratings a bump, or even that it might have been orchestrated to that effect.

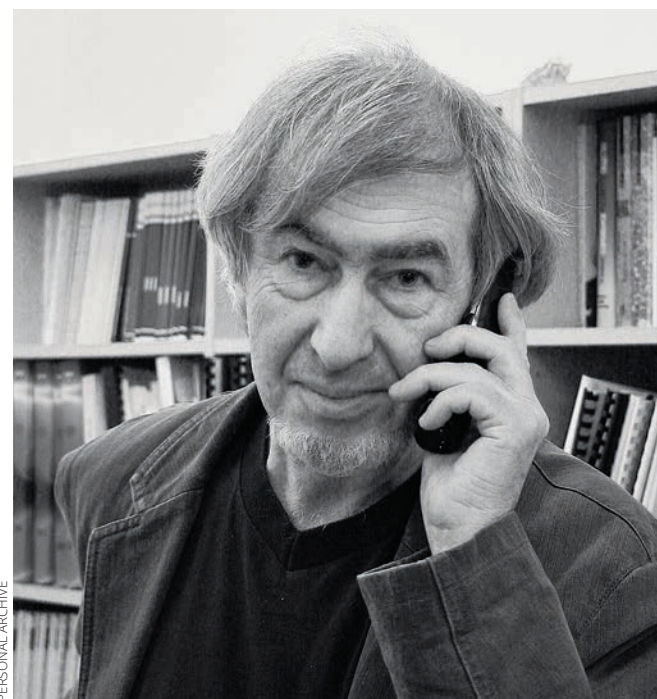
Of course the Kremlin will have thought through its actions and, although we don't have any figures on that yet, we indeed expect it to have a certain positive effect.

Another recent poll shows that a record number of Russians, 61 percent, hold Putin responsible for the problems the country is currently facing. Is that unusual?

These results have attracted more attention than they actually deserve.

In that survey, respondents answered a two-part question on who was responsible for the country's economic failures and, then, for the country's economic successes. In both cases, the most common answer was "Putin."

The news is that, for the first time, respondents pointed to Putin as being responsible for negative things, such as economic failures. Before, people would think that Putin had nothing to do with the country's problems whatsoever. After the change to the



PERSONAL ARCHIVE

pension age, it turned out that people were no longer willing to forgive him for such a controversial move.

But, in general, it shows that Russians think the president is responsible for everything that happens in the country — good and bad. So it would be wrong to conclude that people are finally holding him accountable.

Looking forward to 2019, what do you expect to happen to Putin's ratings, taking into account a potential escalation of tensions with Ukraine? Can we expect a return to the high ratings of March 2014 or does Putin need another geopolitical victory for that?

That is unlikely. Even if we allow for the possibility of an escalation in Ukraine, I think it won't have the same effect as Crimea had. There have been two peaks: First, during the Russian-Georgian War, and then Crimea. But it wasn't the military victories that made Putin's approval ratings skyrocket.

Rather, it's the improved image of Russia in the eyes of those who like to think we are as powerful as the United States. Putin is seen as pursuing Russia's interests and refusing to comply with the West.

There is a perception that the U.S. always does what it wants, ignoring the rules to achieve its goals, like it did in Kosovo, and that this is what defines a Great Power. To restore this status that the Soviet Union used to have was the dream of many ordinary and privileged Russians.

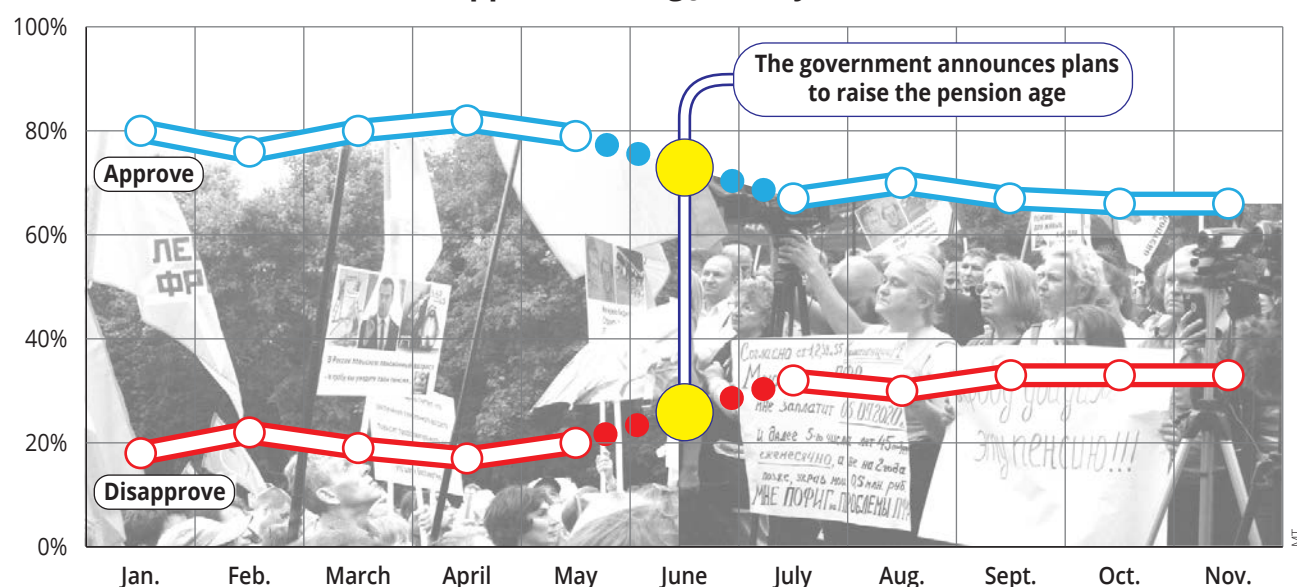
Putin has made people think Russia is powerful in a similar way, but they don't care much about actual territorial victories. What we can predict is that the Kremlin, which is used to high ratings and obviously dissatisfied with the recent drop, will try to give them a boost. But it probably does not know itself how or when.

With all these disclaimers, what do Putin's ratings tell us about Russia? Is there any point in following them so closely?

I think they are very symbolic: Ratings show how unified the population is. You can be happy with your life on a personal level, about your family life or your work. The next level is the state level, the way people feel about their country. So expressing approval for Putin as a president basically means saying, "I'm with you."

The ratings are an imaginary space where people can come together and embody their country's strength. But they don't reflect Putin's personal popularity. They show the absence of something else to be inspired by. In the absence of some sort of a spiritual leader who could unite people in Russia, Putin's rating is high because people need a symbol that inspires, and Putin is one. **TMT**

Vladimir Putin's approval rating January — November 2018



Source: Levada Center

Don't Call Lyubov Sobol Navalny's Press Secretary

By [Evan Gershkovich](#) | @evangershkovich

Meet the woman pushing the opposition leader's YouTube empire into 2019

"Are you even listening to me?"

It's 10:30 a.m. and Lyubov Sobol has been talking uninterrupted for an hour. Sobol, the producer of opposition politician Alexei Navalny's live YouTube shows, ploughs through her monologue even during hair and makeup before an on-camera interview later that day.

Her stylist presses her hand against her head to hold her steady, but Sobol keeps shifting toward me to make sure I'm still paying attention.

We had met earlier at the Omega Plaza business center in Moscow where Navalny's offices are based. Sobol looked more like a white-collar professional than an opposition figure: With a copy of the RBC business newspaper under her arm and a yogurt parfait and black tea in hand, she strode into the lobby wearing a new feather fur coat. ("It's fake," she had assured her Instagram followers earlier. "All animals have been left in one piece.")

But Sobol, 31, is eager to point out that she is Navalny's longest-serving aide. Immediately after graduating with a law degree in the spring of 2011, she joined his newly formed Rospil.info project, which tracks corruption in state tenders. Then came the December Bolotnaya protests Navalny helped organize against election fraud and President Vladimir Putin's re-election. That month, Forbes Russia included Sobol on its year-end list of "faces few know."

Not anymore. She has since become one of the most recognizable personalities of Navalny's team. She became a key part of his Anti-Corruption Foundation, which has shone a light on the excesses of Russia's highest officials, including Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. She ran for the Moscow Duma in 2016. And, since July, she has become the head of Navalny LIVE, a set of live shows on news, politics, economics and cultural trends on YouTube that boasts nearly 600,000 subscribers.

While the channel carries Navalny's name, Sobol has become its flagbearer. "I needed a face, a leader for the channel," the opposition leader said of his decision to put Sobol in charge. "I needed a politician who will speak their mind."

With Navalny barred from state television, YouTube has provided a workaround in his effort to reach a mass audience. Launched in March 2017, the channel has helped galvanize Navalny's base, bringing thousands into the streets in protest of what they see as the Kremlin's rampant corruption.

Now, the opposition politician is hoping to lean more heavily on the platform in an effort to grow his movement.

"There is an audience of 20 million for us that I believe we can harness," Navalny says, estimating that he reaches up to six million with his main channel and live shows combined.

For that, he gives credit to Oxana Baulina, the former producer who "got the channel off the ground." But she was a journalist, not a politician. And, Navalny tells me, Sobol has the "will-



EVAN GERSHKOVICH / NYT

ingness to experiment" and the "passion and drive" to bring eyeballs to his message.

The young staff that work for Sobol (average age: 24) agrees. "Sometimes she'll shoot us a message at three in the morning and then she's still here at eight ready to go," says Alyona Medvedeva, a former co-host of the "Cactus" morning show about social media trends, aimed at teenagers and young adults.

When we met that morning, Sobol's eyes were red, and she asked her stylist for eye drops. "They'll be red until Putin leaves office," she joked.

But once we sat down for an Asian fusion lunch — by which time she had helped finalize the script for Navalny's weekly live show that evening, planned future content and given an interview to the liberal Radio Svoboda outlet about the Anti-Corruption Foundation, all before attending a daily meeting — she turned serious.

"All my work is driven by one very simple goal," she said. "I want justice in our country. I want us to follow the principles written in our constitution."

I realized I could have become a widow. I hadn't fully processed it over the past two years.

Lyubov Sobol has made no secret of her own political ambitions. Even her boss, Alexei Navalny, jokes about being jealous of her growing success.

"There is currently no Russian John Stewart or John Oliver," she said, referring to hosts of popular late night comedy shows in the United States with a political bent. "We need to give people variety and entertainment or they will get tired of us."

Pushing the channel in that direction has, however, resulted in some internal grumbling. One Anti-Corruption Foundation employee, who asked to remain anonymous to speak candidly about a close colleague, pointed to an Oct. 19 episode of "Cactus," in which co-host Vitaly Kolesnikov joked that Putin "overcompensates because of his small member."

"I'm not sure a Navalny show should be discussing Putin's penis size," the employee said. He also claimed that "the majority of the team does not agree with the direction Navalny LIVE has taken."

Both Sobol and Navalny do acknowledge that there are kinks to work through. (Since we spoke, "Cactus" has been canceled.) But they also both emphasize that stretching the boundaries is essential if they are to be able to pull in a bigger audience. Nonetheless, in their own shows, both remain conservative.

Since taking on the role of producer, Sobol has also launched her own show for Navalny LIVE, "By the Facts," which follows the familiar Navalny format: news, analysis, political message, repeat. Sobol proudly notes that all of the recent episodes, which air four times per week, have garnered at least 100,000 views; several have even reached above 300,000. It's still only half the number of views Navalny gets, but Sobol is closing the gap.

"I can honestly say this was a surprise to everyone," says Navalny in their studio, with Sobol standing behind him. "She is competing with me, and" — now joking — "I'm even a little jealous of how many views she's getting."

For her part, Sobol tries to project bashfulness. She insists that, up until the last minute, she didn't even want to be the show's host, but that she ultimately decided that she was "what the program needed."

During Navalny's show that evening, Sobol helped the team with social media promotion. She also tended to her own, replying to messages on Facebook and her Twitter account, which boasts some 124,000 followers, and where her own political ambitions can often be gleaned. In one recent tweet, for instance, she offered to debate a State Duma deputy on state television.

Even after the livestream ended at 9 p.m., Sobol's day wasn't over just yet. She was off to the Ekho Moskvy radio station's annual birthday party, a who's who of Moscow's liberal elite. I lost Sobol as soon as we entered, watching her glide into a crowd that opened up to let her through, then formed back around her.

When I found her again, a young man was asking for a selfie. As they posed, he asked, referring to Navalny, "Will our next president be coming?"

Sobol held her smile, waiting for the fan to snap the photo. Then, once he had pulled away, she bristled. "I don't know," she said. "I'm not his press secretary." **TMT**

Striving toward that goal has brought her in touch with dangers most shy away from. Two years ago in November, Sobol's husband, the sociologist Sergei Mokhov, was stabbed in the thigh with a psychotropic substance, causing him to convulse and rendering him unconscious. The event shook Sobol.

But, she says, it only hit home several weeks ago, when the investigative Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported that the hit was directed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has been linked to alleged U.S. presidential election meddling and proxy wars in Ukraine and Syria. The article, based on interviews with a purported Prigozhin employee, outlined a series of similar attacks that allegedly left at least one opposition blogger dead.

"I realized that I could have become a widow," says Sobol, who has a four-year-old daughter with Mokhov. "I hadn't fully processed it over the past two years."

Still, she says that, back when she was starting out, Navalny had prepared her for what could transpire: His first question in their interview was not about her legal expertise, but about fear.

"I have never had rose-tinted glasses about any of this," Sobol told me. "I understood in 2011 what the dangers were, and I am clear about them now. Of course I am scared for my daughter, but that's why I am working here: to leave her with a better country to grow up in."

At the moment, that work consists of winning Navalny a wider audience — and Sobol has big plans. In addition to wanting to host Navalny LIVE shows in front of live audiences, she believes comedy can be a tool for reaching across divides.

Can Russia Turn a Plastic Corner?

Some supermarkets have already started charging for grocery bags

By Victoria Dmitrieva | @victoria_dmitr

Tatiana Chulyuskina likes to think of herself as an efficient housekeeper. For the past two years, the 32-year-old graphic designer has lived by the motto, "There's nothing that cannot be reused." She brings her own cup with her to coffee shops and wraps her food in re-usable packaging. Once a month, she throws out a single bag of garbage.

In most Western countries, Chulyuskina would be just another eco-conscious millennial. But in Russia, her tips on how to lead a "zero waste" lifestyle are something of a novelty to her 27,000 Instagram followers.

"The thought of my children living in a world full of waste, full of plastic bags that I only used for 10 minutes struck me," Chulyuskina says of the moment she decided to radically change her lifestyle.

Recycling has yet to make its mark in Russia. Waste is rarely separated and recycling bins are, at best, difficult to find, even in the glitzy capital. Garbage is still chucked down waste chutes in Soviet-era apartment buildings or left in large dumpsters in courtyards.

Slowly, however, the question of responsible waste disposal is being taken up more widely as Russians become increasingly attuned to the consequences of overflowing landfills.

The year 2018 began with a string of protests in Volokolamsk, a town some 100 kilometers outside Moscow, when dozens of residents were hospitalized following reports of noxious gases emanating from a landfill nearby. Other protests have followed in places as far apart as in western Siberia's Chelyabinsk and ongoing protests in Arkhangelsk in the north.

In a recent Greenpeace survey, half of respondents blamed plastic bags for the trash crisis. Indeed, more than 26 billion plastic bags are handed out every year in shops across Russia, says Alexander Ivannikov of Greenpeace's "Zero Waste" project.

"The saddest part is that on average each bag is used for just 12 minutes, after which it becomes waste," he told The Moscow Times. "To solve the crisis, we need to solve the problem

with plastic waste first."

But that is a tall order, and one that the Russian leadership appears to be ignoring. When ordinary Russians have complained to President Vladimir Putin about overflowing landfills during his annual televised call-ins, he has responded with symbolic gestures, by ordering specific landfills to be closed or moved elsewhere. And when the head of Greenpeace asked Putin several years ago to ban plastic bags altogether, the president said the move would lead to job losses.

Meanwhile, budget shops, high-end supermarkets and everything in-between hand out plastic bags for even the smallest purchases, which is widely regarded as a hallmark of good service.

Many Russians remember a time when bags were coveted souvenirs from the West, says Boris Akimov, the founder of the organic grocery cooperative LavkaLavka. "In the Soviet Union, they were considered a rarity."

With the advent of capitalism in the '90s, plastic became more common, but many still stockpiled bags at home — just in case. "Encouraging Russians to start hoarding plastic for reuse can feel like asking them to return to the past," Akimov says.

That isn't quite the forward-looking message activists are hoping to promote.

Skeptical consumers

Last year, Greenpeace invited Russia's top 20 retailers to join their "Ban the Bag" campaign to reduce the use of plastic bags. Only four major names — Azbuka Vkusa, Vkusvill, Ashan and a Russian branch of Spar — signed on. And in at least one case it was shoppers themselves who demanded change.

"Customers were starting to comment on our plastic waste on social media," says Andrei Golubkov, a spokesperson for Azbuka Vkusa, a high-end grocery chain. "They were a minority of our consumers, but they were the most active."

Heeding their call, Azbuka Vkusa began charging 5 rubles (\$0.7 cents) per bag in October, a move which the company claims has reduced the number of plastic bags leaving their stores threefold.

LavkaLavka had already replaced plastic with

paper when in November it introduced a discount scheme for customers who purchase food in reusable containers. The aim, says Akimov, is to completely banish plastic from its shops by 2021.

But the transition has not been easy, even for LavkaLavka's exclusive and loyal customer base. "When we started charging for paper bags as well, the reactions were mixed. Some were very negative," Akimov says. "We need to make sure our customers know that our goal is not just to make more money."

Vkusvill, another grocery chain, has also faced backlash for adding a surcharge, spokesperson Marina Purim told The Moscow Times. But "there was no other way," she says. "The only way to reduce plastic waste is to make people pay for it."

A next step would be to introduce alternative biodegradable packaging, in the footsteps of some countries including, recently, Italy. But, as Golubkov points out, "that requires there to be infrastructure to process biodegradable waste. And, in Russia, that doesn't exist."

Eco-entrepreneurship

Meanwhile, "zero waste" stores are springing up across the country, including in St. Petersburg, Petrozavodsk and Perm.

In Krasnogorsk, a town outside Moscow, Larisa Petrakova sells groceries from large tubs which customers transfer to their own containers and then pay for by weight. "I'm not an activist, I'm just your average person who wants to be conscious about waste," Petrakova, 37, says. "When you reduce your waste, there's less to recycle."

Environmentally conscious Russians are also coming together and scaling up their activities, using the internet as a platform.

Dmitry Zakarlyukin first launched his "eco taxi" initiative in Chelyabinsk in 2013. He offers a recycling pick-up service, which customers can order online for 500 rubles (\$7). In the years since it launched, the service has expanded to St. Petersburg and Moscow and there are plans to move into other towns.

"The lack of adequate infrastructure in Moscow means trash is either burnt in cities nearby or it goes to neighboring regions," he says. "Given our

Russian reality in which people aren't given a voice or a role to play, the waste problem is one case where we can actually do something ourselves."

First steps

With small businesses leading the way, some local officials are cautiously getting on board, too. Last summer, Leningrad region's culture committee banned the use of plastic at local cultural events.

"Since we hold more than 100 festivals and have five theaters and around 30 museums, we decided to try to set an example by reducing plastic waste," Yevgeny Chaikovskiy, the head of the committee, told The Moscow Times. "It's important to educate a new generation."

Akimov of LavkaLavka also has his eyes on the future. "In the early 90s, drinking water from a plastic bottle instead of drinking tap water like we used to in Soviet times seemed unusual, but now we can't imagine living without it."

"Every practice needs time to get used to." **TMT**



WHERE TO BUY

Zero Waste Shop
"Box City" shopping mall,
2nd floor, Metro Myakinino
zerowasteshop.moscow

Lavka Lavka
lavkalavka.com

WHERE TO RECYCLE

Greenpeace has created an interactive map of recycling spots in Moscow and several other Russian cities.
recyclemap.ru

Many **Azbuka Vkusa** and **Vkusvill** branches also have separate recycling bins.
av.ru
vkusvill.ru

JOIN A MOVEMENT

The "**Razdelny Sbor**" movement unites individuals and local groups who are interested in recycling:
rsbor-msk.ru/map_eco_active

Ecotaxi (in Russian):
нольотходов.рф



A Constitution Worth Defending

Opinion by **Viktor Sheinis**
Co-author of the 1993
Constitution



YURY TIMOFEEV (RE/RL)

On Dec. 12, Russia marked the anniversary of the Constitution under which it has lived for the past 25 years.

It would be a fitting occasion for a meaningful conversation about the constitutional order in present-day Russia. But these are not the best times for such discussions. So the date will most likely be marked with two or three celebrations, four or five pro-forma articles – and then quickly be forgotten.

The 1993 Russian Constitution was adopted at a time of transition, when there was no consensus on what the new system should be. Consequently, its evolution was complicated and rife with contradictions.

In 1990, the Congress of People's Deputies delegated the drafting of the constitution to a special commission. Because it was formed on the basis of regional representation, however, it was too large. It also wasn't professional or sufficiently politically diverse to create such a complex legal document. A small working group was created of specialist deputies, most of whom were democrats. In the fall of 1990, they presented a first version of the Constitution, which was met with applause by some – but not all.

A political power struggle had begun to unfold in Russia. On one side were President Boris Yeltsin and his shrinking support base, on the other were a growing number of opponents. The draft Constitution was battled back and forth between them like a ball. Alternative drafts appeared, with different scholarly and political approaches, along with hundreds of contradictory and mutually incompatible proposals. At every discussion, the official draft was made to run the gauntlet.

After three years, it became clear that in its given form the Congress of People's Deputies would not be able to adopt the official draft or any of the alternative drafts by constitutional means – that is, with a two-thirds majority vote.

It was feared that Congress's five-year term would expire and elections would have to be held for an unauthorized body and according to an unapproved law.

As the power struggle intensified, in April 1993 Yeltsin made a surprise move. Bypassing Congress, he introduced a new draft constitution that partly overlapped with the earlier and endlessly amended text. He also appointed a Constitutional Conference made up of federal and regional deputies as well as party representatives and members of public organizations, business associations and local municipalities. In terms of numbers and representation, this new institution was comparable to the Congress of People's Deputies, but it was extrajudicial.

Within two months, this Constitutional Conference produced yet another draft constitution, which contained elements of both the proposals of Yeltsin and Congress.

It weakened certain significant defects – such as a tendency to favor the institution of the presidency – and made serious concessions to regional elites. This was, to a certain extent, an acceptable

compromise. Yet the political conflict only intensified: Congress was dissolved and the draft constitution was put to a referendum and approved.

One could ask: How legitimate was this? To defend their actions, Yeltsin and his democrat supporters cited provocations by their opponents and their inability to reach a compromise. Meanwhile, their opponents argued that the transition to a new political order had happened “by decree.”

There is reason to believe that the real results of the referendum differed from those announced. But this went unnoticed by the public and even by opponents of the draft.

Subsequently, the 1993 Constitution gained legitimacy by the very fact of its continued existence, by the creation of functioning institutions on its basis and by a long series of elections in which all significant political forces took part.

The main result of the political crisis was the informal but virtually unanimous agreement that power could not be taken away by force. It is a blessing that Russia did not go the route of Yugoslavia to resolve its internal and external problems.

The Basic Law, given its content and the way in which it was approved, looked like the winners' constitution. But who were the winners? Certainly not Russian democrats, who even then were not an independent force, but a pillar of support for Yeltsin's rule. It might appear that the constitutional crisis was crowned with the victory of the reformist forces. But the reformers' opponents, leaving aside the leaders of the October revolt, had not been defeated or expelled from political life. It wasn't long until yesterday's opponents had reorganized and returned to politics.

More importantly, democratic changes were replaced by a “course of reforms.” The transition to a market economy had been given top priority. But the market itself – without the division of property and power, without real competition for the country's most important assets – was inadequate and defective.

Still, the 1993 Constitution is the best and most modern set of laws to guide Russia in the past century. Its authors can still take real pride in the first two chapters on the fundamentals of the constitutional system and on the rights and freedoms of man and citizen.

But the norms contained in those chapters are essentially declarative. There is no one to guarantee human and civil rights in our society and state. Whenever the interests of individuals clash with those of the state – and there are many such cases – those of the state are given preference. When the contradiction of interests is especially obvious, the state adds to, or violates, the existing legislation and constitutional norms. As before, the Russian people live not according to the Constitution, but under it.

Once again, the age-old Russian question arises: What is to be done?

As before, the Russian people live not according to the Constitution, but under it.

Over the years, some amendments to the constitution have been discussed by the State Duma. But none have yielded substantial results. And when the vector of Russia's development changed in 2000 and political counter-reforms began, the Constitution did not pose any obstacle.

The only real amendment that has been made to the 1993 document was initiated in 2008 by then-President Dmitry Medvedev and backed by the Duma. It stated that the president, which already had almost unlimited power, would be elected every six years, not four.

Clearly, to mark the Constitution's anniversary, the powers that be have no need for a grand celebration or panel of experts discussing the current system.



A guard carries the Constitution during Vladimir Putin's inauguration for a fourth presidential term in May 2018.

From time to time, of course, energetic deputies and activists put themselves in the spotlight by proposing amendments that would only impair the very provisions in the Constitution which are worth preserving. They ask to limit the independence of municipalities; to repeal the ban on state or compulsory ideology; to disavow the secular state; to annul universally recognized principles and norms of international law; to revoke citizens' right to determine their own nationality and so forth. In the current situation, those in power would not find it very difficult to remove these provisions from the Constitution. On the other hand, they do not have a real need to.

The Constitution would, of course, require serious reform when and if our society wants and is able to return to the democratic path declared during perestroika; wants to realize the objectives stated in the Constitution's first two chapters; wants to confirm the European choice.

The best solution would be to thoroughly revise most of the Constitution's chapters, with the exception of the first two. Drafts that merit serious discussion already exist today in the laboratories of constitutionalists, but there are two serious disclaimers.

First, to try to amend the Constitution now would be to open a Pandora's box. It is better to have an extremely imperfect law with important provisions which do not function in practice, than to muddy the text with amendments that legitimize the worst anti-democratic, anti-liberal, anti-modernization features of our current reality.

Second, constitutional reform should come after political reform and act as a legislative buttress. Real changes in the structure of political forces in Russia, party building, political protests and opposition movements – all these could kick-start a constitutional process. ТМТ



From left to right: Viktor Sheinis and Oleg Rummyantsev, both Duma members, and President Boris Yeltsin.

Why IVF in Russia is so popular among foreign citizens?

IVF has more than 40 years of international practice, and in Russia this procedure has been carried out since 1986. Despite the gap of several years in the uptake of assisted reproductive technologies, Russia occupies a leading position in this area and in 2017 became the first among European countries in the number of procedures. Why is that?

It is because Russia has world-class specialists in the field, who use advanced diagnostic and therapeutic tools, along with high-precision equipment. In addition to that, Russia has very flexible pricing policies. NOVA CLINIC is among the best centers of human reproduction and genetics in Moscow, where leading experts annually help thousands of Russian and foreign couples to become parents.

Russian legislation on the side of infertile couples

Russian legislation is more lenient in the reproductive sphere: there is no age limit for IVF, it is allowed to use donor oocytes, sperm and embryos and to use the services of a surrogate mother.

Medical tourism is a trend

In the last few years, medical tourism in Russia is gaining momentum: men and women from different countries of Europe and Asia receive highly qualified medical assistance for the treatment of infertility. For example, in NOVA CLINIC the share of foreign patients is about 20%. Why do people, on the issue of be-

coming parents, turn to NOVA CLINIC so often?

Personalised approach

We offer our patients many types of IVF programs, - including in the natural cycle, with stimulation, (including double stimulation), IVF with a surrogate mother and oocyte donation.

We were among the first to put into practice personalized ovarian stimulation. This method is based on modern practices in the field of genetics. The bottom line is that even before the entry into the IVF Protocol, the patient passes a blood test, based on the results of which the doctor

selects the optimal drug for ovarian stimulation, its multiplicity and dosage. Thus, ovarian stimulation in the IVF program takes into account not only previous procedures, based on the medical history of the patient, but also on objective data.

IVF in Nova Clinic is not only the treatment of infertility

The procedure of in vitro fertilization is carried out today not only for the treatment of infertile couples, but also for the birth of healthy children. This is especial-

ly true for parents who have genetic diseases or have given birth to children with genetic pathologies, as well as for couples of older reproductive age.

Today, scientists have revealed that about 350 million people in the world suffer from rare diseases, and about 80% of them are due to genetic causes. In addition, each person is a carrier of 4-5 mutations, and in 20% of cases the cause of infant mortality in developed countries are congenital and hereditary diseases. To avoid such serious consequences, couples for medical reasons are advised to consult a geneticist and, if necessary, IVF with PGT.

Pre-implantation genetic testing is the earliest prevention of congenital and hereditary diseases, during which only a healthy embryo is transferred to the uterine cavity, which reduces the risk of miscarriages and non-developing pregnancy, and increases the effectiveness of the IVF procedure.

Donation and surrogacy

We conduct IVF programs with donor sperm, oocytes and embryos. Many years of experience in the field of reproductive

medicine has allowed us to form a solid base of surrogate mothers, sperm donors and oocytes.

Choosing an IVF program with a surrogate mother in Nova Clinic, you can safely expect the birth of a baby, because our experts will take care of everything - from the selection of a surrogate mother to the registration of the child.

Service for foreign patients

A full-cycle program including medical and legal support is available in Nova clinic. A personal Manager with knowledge of foreign languages (English, Chinese, Spanish and others) will monitor each stage of this program, advising on all issues. We make every effort to make our partnership as comfortable as possible for you.

High success rate

The success rate of IVF in NOVA CLINIC is one of the highest in Russia - it reaches 53%, which is higher than the average world level. During our work we have conducted more than 5 thousand IVF cycles.

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Can Urban Renewal Plug Russia's Brain Drain?

By [Evan Gershkovich](#) | [@evangershkovich](#)

Regional officials hope that beautifying their towns can keep people from leaving

The road to “New Life” is bumpy. Only recently opened, the entrance to the apartment complex in Belgorod, a provincial city on the border with Ukraine, has yet to be paved. Already, though, young mothers can be seen pushing strollers along bike paths as their toddlers scramble over Danish playground sets.

“We study the best of Europe so that we can create the most comfortable environment for people,” says Irina Tarasova, a local landscape architect who designed the grounds, during a recent tour.

Funded by the Belgorod Construction and Transport Department, the complex is the product of new government spending on *blagoustroistvo* across Russia's regions. The term, best translated into English as urban beautification or renewal, in Russian combines the words for “construction” and something “good.”

In Belgorod, a city of 350,000, it is not just local money that is being spent. The municipality is one of 40 “comfortable city environment” projects funded by the federal Construction Ministry since 2017.

President Vladimir Putin seems pleased with the result. He has extended the project through 2020 and allotted 125 billion rubles (\$1.9 billion) to improve public spaces in the selected cities.

The project is barreling ahead. Across the country, city planners have transformed town squares, main thoroughfares and river embankments. “We have Napoleonic plans,” a local official in the Ivanovo region north of Moscow explains.

Listening to Russian officials, you might get the impression that rendering industrial Soviet cities European-like is the elixir that will cure all of Russia's ills. That, importantly, it will keep people from leaving the regions.

As one recent poll shows, residents in only five cities — Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Kazan and Krasnodar — felt they could build a successful career by staying put.

Looking north

Indeed, students in Belgorod repeatedly told The Moscow Times that they would be “looking north” after graduation. “There are simply more jobs in Moscow and St. Petersburg,” says Timofei Sharepov, a 26-year-old computer science master's student.

For Ivanovo, a city of 400,000 people, the problem is particularly urgent. “In most polls of places that people want to leave, Ivanovo is in the top five,” says local governor Stanislav Voskresensky.

Indeed, whereas the average salary in August in the Ivanovo region was 24,941 rubles (\$379), it was three times higher only a five-hour drive away in Moscow.

For Voskresensky, *blagoustroistvo* could be the solution.

Today, many former factories stand empty in his city. But Voskresensky imagines investors transforming them into lofts or offices, with bustling cafes and restaurants on their first floors.

One day, he says, Moscow will be overflowing with people, and those wanting a less hectic life will flock to a revamped Ivanovo.

For now, though, his priority is providing enough incentives for locals to stay put. “If we make Ivanovo a comfortable place to live,” he argues, “people will want to stay.”

For acolytes like Voskresensky, the example to follow is the capital.

In Moscow, since 2011, a nearly constant cycle of construction work has left in its wake modern parks and revamped public spaces. The city has become leagues more livable — or “more European,” as Moscow's mayor repeatedly says — and is growing rapidly.

Much of that work has been led by the Moscow-based KB Strelka consultancy, an offshoot of the Strelka Institute, one of Russia's top urban design firms. Now, Strelka is leading the “com-



Belgorod (above) is one of 40 cities participating in the “comfortable city environment” project, whose budget of \$1.9 billion is designated for overhauling public spaces, including Park Hussein ben Talal (below) in the Chechen capital, Grozny.





Stelka reimagines the river embankment in the center of Belgorod. Students in the city said they would likely leave the southern Russian city after they graduated.

KB STRELKA

portable city environment” project, parachuting its consultants into cities across the country to help regional planners follow the Moscow model.

In the Ivanovo region, Voskresensky piloted the project in the village of Palekh.

“There is an energy that is coming from Moscow and Strelka,” says Yar Pikulev, 33, at the square. “We have to learn from them and harness it.”

If nothing else, the energy is evident: Palekh’s entire central square was remodeled this summer to include new lighting, murals and foliage.

Yet not all residents see the benefit. “It feels like a Potemkin village,” says Yar Pikulev, 33, at the square. “This is supposed to solve all of our problems?”

Sarkin, though, believes it will take time to alter this mentality. “Soviet design was focused on industry, not people, so people didn’t feel attached to their surroundings,” he says, echoing Strelka’s “human-centric” design philosophy. “Hopefully now a new generation will grow up to better appreciate their hometown.”

“We are waiting for a miracle,” Sarkin continued. “And it will come. People will come back.”

Necessary but insufficient

For Alexander Puzanov, director of the Moscow-based Institute for Urban Economics, *blagoustroistvo* is not enough. Rather than relying on outside investors, he says, Russian cities should exploit “specific niches” to improve their economies.

That is what Andrei Knyazhensky is attempting in Ivanovo. Four years ago, the 30-year-old architect won a private contract to redevelop a former factory in the city center. At first, the owner wanted to turn it into apartments. But seeing that there was little demand, he asked Knyazhensky to take a more creative approach.

Knyazhensky says that many in his social circle wanted to make Ivanovo a more vibrant place — all they needed was an opportunity. So he created a community “for everyone who wants

to help develop the urban environment.” “Our job,” Knyazhensky says of the community, “is to keep our youth at home.”

The former factory now houses several startups focused on design and urbanism. “But its full potential has yet to be realized,” says Knyazhensky.

Instead of the overgrown waterfront behind the factory, he imagines pedestrian walkways, cafes and restaurants. All his dream needs now is some additional funding.

“For now, the money has been directed elsewhere,” Knyazhensky says. “I’m not sure why. Maybe it will be put to use here in the future.”

If it had, perhaps Knyazhensky himself would not have recently moved away from Ivanovo to Moscow (though he does remain a consultant on several projects). “It was mostly about career development,” he says.

Footing the bill

Another major obstacle for smaller cities, says Puzanov, is the centralization of Russia’s budget: the capital’s allowance totals nearly 25 percent of the rest of the country’s regions put together.

Natalia Zubarevich, an expert in Russia’s regions, estimates that in the first half of 2018 Moscow spent 112 billion rubles on urban renewal, compared to the rest of the country’s 170 billion combined.

This is also why she believes that the way *blagoustroistvo* funds are distributed — about two percent of regional budgets, she estimates — is for short-term political gains. As Sharepov, the computer science student in Belgorod, quipped, “The governor was trying to get re-elected.”

The Construction Ministry and Russia’s Federal Agency for State Property Management have also shelled out for Strelka to train young architects, city planners and local officials across the country. Already, they have traversed the nation to see how *blagoustroistvo* is chugging along. They also traveled to Europe this fall to study city planning there. The plan is for them to then return to their home cities to continue spreading the gospel.

“Right now it’s embarrassing to invite anyone to visit our city,” says Marina Kuklina, 30, who works in the city planning and architecture department of Perm, a city in the Urals. “Of course Russia has a long way to go, but we seem to be starting to head in the right direction.”

Whether the investment in young specialists pays off, however, is up in the air.

“I do want to help improve Tyumen,” says Alexander Vasilyukha, 22, of his Siberian home city. “But there are better opportunities [in Moscow] and a lot of my friends have moved there.”

Others say they are considering looking beyond Russia’s borders. “I could make three times as much money in China as I can in Russia,” explained Bakhtiyor Tirkakaritov, a 29-year-old architect in Vladivostok.

A European facade?

For Zubarevich, *blagoustroistvo* is ultimately a false idol when it comes to ending Russia’s brain drain. “Look how much they’ve developed Moscow, and people keep leaving anyway,” she says.

Earlier this year, university researchers found that some 100,000 Russians are leaving the country every year. Of those who have left, 40 percent had graduated from higher education institutions.

A quarter of Russian emigres who spoke to the researchers said politics had played a role in their decision to leave. According to the researchers, the number has risen since the “disappointment after the 2012 elections” when Putin was re-elected in what were widely considered to be rigged elections. Russia’s annexation of Crimea from Ukraine was another push factor.

Other emigres said they left for economic reasons, with Russia struggling to pull itself out of recession since mid-2015. Those respondents identified fewer opportunities for employment, career development and lower salaries.

Nonetheless, some city planners have bought into the *blagoustroistvo* model. “If we make it feel like Europe,” Kuklina says of Perm, “maybe people won’t want to leave to see it.” **TMT**

Heroes of the Fatherland: Killing Here, Hacking There

Opinion by [Mark Galeotti](#) | @MarkGaleotti

Diminished and demeaned, Putin has no incentive to reel in his spooks

Spies and spycraft seem to have been the dominant theme in Russian foreign relations this year. There were, of course, the stories of intelligence operations: the Skripal assassination plot in Britain, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons hack in the Netherlands, not to mention the continued drip-feed of allegations and revelations from the Mueller inquiry into interference in the U.S. presidential elections in 2016.

But Russian spycraft also threaded its shadowy way through many other stories.

The conflict in Ukraine is still a hot war, but the real struggle is now political, and Russia's spooks seem to be doing everything from staging sporadic terrorist attacks to spreading their agent networks in the name of undermining Kiev's will and capacity to challenge Moscow. In Syria, now that government troops and their militia allies are better able to fight, Russia has shored up its backing of Bashar Assad beyond airpower by contributing intelligence support – from the satellite photography and radio-electronic plots that help shape the battle, to the quiet infiltration of GRU Spetsnaz commandos, calling down airstrikes and targeting rebel supply lines.

How far can Russia's enthusiastic embrace of covert activities be considered a success, at least when viewed from the Kremlin? There have, of course, been tactical reversals, and in many ways the Salisbury poisoning can be seen as an example of the whole campaign.

Sergei Skripal – the “scumbag” and “traitor,” according to Putin – still lives. But the likely wider objective of demonstrating the will and capacity to act in such a flagrant way was accomplished. Even so, in the aftermath of the attack, the two alleged military intelligence officers were unmasked (which was likely predicted) but it also triggered a wave of international diplomatic expulsions (which surely came as a surprise).

So, a partial operational success, a full political one, but also an unexpected geopolitical setback. A score of 1.8 out of 3? Actually, the arithmetic was probably even more favorable. The expulsions were embarrassing, and undoubtedly caused short-term problems as new case officers hurriedly connected with their predecessors' agents. However, there has been no sense yet of a major and lasting impact on Russian intelligence activity, not least as it is not entirely dependent on officers based under diplomatic cover.

More to the point, there is no real evidence that the Kremlin regards public disclosure as a serious problem. Just as with so many other aspects of Moscow's geopolitics, there is a theatrical aspect. As the country tries to assert an international status out of proportion with the size of its economy, its soft power and arguably even its effective military strength, it relies on the fact that politics are about perception.

By nurturing a narrative that its spies are everywhere, hacking here, killing there and rigging elections in between, they contribute to Russia's claim of being a great power, even if an awkward and confrontational one.



After all, the calculation appears to be that there is little scope in 2019 for any major improvement in relations so long as the West remains united. If populist leaders of some countries break rank over European sanctions – however unlikely that appears – then that is a plus. But overall the Kremlin seems to have concluded, not without reason, that it is stuck in confrontation for the long haul. The later U.S. sanctions, based as they are on past misdeeds, offer no clear “off ramps” and especially contribute to the sense that relations are permafrosted.

Short of what Moscow would rightly consider capitulation – a withdrawal from Crimea, abandonment of its adventures in both Ukraine and Syria, and a general acceptance of a global order it feels is essentially a Western-dictated one – then the confrontation is here to stay. So there is no incentive for Moscow to scale down its aggressive intelligence campaign in the West anytime soon.

Instead, lessons are likely to be learned. It is striking that the 2018 U.S. midterm elections

showed no serious Russian interference, and likewise their efforts in Europe have been largely to provide some slight support to useful populist groups already on the rise. The risk of more obvious and heavy-handed meddling is not just that it may trigger a backlash – as it has with the U.S. Congress – but also that, quite simply, it seems not to work.

The intelligence-gathering campaign will continue unabated, especially as Putin appears to depend more on his spooks than his diplomats for his picture of the world. Meanwhile, the online realm is very much a key battlefield of the new espionage war, although it is important not to lose sight also of the others, especially old-fashioned human intelligence.

If espionage will remain a ubiquitous threat, then with subversion and active measures the focus will be on softer targets: countries with limited counter-intelligence capacities, with fractured and fractious politics to be exploited and encouraged, with national leaderships unwilling to challenge Moscow directly. The Balkans and southeastern Europe will likely see continued

efforts, as may the United Kingdom if Brexit metastasizes.

Fixating on the spies, though, misses the point. There was talk of a purge in military intelligence – still generally known as the GRU even though officially it is just the GU now – after recent revelations. Yet what happened? Putin turned up to its hundred-year anniversary gala, delivered a gushing eulogy and raised returning that errant “R.” The fact is that Russia's intelligence agencies are doing what the Kremlin wants.

When you feel like an outsider, under threat, being diminished and demeaned by your rivals, you have no incentive to play nice. Instead, you have to turn to whatever options and advantages you feel you have. Clearly the spooks are among Putin's relatively few such instruments. So while the tactics will evolve, until there is some step change in Russia's relations with the West, the intelligence campaign will continue. T.M.T.

Mark Galeotti is a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations Prague and the author of “The Vory: Russia's Super Mafia.”

 **16**
RUSSIA **DECEMBER** **FINLAND**

 **22**
SKA **DECEMBER** **CSKA** 



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WHAT RUSSIA WANTS

Foreign policy experts map Russia's grand designs for 2019



Vladimir Frolov
political analyst and columnist
at Republic.ru **Moscow Wants a Veto on U.S. Foreign Policy**

Russia's goals with the United States are incoherent and inarticulate. What's more, they are not defined in ways that lend themselves to being achieved through traditional diplomacy. Rather, Russia is seeking to dismantle the U.S.-led international order and secure a veto over U.S. actions abroad.

The Kremlin's fear of "crumbling under U.S. pressure" has pushed it into an unyielding, intransigent posture across a range of issues. The "all or nothing, everything is linked" approach hampers Russia's diplomacy, reducing its options to what might be called "hopeful procrastination" for a better moment to engage Washington.

In 2019, Moscow will focus on summits, with Putin invited to Washington and Trump to Moscow later in the year. For Russia, the only way to influence U.S. policy is to "play Trump," capitalizing on his inexperience and impulsiveness. Moscow currently deals with National Security Advisor John Bolton who, like a force of nature, cannot be reasoned with.

The immediate priority is to safeguard the U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control regime, which is under threat by Trump's decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty and his skepticism towards extending New START beyond 2021. Russia might be forced to accept Bolton's plan for a symbolic nuclear accord (like the Moscow Treaty of 2002) that would not limit deployment options. The good news for the Kremlin is that the majority Democrat Congress may not fund Trump's nuclear build-up.



Elena Chernenko
foreign editor at Kommersant **Can Russia Coax the EU Into Lifting Sanctions?**

Vladimir Putin is probably going to continue wooing European Union leaders who have a soft stance on sanctions imposed on Russia after its incorporation of Crimea in 2014.

Pundits point out that the Kremlin is cooperating with fringe parties across the EU, both on the far right and on the far left. For example, Russia has ties with Alternative for Germany but also Die Linke, both of which run on a platform of improving relations with Russia. This strategy applies to EU leaders, too. If Hungarian President Viktor Orban is prepared to visit Moscow and cooperate with the Kremlin, then the Kremlin will talk to Orban.

Because Russia has become toxic, it will have to make do with whatever European leaders it can get. And right now it can only win over fringe figures. But this is a pragmatic policy, and it seems likely that Moscow will continue to pursue this strategy into 2019.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's announcement that she is leaving German politics does not actually represent an opportunity for Moscow. Merkel knows Putin. They have a relationship, albeit a difficult one. Whoever the next chancellor is – and the candidates are all critical of Russia – they won't have the same rapport with Putin. It's hard to see how Russia benefits here.

Can Russia actually persuade a European power to use its veto power to end sanctions? When we hear about EU countries threatening to use their veto, it's usually just a bargaining chip for extra funding or preferential treatment on a particular issue. I don't see any European country really standing up right now and saying, "We're going to veto the extension of sanctions." Unless there is real progress in Donbass, of course.



Yury Barmin
Middle East expert at the state-funded Russian International Affairs Council **Russia Has Won the War in Syria, but Can It Win the Peace?**

As the fighting in Syria dies down, Russia's main task will be to align its efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict in line with the United Nations' peace process. So far, Russia's military-diplomatic approach has been seen as obstructing broader international diplomatic efforts.

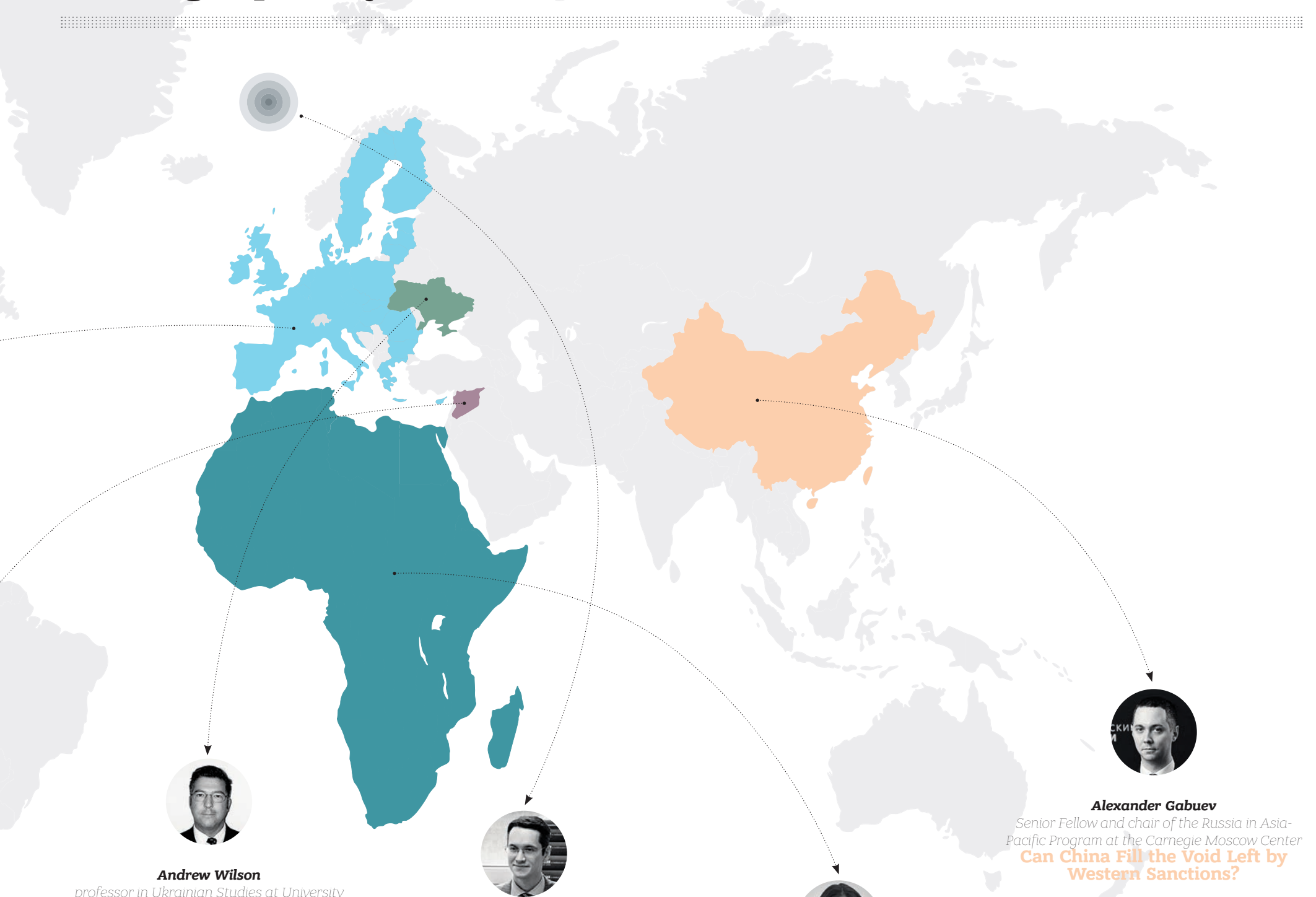
Russia will increasingly struggle to keep the government in Damascus in line. As Bashar Assad's government no longer feels threatened by its opponents, it has zero incentive to deliver on political reforms, which will further put Russia in the spotlight.

In 2019, Moscow will also need to double down on reconstruction efforts in Syria. Since Moscow's own capacity to rebuild the country is limited, it will need to convince the international community – first and foremost the EU – to unlock reconstruction funding, which will be a daunting task given the Syrian government's reluctance to reform.

While the war in Syria is coming to an end, the competition between global and regional powers over the future of the war-torn country will only intensify. Russia will need to strike a balance between the different concerns of its partners, which include Turkey and Iran.

It will find itself at odds with the U.S. and will need to invest a lot of effort to prevent skirmishes between Iran and Israel from intensifying.





Andrew Wilson

professor in Ukrainian Studies at University College London and Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations

Russia Believes That Creating Tension Could Swing the Dynamic in Its Favor

There are many uncertainties about how Russia's relationship with Ukraine will unfold next year. We can never be entirely sure that Putin is a rational actor, but his best approach would be caution. Ukraine is more resilient than it was, and Russia's ability to change the situation in ways it wants is far from certain. Still, Russia believes that the creation of tension can shift the dynamic in its favor.

The key event to look out for is Ukraine's presidential election in March. I don't think Russia can realistically expect their guy to win the presidency – that's not how Ukrainian politics works anymore. But parliamentary elections in October are a different matter. It is entirely possible that certain Russian-backed parties could come to power.

The number one priority for Russia in its relationship with Ukraine is the ongoing war in the east. A new front, some kind of massive escalation, is unlikely. But a flare-up is entirely possible. The rupture between the Orthodox Churches in Moscow and Kiev is a bone of contention, which will take years to resolve. Not to mention the disputes over Russia's militarization of the Sea of Azov or the ongoing trade war between the two.

But Ukraine is only one part of a bigger equation between Russia and the West. The Kremlin isn't happy with the status quo in Ukraine, but it is limited by what it can do militarily in view of how the West may respond and by its own economic constraints.



Timur Makhmutov

Arctic expert at the state-funded Russian International Affairs Council

Russia Wants to Modernize – Not Militarize – the Arctic

The fact that huge swathes of Russia fall within the Arctic circle means the region is not only a pressing domestic concern for Russia – it is also a foreign policy priority. Accordingly, Moscow has two main goals in the region. First, to secure large investments in Arctic infrastructure and the economy. Second, to modernize its military presence to protect those investments, all while counterbalancing the aspirations of the United States and NATO.

Western journalists regularly accuse Russia of militarizing the Arctic. In reality, Russia's only real military presence here is in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. These ports are Russia's only access point to the world's ocean. Strategically, there are no other viable options.

Developing the Arctic economically through new shipping routes or oil and gas projects is made all the more difficult by the harsh climate, the poor existing infrastructure and the Arctic's vast expanses. Today, there is no success story that Russia might use as a template to follow. Time and money are the only answers to this problem.

What's more, Russia will increasingly have to compete with other countries' Arctic aims. In particular, Moscow should continue negotiations with China, so as to better understand each other's red lines. U.S. sanctions and the fact that Russia is still drafting legislation specifically for the Arctic region means it will be more difficult to attract foreign or domestic investment.



Polina Slyusarchuk

head of Intexpertise, an Africa-focused consultancy

Russia Needs a Long-Term Strategy in Africa

I doubt whether Russia has a broader Africa policy or long-term strategy there. While Moscow is still contributing to programs under G8 patronage – which is peculiar considering Russia's status in the group – that may soon change.

At the same time, some private and commercial actors have their own interests there. Recent media reports suggest that Russian private military contractors are working in at least 10 countries on the continent, but the significance of those deployments may be inflated. Today, Russia wants to deepen its understanding of the business climate and explore trade and partnership opportunities in Africa.

An increasing number of bilateral events have been planned recently, which the Foreign Ministry hopes will culminate in a summit of more than 50 African leaders hosted by Russia in 2019. In the meantime, the meetings will be used to discuss the barriers to Russia's trade and cooperation with African countries.

Fifty years ago, African leaders had two basic options: A pivot towards the West, i.e. capitalism or neo-imperialism, or towards socialist development associated foremost with Moscow. Now, Russia's main goal is to decide what it can offer that hasn't already been made available by Chinese investment or Western aid.



Alexander Gabuev

Senior Fellow and chair of the Russia in Asia-Pacific Program at the Carnegie Moscow Center

Can China Fill the Void Left by Western Sanctions?

We shouldn't expect any major departures from the trajectory the Russia-China relationship has taken since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia now sees Western sanctions as all but permanent, which is why Russia is trying to build a relationship with China that will soften economic losses from its deteriorating ties with the United States and the EU. In 2019, Russia's primary goal will be cementing oil and gas deals with China.

Russia, however, will be increasingly wary of Chinese military interests in Central Asia. Moscow has accepted China's economic dominance in the former Soviet states, but it is not ready to cede its role as the guarantor of security or the region's major military force. We can see that China is increasing its military presence in Central Asia through bilateral arms deals with local armies and occasionally even with boots on the ground, for instance in Tajikistan.

Either this will become a point of friction between Russia and China, or Moscow will have to decide that China's role is a complementary one, and that the major enemy is the United States.



The Glass Is Half Full



Opinion by **Igor Ivanov**
Foreign Minister 1998-2004

Reflecting on 2018, it is tempting to point to the U.S. administration as the greatest global problem of today.

In pursuing its goals, Washington does not seem to care about international law or multilateralism. It withdraws from crucial agreements and tries to impose its decisions on other countries. In 2018, the White House pressured both its partners and opponents, which led to global instability.

But it would be a dangerous oversimplification to blame the problems of 2018 on Donald Trump and the United States. The reality is more complicated. The world is going through profound technological, economic and social changes. The pace of change calls for a new level of global governance, but old habits stand in the way. The greatest challenge of our time is a deficit of solidarity between states, including those entrusted by the UN Charter to maintain peace and security. Until they unite to tackle common challenges, the world will not be safe.

It would be difficult to single out just one threat looming on the horizon. Tensions between the U.S. and China could have profound negative implications for the world, including a global recession. The Middle East is explosive. We should not underestimate the danger of a clash between Iran and the U.S. or Saudi Arabia. Sadly, the Ukrainian crisis remains unresolved and limited progress on the Korean peninsula is still fragile. This is not to mention climate change, immigration or destabilizing transnational actors.

Each conflict has its roots, participants and dynamics. Yet they feed each other, destroy trust among international players, paralyze international organizations and complicate cooperation. A “perfect storm” — the cumulative impact of several crises taking place at once — is the greatest threat of 2019. We could fully destroy the old international system before we even start building a new one.

So, how can we do better in 2019? First, we have to agree that the critical task is restoring the shattered system of global management. The central dividing line in the modern international system is not between democracy and tyranny, but between order and chaos.

The building blocks of the international system will continue to be nation states. Therefore, the principle of sovereignty should be of paramount importance. Interdependence and integration can be accepted as long as they do not contradict the principle of sovereignty.

But there are limits to what even the most powerful states can accomplish unilaterally. With globalization, these limits become more and more apparent. Unfortunately, today we see powerful countries creating more problems than solutions. The United States is arguably the best example of a country with a unilateralist, shortsighted and egotistical foreign policy. Given the U.S.’ unique role in the modern international system, this is particularly dangerous.

However, this applies to all states — big and small, rich and poor, in the West and in the East. So far, no one can convincingly claim that their country has learned the uneasy art of multilateralism. Even the European Union — the leader of multilateral diplomacy — faces serious and diverse challenges. We should study multilateralism jointly, not in isolation.

This might sound unrealistic under the dire political circumstances, but I see no other way — neither for Europe, nor for the world at large. In the world of today, security is indivisible, and so is prosperity.

The emerging international system should reflect the changing balance of powers. Western-centric institutions should either undergo a profound transformation or be replaced by more inclusive, representative organizations. We should fully reject the concept of Western, or liberal, universalism in favor of developmental pluralism.

In 2019, the glass looks half-empty if you are trying to drain it. But it will look half-full if you are filling it. **TMT**



The G20 summit in Argentina this year was marred by Donald Trump's last-minute decision to cancel a planned meeting with Vladimir Putin.

The View From Moscow

By **Jonathan Brown** | @jonathaneebrown

‘The demonization of Putin will make it difficult to improve ties between Russia and the West’

Since Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in 2014, it has also come under fire for propping up the regime of Bashar Assad in Syria and meddling in elections.

To help shine a light on Russia's view of deteriorating ties with the West, The Moscow Times spoke with **Fyodor Lukyanov**, chief editor of Russia in Global Affairs, a state-funded foreign policy journal.

There is a view in the West that Russia is a re-emerging superpower with nefarious intentions. How does Russia view its own resurgence on the world stage?

Yes, reading Western press or statements made by Western officials, you could be left with the impression that Russia is expanding its presence abroad and that President Vladimir Putin wants to implement a completely different world order while destroying the Western, liberal rule-based system.

But this isn't reflected in the behavior of Western powers. Even though there is a very tense relationship with, say, the United States, Germany, France or even Britain, their policies don't reflect the view that Russia is a significant threat.

Look at Donald Trump, for example, and his behavior vis-a-vis Russia. No one would treat a superpower the way he does, canceling meetings last-minute by tweet, despite the fact that the previous tweet two hours ago said exactly the opposite. This is not the way emerging superpowers are treated. Trump, for instance, can't afford to do the same with China. He treats Beijing with more respect.

As an aside, the concept of superpowers dates back to the Cold War and is outdated. Even if we think of the United States or even China as superpowers today. Russia certainly isn't one, because it lacks resources. And even the United States is losing its status.

What I see unfolding is something else entirely. What I see is an attempt by Western officials, particularly in the U.S., to use Russia as an instrument in their political conversations back home. Russia has become a kind of meme in very brutal infighting in U.S. politics. A meme is a passive object of someone else's will.

Even if Russia wanted to improve relations with the West — and I think that the Russian leadership is interested in de-escalating tensions — it would be difficult. Whatever Russia does, positive, negative, even nothing at all, it is being used as part of political processes within Western countries.

When you are another country's powerful opponent or even an enemy, there is a framework for both sides to interact. Real confrontations like the Cold War are, in a way, a joint project. Being



Fyodor Lukyanov speaking at the Valdai Club in the southern Russian city of Sochi in October.

someone else's meme makes you almost helpless. So, Russia is in a very unfavorable position.

Recently, Russia has been expanding its presence in the Middle East and Ukraine, among other regions. Does Moscow have the economic or military resources to sustain its expanding role abroad?

Yes and no. First, I wouldn't overestimate these advances. Yes, Russia's move in the Middle East was pretty bold. It was a pretty efficient investment; the Syrian operation didn't cost very much. In 2015, when the operation started, no one in Moscow expected that by 2018 Russia would universally be seen as the most powerful country in the whole Middle East. As far as resources are concerned, both the Russian economy and its military forces can sustain this strategy.

Ukraine is a burden, of course. The situation in the east is deadlocked and relations with Kiev are absolutely awful. Russia is trying to limit the damage and keep the confrontation under control, which is difficult. But for now it has no other choice.

Neither of these cases is exhausting Russia's resources. But, taken together, it does add up. I don't see available resources to significantly extend Russia's role in Libya or Afghanistan, for example.

What can fatally limit Russia's capacity to act abroad is U.S. sanctions. That is, if the United States decides to use all the means it has, because the American ability to harm other countries, in-

cluding Russia of course, is almost unlimited. The country that controls the international financial system can paralyze almost anybody.

Will Putin's falling approval ratings influence foreign policy?

I don't think so. Yes, Russians are increasingly preoccupied by domestic problems, whether it's the retirement age or rising inflation or fuel prices. Society is not improving and people are no longer optimistic. The question is whether people will connect these problems with Russia's foreign policy and, personally, I don't think they will.

The danger is not that pensioners will suddenly say "Enough is enough. Stop Syria. Stop Ukraine! Give us our money back!" It would be worse for the Kremlin if Russians started to relate the country's poor economic performance to the authorities' inability to tackle corruption. Before, Putin was beyond the reach of these frustrations, but now, he is more involved personally and more often. And this means his political potential could be affected.

Broadly speaking though, many Russians who are unhappy with their lives are proud of Russia's advances in the world, especially as those advances are promoted on state-run television every day.

This is likely to be Putin's final term. Do you think questions surrounding his successor will have an impact on Russia's presence abroad?

We can look at Russian history to see that personnel changes do matter. There could be extremely significant fluctuations, even if there is an orchestrated and smooth change in leadership.

Traditionally, Russia's foreign and domestic policy was measured based on the relationship with the West. That was the case in the late Soviet Union and in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But what's happening now? There is a fundamental shift in which the West is no longer the political, economic or technological centerpiece of international development or innovation. And this is unusual for Russia because it removes the traditional paradigm where all changes were either pro-Western or anti-Western, closer to Europe, further from Europe. It is not relevant anymore.

Europe is distracted by internal problems, while Asia is rising. We might welcome the Chinese rise, we might fear it. But this is a fact of life. Russia can't afford to still be European or Western-centric. And I think this is the profound story

of change that might happen, regardless of who the next president is.

What changes are you expecting to see in Russia's foreign policy in 2019?

As long as Putin remains in place, there's no reason to expect profound changes in Russia's foreign policy. For one, he's not that young anymore, and his strategies on the eastern, western — on all fronts, actually — don't leave that much room for maneuvering. What's more, Putin has been demonized in such a way that I cannot imagine the West being ready to engage in efforts to change the relationship with him.

What will happen later is another issue. I think we might see big changes earlier than we think. But considering the pace of politics today, it's pretty meaningless to try to speculate what those changes may be. **TMT**



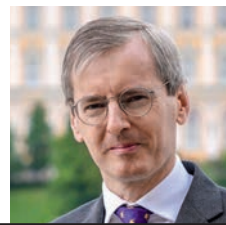
Maria Zakharova, the Foreign Ministry's spokesperson, has gained a reputation for her combative and unapologetic rhetoric during press briefings.



At the United Nations, Russia has made friends with China to veto certain resolutions.

If Russia Chooses a Different Course, The U.K. Will Respond in Kind

By **Laurie Bristow**
British Ambassador to Russia



This year, politically at least, has been one of the most difficult in living memory. Between the United Kingdom and Russia, for sure. But also between Russia and other international partners.

The chemical weapons attack in the United Kingdom this March crossed all possible moral and legal red lines. The subsequent police investigation uncovered enough evidence to charge two Russian GRU military intelligence officers with serious crimes, including attempted murder. This was followed by the GRU's attempted hack of the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons in The Hague in April.

These are just the most recent examples of actions executed by a Russian government which is seeking to disrupt and divide. In recent times, we have also seen Russian interference in Ukraine, its support for the actions of the regime of Bashar Assad in Syria and the use of disinformation to obscure or distort the truth, not only within Russia but in other countries, too.

Russia's actions are intended to undermine international in-

stitutions and rules, which are in place to keep everyone safe. Now, these safeguards are under threat from Russia's actions. It will not be possible to have a normal political relationship with the government of a country which behaves in this way and whose agents attack us.

But the United Kingdom is not seeking confrontation with Russia. In fact, as Prime Minister Theresa May has made clear, we are open to a different relationship. One that brings benefit to the people of both countries, where we work together in support of international peace and security.

We want to work together with Russia, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, to fulfill responsibilities we share and to confront common challenges that we face.

We already have the foundations for a better relationship that can be built on. We have a commercial relationship worth over £10 billion (\$12.7) annually, where British and Russian companies work together to improve prosperity in both our countries.

We have deep-rooted cultural and educational links, developed over many years, connecting the next generation of Russian leaders, influencers and entrepreneurs with the United Kingdom.

We also have the strength that comes from individual contacts. Over 200,000 Russians travel to the United Kingdom each year, and last summer tens of thousands of British fans visited Russia for the World Cup.

But if we are to build on these foundations we need a different approach from the Russian government. One in which it no longer seeks to undermine international institutions and rules. One where it seeks to work with partners to support international peace and security.

It will take a long time to build the kind of relationship we want with Russia and it will be difficult. But we hope that Russia will allow this to happen. As Prime Minister Theresa May said: "We hope the Russian state chooses to take this path. If it does, we will respond in kind." **TMT**

MH17: In Search of Justice

Opinion by **Piet Ploeg** | @ploegp

Russia's denials and obfuscation show a lack of respect for the victims' relatives

On July 17, 2014, I lost my brother, his wife and his son. They were among the 298 innocent victims who lost their lives that day in a cowardly and gruesome assault, when a Russian Buk missile shot down Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine.

More than four years later, relatives of the victims are still being left out in the cold by Russia's leadership.

In the wake of the tragedy, the process of repatriating the bodies, identifying them and saying goodbye – to the extent that that is possible – has been lengthy and painful.

It has been an ordeal to establish the exact course of events and the identities of those responsible. For many relatives, including me, this is an important part of coming to terms with this horrible event and our loss. The international community, too, was shocked. It needs to see that this inhumane act will not go unpunished and that something like it will not happen again.

Having stood on the sidelines for more than four years, a large group of relatives, myself included, can no longer stand by and watch. We want legal action.

In November, we filed a lawsuit against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights. We did this because we want an independent legal body to issue a ruling on Russia's role in the downing of MH17 and for justice to be served.

In May, the Joint Investigation Team (JIT), which is conducting the criminal investigation on behalf of the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine, made public some evidence it has of Russia's involvement in the incident.

The Dutch Safety Board and the investigative journalist collective Bellingcat had already proven the involvement of Ukrainian separatists and Russia in this heinous crime. The United Nations Security Council confirmed the JIT's findings and has called upon Russia several times to admit its role.



Russia's Defense Ministry in September presented what it said was new evidence to show it wasn't responsible for supplying the Buk that downed MH17.

Russia, however, denies all responsibility and has done nothing but obstruct the investigations by peddling alternative theories involving Ukraine, giving incorrect information or withholding it. Of course, Ukraine can be accused of failing to close its airspace, but there has so far been zero evidence to suggest that it downed MH17.

We, the relatives, have become puppets in Russia's geopolitical theater. Over and over again, the Russian authorities have rubbed salt in our wounds. Human remains are still being "found" in impossible locations, and only being returned to mourning relatives after endless bureaucracy. My own brother is one of two victims whose remains were never found.

It shows that neither the Russian authorities nor the separatists have any respect for the sanctity of human life or the victims' relatives. We, therefore, have no choice but to take legal action against the Russian state so that justice will triumph and to honor the memory of those we love.

Our patience is being tested. The JIT is sparing neither cost nor effort to find the culprits and bring them to justice, but that investigation is complex and will take a long time. Meanwhile, the Dutch and Australian governments are attempting to continue talking to Russia, and pressure it into taking some responsibility. Legal steps are seen as a last resort.

It is a good thing that relatives feel supported by the JIT and their governments and I am closely following the process from the sidelines. But for me, and for many others, this is not enough.

With our lawsuit at the ECHR, we want to make our own contribution. We want Russia to see that we will not give in until justice is served. We want to let the world know who is responsible for this infinite pain and send a signal that such violence cannot be tolerated.

In 2019, we will commemorate our loved ones for the fifth time and look back on five difficult years. We know there will be many more years of complicated legal procedures before justice triumphs.

Why? Because states like Russia are too proud and stubborn to admit to their mistakes at the expense of the victims and their relatives, despite the international community's indignation.

I still believe that an independent investigation will eventually result in a verdict issued by an independent Dutch court, with or without the suspects present. So that the world will know who is responsible for this tragedy.

Because the only thing that can make the deaths of our loved ones any worse, is if no lessons are learned. **ТМТ**

Piet Ploeg is the chairman of the MH17 Disaster Foundation.

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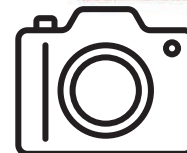
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MOSCOW  **OKHOTNY RYAD** Shopping Center "Okhotny Ryad", Manege Square, Building 1 (50 meters from the Red Square)
ST. PETERSBURG  **GOSTINY YARD** Shopping center «Gostiny Dvor». Nevsky Prospect, Building 35, Sadovaya Line, 2nd floor.
(The historical center of St. Petersburg)

On Oligarchs, Sanctions and Tax Havens

By **Pjotr Sauer** | @PjotrSauer

Oliver Bullough is a journalist and the author of the acclaimed book **'Moneyland'**

Where, or what, is Moneyland? >> The thing about the way the financial system works is that there is a very significant amount of money that we know exists but we don't know where it is, or who owns it. It exists as anomalies in statistical tables and is essentially money that is owned offshore by very wealthy people who disguise their ownership to avoid scrutiny or taxes. I invented Moneyland to try and explain this anomaly.

Between 8 and 10 percent of all the money in the world is in Moneyland, which makes it approximately the third richest country in the world.

What part does Russia play in Moneyland? >> Moneyland's system was actually created by the United Kingdom during the Cold War, when the city of London was looking for a new role and invented offshore, in cooperation with the banks in Switzerland.

But it was then very quickly discovered by the Soviet Union and later by Russians. They are among the most enthusiastic money launderers and users of this system. Russia is also one of the countries that is most affected by Moneyland.

You have argued that corruption is transnational. What is specific about Russian corruption? >> Russians and, in fact citizens of former Soviet Union countries in general, are quite useful from a journalist's perspective because they tend to spend their money ostentatiously. They buy houses, yachts, things like that. That makes them quite easy to track. They also have children who like Instagram, again, making them easier targets to study.

Russian oligarch Dmitry Rybolovlev is facing a corruption probe in Monaco, and Roman Abramovich was recently reportedly denied a British entry visa and Swiss citizenship. Is Europe getting more serious about clamping down on Russian money? >> Yes, I think it shows that European countries are more aware of or interested in the origins of this money than they used to be.

If you compare the actions of European governments to those of the U.S., they're pretty nominal. However, from a very low threshold, Europe is finally doing something.

Essentially, Europe remains wide open to this kind of money, and not least because of the willingness of places like Cyprus, Malta, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania to launder it and send it into the European financial system. As long as these countries are refusing to clean up, it's very difficult for anyone else to do anything about it.

In a recent interview, you rephrased a famous quote by Lenin, saying: "We are selling Putin a rope with which he'll hang us." What did you mean by that? >> What I mean is that this offshore system, this Moneyland, is entirely a system that we created. It was originally intended to allow Westerners to dodge tax. Now it's being used by people who are opposed to the very essence of the basis of Western civilization, people like Putin.

Money is being smuggled into our economies and societies without us really having any idea of what's happening.

Essentially, if enough of this money builds up in the West then the West will no longer be the West, it will be something else. I don't know exactly what it will be, but it will be a far more corrupt place than it is at the moment.

Despite international sanctions, the 10 wealthiest Russian billionaires made more money combined in 2018 than all their international counterparts according to Bloomberg. Does this show that rich Russians are very good at navigating Moneyland? >> Yes, they are very good at it. Also this is a function of the way that Moneyland has infested Russia in general.



Russia is by far the least equal major society. It's an astonishingly unequal place. Money multiplies. Once you've got money, it makes more money. It's very difficult to do anything about that. Particularly if the government is controlled by those very rich people.

Does it also show that international sanctions against Russian businessmen just don't work? >> No, I don't think it has shown that. One of the reasons there is comparatively less Russian money going into British real estate at the moment is because the ruble is so much weaker. That's a consequence of sanctions.

They have worked to a certain extent, probably not as well as people hoped they would. American sanctions are clearly much more potent than European sanctions because of the role of the dollar as the international currency. The U.S. law enforcement system is much more powerful.

A recent study by the Russian consultancy Frank RG claims that two-thirds of Russian millionaires keep their money abroad. >> Most of the Russian money that's abroad, or certainly a lot of it, is then immediately invested back in Russia again under the guise of foreign investment. If you look at Russian investment statistics, you'll see that the biggest investors in Russia are Cyprus, the Bahamas, and the British Virgin Islands. These places are not actually investing in Russia, it's just Russians hiding their money and then sending it back to Russia. Some offshore Russian money is also used to buy houses or yachts, but certainly not the majority of it.

Given the massive inequality in Russia, could corruption be a unifying cause for the political opposition? >> I think it should be, as it should be in lots of countries. Vladimir Putin and the group around him talk about defending conservative values but it's just a smokescreen. They're just stealing money and hiding it offshore. It's all hypocrisy. The best way to undermine that is to expose their hypocrisy by exposing their corruption.

Can you imagine rich Russians moving on to say, China, or will Russia's elite continue to spend its money in the West?

>> It's difficult to say what will happen in the long term. The thing is that Europe and the U.S. are just really nice places. They have very good universities. They're very safe, the air quality and the maintenance is very good, the shops are very good, the restaurants are good, the schools are good, and so on. These are places where you want to go and hang out. I don't see that China at the moment can rival that. It would take something quite major, quite a major upheaval, for that trend to be disrupted. **TMT**

What to Expect From 2019

By **Luis Saenz**, co-director of equities at BCS Global Markets



THE ECONOMY

We at BCS forecast the Russian economy to grow by 1.5 percent in 2019, driven primarily by exporters (investments into new pipelines and other commodity projects), state spending (housing renovation and road constructions in the Moscow area as well as the federal program for infrastructure modernization) and some weak growth in consumption (the negative effect from the VAT hike is likely to be offset by a rise in the pension age).



OIL

Our oil price forecast for the new year is an average of \$74/bbl Brent – that's a slight increase on 2018 levels. Inflation in Russia will spike in the first quarter of 2019 following a rise in VAT tax, excises and communal tariffs. The CPI rate could reach 5 percent year on year, or above from the estimated 4 percent at the end of 2018. However, given the weak domestic demand and stringent fiscal and monetary policies, as well as lower tariff indexation in July 2019, inflation could start to come down fairly quickly. In fact, by the end of 2019 we expect the CPI rate to slow to 4.2 percent y/y.



THE RUBLE

As we expect oil prices to remain stable, the ruble will mostly be driven by geopolitics and the developments of global emerging markets. Next year, we forecast the ruble will trade at close to the current levels of 62-66 rubles to the dollar, coming up to 61.7 to the dollar by the end of 2019.

With all this in mind, what are the opportunities to make money in 2019? In the first half of the new year, we would stay overweight in the broader exporters theme, with a focus on the precious metals names, both Polyus and Polymetal. In oil and gas, we would own LUKoil, Rosneft, and even Gazprom. Novatek, which we like to refer to as the "Ferrari of the Russian market," is a must-own not only in all emerging market portfolios, but also in major oil and gas portfolios. Among the large domestic names, we would single out Sberbank and Yandex.

A Capital Reimagined

By [Victoria Dmitrieva](#) | @victoria_dmitr

Russia's capital has been overhauled by large-scale urban renewal projects that have given it a Western veneer. Moscow's chief architect, Sergei Kuznetsov, tells us what lies ahead

What do you consider to have been the main achievements of the outgoing year?

Although I worked on several high-profile projects, the most prominent had to do with the World Cup, like the Luzhniki or Spartak stadiums, even though the latter was already in operation.

Moscow doesn't have to worry about what to do with World Cup infrastructure like some other host cities do. There are always plenty of people in the capital and lots of events being held.

The World Cup brought thousands of international football fans and foreign media to the city. Their positive appraisal has changed how Muscovites view their own city. They've become more patriotic and take greater pride in it. The importance of this can't be overestimated — it's about people's willingness to embrace new things.

I would also mention the new concert hall in Zaryadye Park, which opened this year. It is an important part of the park complex, but it's also a very important structure in and of itself. Zaryadye is the main story now. It defines the city's image. It is without a doubt the first modern architectural landmark that Moscow has had in many years. It attracts crowds of Russian and foreign visitors.

The park has received a lot of media coverage and a slew of nominations for various awards. The international status it brings is exactly the breath of fresh air that Russia needs.

A number of other facilities were completed in 2017 and opened this year. For example, the Moscow Central Circle is in full swing and the "My Street" program has also come a long way.

We live in an era of cities. Some believe the world's major cities are more similar to each other than they are to other cities in their own countries. These metropolises have a special status, they compete with each other. And architecture is one of the most visible tools in this competition.

I emphasize these non-material developments because they strike me as being more important. They symbolize the faith residents have in our initiatives. With Zaryadye, there was a lot of distrust toward what the authorities initially designed and built. People said all Russian architects were bad and that we shouldn't work with them. But they also argued that choosing foreign architects would be a betrayal of our country. No matter what we did, it was going to be wrong.

To have gone through this and ultimately achieved such good results, to have tried and proven that it was a success and to have had so many people express their delight — this to me is the major ideological success of 2018.

What about more controversial plans, like the demolition of Soviet-era housing?

Some projects will always be met with negativity. Replacing Soviet-era apartments is fraught with numerous challenges and risks. People aren't clear about what good will come of the project. We have to earn people's trust and make them see that this really is a positive initiative. Many people still have doubts. Our task is to convince them it is worthwhile.

What can we expect from 2019?

Our priorities are the renovation of prefabricated apartment blocks [Editor's note: this refers to the aforementioned plan to demolish thousands of residential apartment blocks built under Nikita Khrushchev and relocate its inhabitants], which is the most important and difficult, and development of the Moscow River, which will include a transport and ecological strategy and bridges.

There have been long-standing plans to introduce regular traffic to the Moscow River. In fact, the Moscow authorities have

wanted to develop this ever since 1998, when they hosted the World Youth Games.

Right now, the main problem is that the population density along the river is five times lower on average than in the rest of the city. I would like to see more exciting projects on the river and complex infrastructure projects involving transport lines.

What will be built in place of the *khreshchevki* Soviet-era apartments?

The most important stage of the project next year will be preparing the designs of the new housing. Everything we are developing now will be put up for discussion next year, with the goal of finalizing everything by the end of 2019.



PERSONAL ARCHIVE



MOSCOW ARCHITECTURE COMMITTEE

Top, Moscow's chief architect Sergei Kuznetsov. Left, Zaryadye's viewing platform overlooking the Moscow River has quickly become a favorite photo spot for tourists.

Bottom, once an industrial zone, ZIL in southeastern Moscow is one of several Moscow neighborhoods to undergo a transformation in 2019.



It's also important to help people understand what we are doing and why. The alternative is scandal. Although our first meetings with residents went well, there were tensions around some questions.

Landscaping and parking, which are considered standard for people living in huge cities, were completely new to the inhabitants of Khrushchev-era housing. It's not straightforward to explain the importance of reorganizing people's surroundings or to help them understand that this would be an improvement for the city. Construction has already begun at the first building sites and individual apartment buildings are scheduled to be finished in 2019.

What are the main trends you see for Moscow's redevelopment going forward?

The apartment renovation project and the Moscow River project both look beyond the center of Moscow. The focus is obviously shifting from the center. That doesn't mean there won't be other high-profile projects, but our energy will be devoted to projects outside the center that serve the wider public.

Are there any plans to reshape Moscow's image abroad?

Although it matters to Russians how the rest of the world perceives Moscow, and it's an important question, the goal here isn't to impress others. I'm not interested in showing off. Our priority should be to do things well for our own purposes. But I do understand that our international image is important and that this matters to Muscovites.

We had 16 projects on the World Architecture Festival shortlist. This is a record for us. Of those, 10 are in Moscow. This is a positive trend.

It's difficult to say now what will happen next. There could be more projects co-financed by investors. For example, we worked with the Belgian architecture bureau MVRDV on the corner of Prospekt Akademika Sakharova and the Garden Ring.

What role do foreign firms have in Moscow's architectural development?

We are bringing in fewer foreign specialists because with the development of the Russian market, our specialists increasingly have the expertise themselves. Spanish and Japanese companies are involved in the housing renewal project but foreign firms represent a fairly small percent of what we do.

We aren't in the learning stages anymore, and we can build high-profile projects on our own. The goal now is to develop our niche, which is difficult to do without competition. For that, we need continual cultural exchange. Of course, we must work with the best. **TMT**

Holding Back THE TIDE

By Daniel Kozin | @KozinDaniel

St. Petersburg is in a race against climate change

ST. PETERSBURG FLOOD PREVENTION FACILITY COMPLEX

In the cold, gray waters of the Gulf of Finland, 30 kilometers west of St. Petersburg, a giant wall juts across the bay. Completed seven years ago, it protects the city from an age-old danger: floods.

When storms approach from the west, the Baltic Sea is pushed eastwards into the shallow Neva Bay where the city lies. There, it collides with the fourth largest river in Europe by discharge, the Neva, causing water to spill over the riverbanks and overflow the hundreds of canals that crisscross the city center.

"When the floods happen, the wind knocks you off your feet and it's hard to see anything because of the rain," says Olga Suvorova, a press secretary at St. Petersburg's Flood Prevention Facility Complex.

Over the past three centuries, the "Venice of the North" has suffered more than 300 floods, two-thirds of which saw water levels rise above the "dangerous" mark of 2.1 meters, according to Russia's Hydrometeorological Center. Three times — in 1777, 1824 and 1924 — water levels rose above the "catastrophic" level of 3

meters, causing hundreds of deaths and damaging thousands of buildings.

While much of Russia remains skeptical about climate change, St. Petersburg can't afford the luxury of stalling, as climate experts warn of an uptick in storm surges.

Today, the massive St. Petersburg Flood Prevention Facility Complex, a bulwark of reinforced concrete, steel and stone, which stretches more than 25 kilometers across the Neva Bay from the north to the south, is the city's first line of defense.

The dam complex consists of 11 embankments, six sluices and two navigation channels, which allow ships to enter and exit one of Russia's busiest ports. A highway runs along the top of the barrier wall, connecting the mainland to Kotlin Island at the center of the dam.

For most of the year, the floodgates are left open to allow the flow of water and marine life between the bay and the sea. But within 45 minutes of sounding the alarm, the sluices can be shut, ready to withstand the force of up to 11,000 tons of water pressing up against it.

"There's nothing like it anywhere in the world," Dmitry Drugachuk, the dam's spokesperson, says proudly. "Not even in the Netherlands."

While plans to defend the city from the sea were drafted as early as the 18th century, it wasn't until 1979 that construction of a barrier finally began. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the project was abandoned, and it wasn't until Vladimir Putin, a native of the city, became president that the plans were put back in motion. With European loans and expertise, the dam was finally completed in 2011 at a price tag of 109 billion rubles (\$3.85 billion).

Four months after its completion, it was put to the test. In December that year, officials warned of an oncoming storm surge that threatened to flood one fifth of the city and estimated the potential damage at 25 billion rubles (\$374 million). "We were nervous. We didn't know whether the dam could cope," Drugachuk remembers. But the dam held its ground and, in the seven years since, it has prevented 13 more floods.

Vladimir Kattsov, a climate specialist and the head of St. Petersburg's Voeikov Main Geophysical Observatory, fears the worst may be yet to come.

He cites a recent report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that predicts sea levels could rise by a meter within the next century. "But other reports have said that this estimate is too conservative and we can expect significantly higher levels," Kattsov says. In any case, the change will bring water lev-



A city on the water.

els closer to 1.6 meters — the mark at which a flood is officially declared in St. Petersburg.

Kattsov adds that changing weather patterns in the North Atlantic Ocean could see cyclones spilling over into the Baltic Sea, increasing the frequency and strength of storm surges in the Neva Bay.

While local scientists vary in their estimates, St. Petersburg's environmental committee predicts that the number of storm surges in St. Petersburg could increase by 40 percent by the end of the century. With the dam already under pressure, Drugachuk, the dam spokesperson, says the complex might not cope with the challenge posed by a changing climate.

"The complex was built to last 100 years because, theoretically, nothing would change in that time," Drugachuk told The Moscow Times. "But if the climate changes, it is possible that the complex will have to be rebuilt."

On top of this, weather officials are noting that the Neva Bay is freezing over later each year, making the city more vulnerable to storm surges, according to Ivan Serebriksky, the vice-chairman of the local environmental committee.

"Before, the frozen surface of the bay would stop the storm surges that came with cyclones in the winter," he says.

According to Kattsov, the climate scientist, it isn't the number, but the power of storm surges that matters.

BUSINESS LIQUIDATION

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Dated this 14th November, 2018

For and on behalf of
René Kurth
Director

Frédéric Gamblin
Director

“It only takes one massive storm surge to wash everything away,” he says. “Remember the Biblical flood?”

Among the lowest-lying central districts of St. Petersburg are Vasilyevsky Island, the Petrograd Side and the historical neighborhoods between St. Isaac’s Cathedral and the Winter Palace. “If the Hermitage Museum is suddenly flooded, the damage would be impossible to measure,” says Kattsov.

To protect the historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage site home to some of Russia’s most prized cultural treasures, the city has integrated a pioneer climate strategy program into its long-term development plan that focuses on adaptation strategies.

Implementing those strategies is an urgent matter, says Serebriksky. “Storm surges seriously impact the city’s shores, wash away our beaches, our islands and anything else that they can,” he says, adding that coastal erosion would cost the

The S-1 gate of St. Petersburg’s dam complex can withstand the force of up to 11,000 tons of water when closed during a storm surge. It is left open for the rest of the year to allow cargo and cruise ships to enter the city’s bay.



ANTON VAGANOV / TASS



SERGE YERMOKHIN / TASS

Floods present an ever growing danger to the city, experts warn.

city some 20 billion rubles in the next five years if prevention measures are not taken.

The city administration has started some of the work already, including developing new drainage systems in a cross-border program with Finland to cope with heavier snows and rainfall, as well as coastal defense systems.

Serebriksky also notes that the city has massively reduced its greenhouse gas emissions in the past 15 years by switching to natural gas fuel for municipal heating systems. Of the 279 boiler stations in the city, 246 have switched to natural gas, with the rest powered by coal, fuel oil and diesel.

“There’s not much more that we can do [to reduce greenhouse gas emissions] apart from what we’ve already done,” he says.

St. Petersburg is ahead of the rest of Russia in confronting the negative effects of climate change, environmental activists admit.

“The problem of climate change is taken much more seriously in St. Petersburg than in Moscow or other Russian cities,” says Alexei Kokorin, the head of the Climate and Energy Program at the World Wildlife Fund, “simply because it is much more vulnerable.”

But, Kokorin adds, the city so far has focused mainly on countering immediate threats. “Russia is adapting more quickly to short-term problems, but it is a lot harder to accept that

there is a need to reduce emissions and that humans are strongly contributing to climate change.”

Back on the shores of the bay, Drugachuk shows off the dam’s control center which offers a picturesque view of St. Petersburg’s landmarks in the distance.

“We are working to defend the city based on proven technologies,” he says. “As sad as it sounds, we work with what we have. As for the future – that’s the business of scientists.”

For now, the complex is prepared to save the city from the rising tide, Drugachuk says. “But what happens in 100 years, that will be for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren to decide.” **TMT**

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Hopes and Fears for the Arts

We asked people in the arts: Is 2019 likely to be a banner year for their particular area of culture or do they foresee hard times?

The result is more than we expected: A snapshot of Russian cultural life in all its glorious diversity – and a delightful reminder of what it's like to be young, successful and probably very much in love.



Olga and Pavel Syutkin, historians of Russian cuisine

For people like us, involved in Russian cuisine, we have great hopes that in 2019 we will witness a growth in its popularity in Russia and abroad. We hope that this period of self-imposed sanctions on food imports will fade into the past along with their cause. We hope that our fellow citizens will finally be able to stop counting out their last *kopeks* as they stand in front of grocery store counters. The flip side of that is our fear that this won't happen, since events, alas, don't seem to be heading that way. Crises, wars, falling incomes – how we wish these would stay in the outgoing year! And that in a year we'll recall with amazement that these were part of our fantastical history.



Yelena Kovalskaya, art director at the Meyerhold Center (TsIM)

Next year is the official Year of Theater, so there will be additional funding and some theaters will be able to accomplish certain things they haven't had enough money for. There'll also be a whole Theater Olympics in St. Petersburg. It looks like the government is trying to tame the obstinate theater with carrots and sticks. For TsIM, next year will be the year of documentary theater, dedicated to its founders in Russia, Yelena Gremina and Mikhail Ugarov, who passed away in 2018.



Yury Saprykin, writer

Hope: The situation in Russia today looks more and more like the late Soviet Union: Cold War, ideological pressure from the state, soft

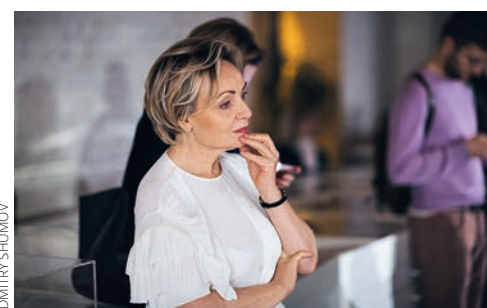
but tangible repression. And just like the 1970s, more and more cultural figures are going into internal emigration and refusing to collaborate with the state. This is not an easy path, but it is productive: Less clamor and compromise, more novels and poems. It is easier today than back then since there are independent publishing houses, theater projects and film producers, and the pressure from the state is not absolute. Those new novels and films created without even a glance at official imprimatur and commercial success are what I'm hoping for. And I can't wait to see parts of the film "Dau" by Ilya Khrzhanovsky on the big screen. It is an amazing film, like nothing else ever made before. My fear: war.



Elena Koreneva, film and theater actress

In 2019, I hope that the "theater affair" ends without any jail terms for director Kirill Serebrennikov, producer Alexei Malobrodsky, Seventh Studio general director Yury Itin and Culture Ministry official Sofia Apfelbaum. There is no point hoping they will be acquitted, given the tendencies of the court – even though no sane person watching the trial could believe in their guilt. Serebrennikov should be free and in charge of his theater, the Gogol Center.

I dream that Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov will be released from his 20-year sentence and that there will be an exchange of Ukrainian and Russian prisoners – one of Sentsov's demands during his 145-day hunger strike. My personal hopes are connected with rehearsals for a role in a new production at the Gogol Center. I'm also hoping for the success of an anti-utopian web series called "The Wrong Ones." Five pilot episodes were filmed last summer by director Vladimir Mirzoyev. I have a very interesting role. My professional fears are the flip side of my hopes.



Teresa Iarocci Mavica, director of the V-A-C Foundation

My great hope for next year is to see Russia gain a better understanding of the real power of culture as an instrument that can change minds over time. Culture should become the driving force in the effort to reshape Russia into a country no longer defined by its borders but rather its desire to engage in an open dialogue. A dialogue with its neighbors, between past and present, between its tradition and the huge potential for innovation.

What I fear is that without this change, the current cultural policy will continue to inhibit the contemporary art scene from being presented on the international stage in a way it deserves to be perceived. If this ostracism persists, Russia will, once again, preclude the international community from experiencing and celebrating the cultural wealth of this immense country and the art which it is creating right now.



Marina Loshak, director of The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts

Our hopes are to continue what we have already started. My fear is to not be able to realize my own hopes and plans. We count on moving only forward. We've already begun building a new museum within the old walls. And I don't mean just physically, but mentally as well.

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Maya Kucherskaya, writer
I really hope that in 2019 one brilliant poet and one brilliant writer will get published in Russia. And everyone will shout: “Finally, a new Pushkin, a new Gogol, has been born!” But at the same time, I am very afraid that this will not happen.



Kristina Gerasimova, aka Luna, singer-songwriter
I feel that the new year will be very special in terms of both my personal and creative

development. The way I feel about the recent events in my life – the release and success of my new album and a great tour to support it, a sea of love for and from me – inspire me to dream only about the most beautiful things. For me 2019 will also mean serious plans, new releases, big concerts, new projects and love – lots of happiness and love.



Marina Antsiperova, art critic
I am worried about the recent change in the leadership at the National Center for Contemporary Art (NCCA) since its regional branches are very important for the education of young artists. I’m also perplexed that the NCCA introduced a new award called “Tradition.” I can’t get my head around the fact that a contemporary art center could establish an award like that. It’s still unclear who will be in charge of the Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale next year, and the fate of the Moscow International Biennale of the Contemporary Art hasn’t been decided yet.



Alexei Kiselyov, theater critic
All we can hope for is the underground. Those who work in the theater world should leave their buildings, go to the forests, seize the wasteland and squat on abandoned land. Top theater professionals should remember their teachers and start reviving old acting techniques. In a year or two it will be too late.



Michael Idov, writer, film director
I’m obviously dizzy with excitement about my first feature film, “The Humorist,” which is finally

coming out in 2019. But I’m also happy to see the increasingly great company it is going to find itself in – it takes a kind of willful blindness not to see that Russian movies have been getting really good lately, and I am optimistic about this trend continuing into the new year.



Catherina Gordeeva, journalist
I was born and raised in Russia and still live here now, so I always hope for the best but prepare for the worst. I’m afraid that the ongoing and critically important trials of cultural and public figures will result in harsh sentences. I’m afraid that new trials will begin. I’m afraid – with good reason – that the new year will bring new trials of doctors and people working for charities.
What do I hope for? I hope that society will find more strength to fight the state’s abuse of power and become a unifying force. But that hope is very small and probably perfunctory – like wishing for happiness on New Year’s Eve, even though you know there’s almost no chance. **TMT**

Interviews by Michele A. Berdy and Andrei Muchnik.

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GARAGE MUSEUM

Garage Museum in 2019: Expect the Unexpected

By **Andrei Muchnik** | @amuchnik

A sneak peek at the year ahead

In 2019, the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow's leading contemporary art institution, will begin its second decade with some changes.

Anton Belov, the head of Garage, told The Moscow Times that "the exhibition strategy had been adjusted, taking into account our experience with visitors, the importance of themes we'll be exploring next year and our desire to ensure that as many people as possible see our projects. We have increased the duration of exhibitions, the number of works and scale. All exhibitions, of

course, will be accompanied by public programs and online content."

The main theme next year is the environment. Belov said that "the concept of sustainable development has always been part of Garage Museum's strategy. We define it as an integrated and balanced approach to all aspects of museum life. In 2017, the Garage Museum reduced paper consumption by 30 percent, introduced recycling, and solar panels have been installed on the roof of the museum. But this is only the beginning." **TMT**



GARAGE MUSEUM

Art Experiment: The Miracle of Light

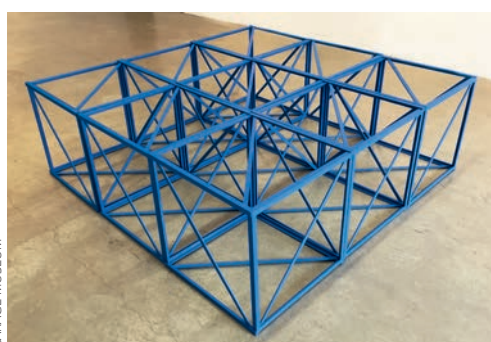
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Garage Museum will open the year with "The Miracle of Light" — the ninth edition of Art Experiment, its traditional annual interactive project. Art Experiment started as a New Year's holiday exhibition for kids, but this time it will cater to all ages. Using an immersive theater format, "The Miracle of Light" will tell the story of the invention of photography, which celebrates its 180th anniversary in 2019. Visitors will be able to try out various ways of creating images using light: walk inside a giant camera obscura, make their own pinhole camera or a cyanotype photograph and even explore freeze-light photography. And whatever visitors make at Art Experiment, they can take home!

Rasheed Araeen: A Retrospective

March 8 – May 26

In the spring, Garage Museum will host another major retrospective, this time of Rasheed Araeen, one of the most prominent artists living today. Born in Pakistan in 1935, Araeen first studied to be an engineer but then moved to the U.K. and became an artist in the 1960s. The exhibition at the Garage Museum will aim to show different aspects of Araeen's oeuvre, an artist whose career spans over six decades, from early experiments in painting and minimalist sculptures to his trademark political pieces that brought him fame in the 1970s and 1980s. The retrospective will also feature some of his new geometric paintings and wall structures, previously shown at Documenta and the Venice Biennale, and an installation in the museum's atrium: a sculpture that he first conceived in the late 1960s.



GARAGE MUSEUM

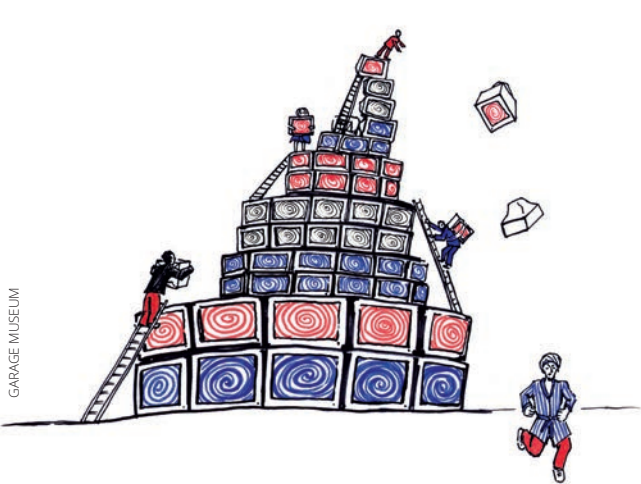


GARAGE MUSEUM

Pavel Pepperstein: The Human as a Frame for the Landscape

Feb. 21 – June 2

Garage will present a large scale solo exhibition by one of the most prolific contemporary painters in Russia: Pavel Pepperstein. The son of one of the leading Moscow conceptualists, Viktor Pivovarov, Pepperstein has been a part of the art scene since his childhood. His exhibition at the Garage Museum will feature about 80 works from different periods in the artist's career, both from public and private collections. The retrospective will cover all of Pepperstein's favorite themes: "supremas" — multi-colored geometric forms borrowed from various suprematist painters, like Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky; utopian and dystopian visions of the future; invented countries; and parallel universes.



Bureau des Transmissions

March 8 – May 15

Bureau des Transmissions is a result of collaboration between Garage Museum's curators and its educational team. The project is devoted to the themes of the production and circulation of knowledge in a museum setting, and it is meant to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the launch of educational programs at Garage. Bureau des Transmissions might be best described as a discussion space and forum with artistic interventions. The topics of discussion include, but are not limited to, artistic research, art therapy, community engagement and institutional critique.

Allora & Calzadilla

May 26 – Dec. 1

The artistic duo of Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla from Puerto Rico will create an installation on Garage Square in front of the museum. Allora and Calzadilla are known for working in such diverse media as sculpture, photography, performance art, sound and video. Their works usually have some sort of social, political or cultural subtext and come out of research ranging from sonic studies to warfare and biophysics. Their upcoming Garage Square commission will align with the theme of the multi-artist exhibition "The Coming World: Ecology as the New Politics 2030–2100," which will open in June 2019.



The Coming World:
Ecology as the New Politics 2030–2100

June 28 – Dec. 1

Garage Museum will organize the first and largest exhibition in Russia devoted to the issues of environmental protection. The title is inspired by the theory that some time in the future all the deposits of oil and water on Earth will be used up and humanity will have to turn to other planets for resources. "The Coming World" will consist of both existing works and new commissions from over 50 artists and visionaries from around the world. The first part is called "Purple": an immersive, six-channel video installation by John Akomfrah that will open on June 15. Huang Yong Ping will also present a new installation produced especially for the atrium of the Garage Museum. Garage Live will present a series of events as part of "The Coming World."

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‘The Theater’ in 2019

By **Andrei Muchnik** | @amuchnik

A conversation with Vladimir Urin, general director of the Bolshoi Theater

In Russia, the Bolshoi Theater is “the theater” — the most prestigious venue for opera and ballet in the country. The Moscow Times talked to Vladimir Urin, the Bolshoi’s general director, about the theater’s plans for the coming year.

Which blockbuster premieres can we expect in 2019?

I don’t quite understand the word “blockbuster.” You know, in our business the result is not apparent until the very last moment.

And even then I can only talk about our plans until the end of this season, because we announce premieres season by season.

On Dec. 12, we have “Il Viaggio a Reims,” produced by the wonderful Italian director Damiano Michieletto, possibly one of the best opera directors alive today. The next premiere that might interest audiences is the ballet “The Winter’s Tale” by British choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, scheduled for April. We are very happy that he’ll work with the Bolshoi. Wheeldon and Alexei Ratmansky are among the most interesting choreographers in the world. Timofei Kuliabin will produce a new version of Antonin Dvorak’s “Rusalka” in March and Yevgeny Arye will finish the season with his production of Pyotr Tchaikovsky’s “Eugene Onegin” in May.

Besides that, our opera company will be on tour in Paris in March, and the ballet company will go to Australia in May and June, and to London in July and August.

What about the Bolshoi’s new Chamber Stage?

Last September we merged with the Pokrovsky Chamber Theater, which is now officially called

the Boris Pokrovsky Chamber Stage of the Bolshoi Theater.

It was an excellent theater, with its own great history. It found itself in a difficult situation, with an internal conflict, and the Bolshoi was invited to take over. The Chamber Theater still has some autonomy: They have their own orchestra, their own soloists, their own company.

The first premiere on this stage is the new opera by Alexander Tchaikovsky based on Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s novel “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich” in December. Then we have two more premieres there: One-act operas by the American composer Gian Carlo Menotti — “The Telephone” and “The Medium” in March — and Offenbach’s “La Perichole,” produced by director Philipp Gregorian in June.

How do you strike a balance between 200-year-old traditions and contemporary innovations?

Theater cannot afford not to be contemporary. On one hand, we preserve the repertoire of the theater, including productions in opera and ballet that have played a role in its history and are still popular with audiences. We have a number of such productions: “Boris Godunov” has been going on for about 60 years, and “The Tsar’s Bride” is also about 50 years old.

On the other hand, a theater would become a museum if that’s all it did. The most important thing in today’s theater life is, of course, to speak to the audience in a contemporary language.

Today, opera theater is taking more risks, looking for completely unique ways to convey images and meaning. There are innovations in set design, in costumes. Many prominent drama theater and



Vladimir Urin has been general director of the Bolshoi Theater since 2013.

even film directors are getting involved in opera productions today because that’s where creativity is.

What do you know about the Bolshoi’s audience?

We are constantly analyzing information about our audience and just recently commissioned a study by McKinsey & Company. In Europe and the U.S., opera or ballet goes are often over 60. But if you come to a performance at the Bolshoi or any Russian opera house, you’ll see a very mixed audience of elderly, middle-aged and young people. Russia’s opera houses are unique.

Which city is Russia’s theater capital right

now: Moscow or St. Petersburg?

I think that any city with a talented theater production team can become the “theater capital,” regardless of whether it’s Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg or Perm.

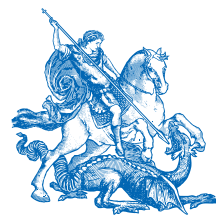
The Bolshoi often makes headlines, sometimes because of scandals like the delay of the “Nureyev” ballet premiere. How do you deal with this?

We try to be open to the media. But we have a little trick: We are open to a certain degree, but we don’t let the media into the internal world of the theater, into the highly wrought creative backroom.

As for “Nureyev” — premieres get postponed all the time at different theaters. What mattered in that particular case was the name of Kirill Serebrennikov [director of the ballet]. Because of his legal troubles at the time [Editor’s note: Serebrennikov is under house arrest for allegedly embezzling government funds] the media decided that “Nureyev” would be canceled. We held a press conference, but some of the media just didn’t hear what we were trying to say and thought we were just defending ourselves.

Before the premiere, when Serebrennikov was under house arrest, he and I discussed the possibility of the ballet being performed without him. I had actually asked the prosecutors to let him attend the rehearsals, but they said no. So in the end, “Nureyev” premiered, but media continued to talk about it, saying that it would only be shown once and then canceled.

But that was never our intention. “Nureyev” is still part of our playbill and has even been nominated for a “Golden Mask” award. **TMT**



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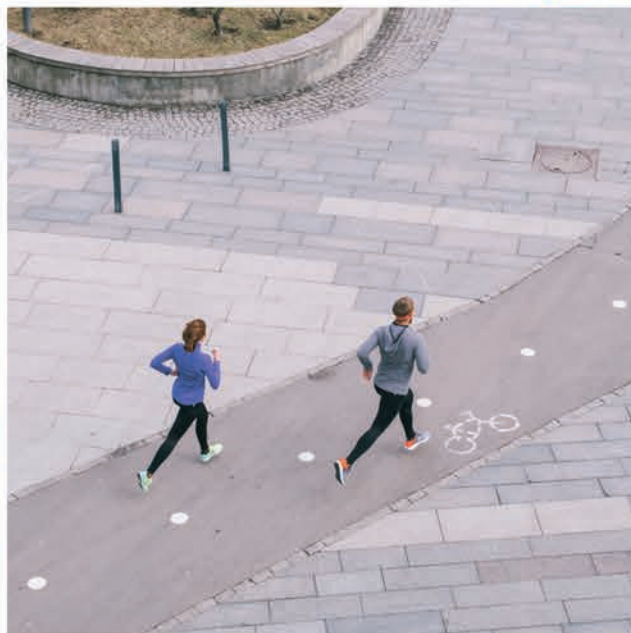
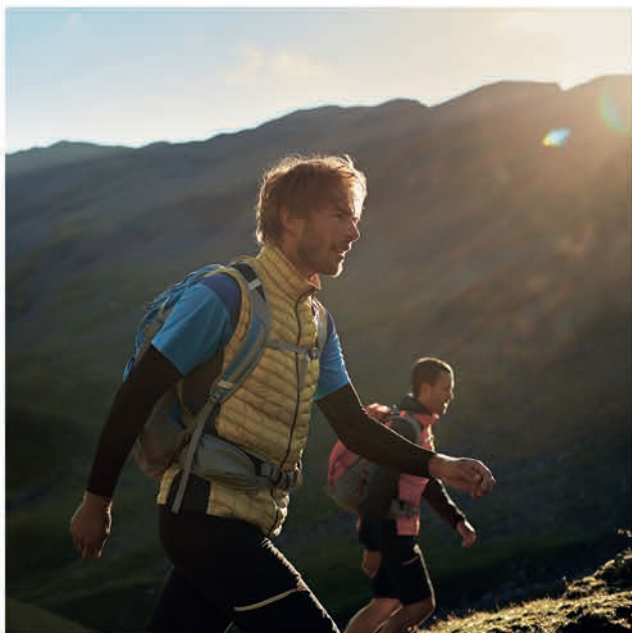
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