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Russia in 2015: Eternal Winter In a Solitary Cell (Op-Ed)

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The year started with the news that Oleg Navalny was being sent to a penal colony for 3.5 years. On Dec. 30, thousands of people took part in a rally on Manege Square to protest the sentence.

In November, performance artist Pyotr Pavlensky staged the most significant artistic stunt of the year by setting fire to the doors of the FSB headquarters. Pavlensky will meet 2016 in Butyrka prison.

Marat Guelman lost his gallery in 2015 after a charity auction to support the Bolotnaya Square political prisoners. The year is coming to an end but people still get arrested in connection with a protest that happened three years ago. Anarchist Dmitry Buchenkov was detained on Dec. 3 even though his lawyers claimed he had not been at Bolotnaya Square on May 6, 2012.

Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov got a 20-year sentence in October along with the antifascist Alexander Kolchenko, who got 10. Both were accused of plotting terrorist acts in Crimea.

Meanwhile, Ildar Dadin has been sent to a prison camp for 3 years because of his picketing. After his sentence we realized that the new article 212.1 of the Criminal Code is serious. It penalizes "multiple disruptions of the public order or the staging of a gathering, a meeting, a demonstration, a march or picket." Before Dadin was imprisoned we were all hoping that it was not serious, that they did not mean it. Well, their intentions are clear. You can really receive up to five years in prison for picketing three times.

There were some humane decisions in 2015. Yevgenia Vasilyeva, a former Defense Ministry property manager, was sentenced to five years for fraud but was released on parole after less than two months and went home happy.

Officials were destroying "sanctioned food" in 2015 because they had no idea what to do when the oil price came crashing down. Russians forgot how to believe in stability and started to tighten their belts as $400 became a decent wage again, just as it was in the early 2000s. The public transport system was shut down in a number of Russian cities because of the debts owed by municipal authorities to fuel providers.

The state kept on attacking social organizations in 2015. A patriotic "stop-list" was published of all 'undesirable' NGOs. The legislation provides for up to 6 years in prison for participation in the work of such an organization.

At the end of February, we learned that you can not only be imprisoned but also shot dead in the center of Moscow because of your political activity. Many people still cannot believe that Boris Nemtsov is dead. Short memories remain a big problem in Russia in 2015.

But we did receive our New Year present and also a reminder of the criminal character of the Russian system. The present was the "Chaika" movie by Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation. Oleg Navanly remains in prison but continues to support his brother's investigations even from behind bars.

Ecclesiastes said: "Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness ... The vanity of vanities."

With a nice New Year dinner costing around 5790 rubles ($82), it's better to save the money and just go to sleep. And dream of how Pyotr Pavlensky, Oleg Navalny and the Bolotnaya Square prisoners will celebrate New Year's in their prisons, pouring Russian sparkling water into plastic cups.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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