

Russia's People of the Year 2019

The Moscow Times asked some of Russia's leading commentators to name their person of the year in society, politics, business and sport.

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Daniil Medvedev, Dmitry Kozak, Lyubov Sobol [Wikicommons](#), [Kremlin.ru](#) / MT

Citizen of the Year – Danila Beglets

By Kirill Martynov

Danila Beglets is a political prisoner in the so-called Moscow protest cases.

However, unlike most politicians, Beglets is not fighting for power. He is not interested in elections and he is neither an activist nor famous. He is an ordinary person who was walking along a Moscow street on July 27 when he saw police beating up protesters. And weren't we all taught to stop fights by stepping in and separating the two parties? Beglets tried to stop the violence and was sentenced to two years in a penal colony for "grabbing a public officer by the

wrist and causing him severe pain.”

He was convicted of committing an immoral act and suffered a legal punishment in accordance with Russian law. The story of Beglets reflects that of Russia as a whole, where citizens are largely apolitical and only want to lead normal lives.

The authoritarian government, however, is rapidly politicizing them. Honest people who cannot watch indifferently as the authorities steal and use violence against their compatriots will be declared enemies of the regime. They will receive the severest punishments for simply trying to challenge the actions of the “representatives of the authorities” — the repressive police apparatus whose officers suffer when citizens so much as touch them.

The punishment will be severe even if, like Beglets, those citizens have no political aims. Beglets’ family is now deprived of its only breadwinner. He could not obtain qualified court counsel and he was pressured to agree to special court proceedings. Now his friends and family know with certainty that the Russian authorities can come for anyone. Beglets is a symbol of solidarity for those who oppose the Moscow protest cases, who have followed their conscience and stand in defense of the accused.

Kirill Martynov is the political editor at Russia’s oldest independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta.

Politician of the year – Dmitry Kozak

By Tatyana Stanovaya

Like many individuals in Russia’s political life, it is hard to call Dmitry Kozak a politician, as our country only has one real one in the form of Vladimir Putin. Despite that, Kozak has had a formidable year. He influenced the situation in Moldova during the spring political crisis, played an important role in the historic prisoner exchange with Ukraine, and oversaw the launch of the Power of Siberia pipeline on behalf of the government. Perpetually underappreciated, he is increasingly found at the center of important government decision making. Every political analyst should keep an eye on him going into 2020.

Tatyana Stanovaya is the founder of the political analysis project R.Politik and a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

Businessperson of the year – Vladislav Tetyukhin

By Nabi Abdullayev

My businessman of the year is Vladislav Tetyukhin, the former shareholder and director of VSMPO-Avisma, Russia’s titanium producer.

Launching successful start-ups, aligning mergers and acquisitions, outcompeting powerful peers and winning massive tenders are definitely very exciting parts of any business’ life cycle, but the Tetyukhin story highlights the importance of the endgame, something that is often overlooked in discussions about relatively young Russian capitalism.

In 2006, the Soviet-era engineer and talented businessman, Tetyukhin was forced to sell all his shares in VSMPO-Avisma — a company he had built into the largest titanium producer in the world and a strategic partner of Boeing and Airbus — after a nasty corporate war.

Tetyukhin spent the proceeds — Forbes reported that he was worth \$650 million in 2012 — building a world-class orthopedic clinic in Nizhny Tagil, where thousands of people have been treated since it opened in 2014. Tetyukhin lived with his wife in a two-bedroom apartment in the small town of Verkhnyaya Salda some 30 kilometers from the hospital and used an old Toyota Camry to commute between home and the hospital that he supported until his last days.

He died in April 2019 at the age of 86.

Nabi Abdullaev is an Associate Director at Control Risks and the former editor-in-chief of The Moscow Times.

Person of the Year in Society – Lyubov Sobol

By Artemy Troitsky

I had difficulty choosing my person of the year in the sphere of society, because 2019 turned out to be exceptionally barren in terms of cultural production: There were no sensational novels, scandalous films or exceptional albums...

In fact, all of the major events of the past year have been in the spheres of politics and civil society: citizens' actions and the government's reactions — protests and repressions.

For me, the participants of the “Moscow case” are the real people of 2019 — the candidates, deputies, activists, detained protesters, human rights defenders and lawyers. If I had to choose someone from this list, I would choose Lyubov Sobol!

Sobol — who is a lawyer with the Anti-Corruption Foundation, an opposition candidate to the Moscow Duma and the host of a popular video blog — is one of the real symbols of this new generation of Russians. They are fearless, energetic and free (including from gender divisions).

She's done an incredible job over the past year, and, moreover, I hope that one day she will become Russia's president. After all, everyone knows that Russian women are much stronger than Russian men.

Artemy Troitsky is a journalist and cultural critic in Tallinn, Estonia.

Athlete of the Year – Daniil Medvedev

By Mariya Komandnaya

Tennis player Daniil Medvedev is, for me, the undisputed hero of the year. And not because it has been years since our guys climbed as high as he did in the ATP ratings, but because Medvedev did this summer what only one tennis player — Marat Safin — had done before. He made the whole country fall in love with him.

Admit it, many of you stayed up to root for Medvedev during the amazing U.S. Open final that he lost in the fifth set to Rafael Nadal. Medvedev has unique physical traits with his 198-centimeter frame and rapid-fire play at both the back line and net. I am certain that a bright future awaits him and that he will win the Grand Slam Tournament in the next couple of years. And we will be cheering for his victory, just as we cheered as children for Safin and Zhenya Kafelnikov.

Mariya Komandnaya is a prominent Russian sports journalist.

Artist of the Year – Irina Korina

By Marat Gelman

My Russian artist of the year is Irina Korina. In fact, I would say she is my artist of the past several years.

Whenever I visit Russia and go to exhibitions that are on display, I see Irina's artwork everywhere. At the Museum of Moscow, at the Garage Museum during the triennial, at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art as one of the winners of the Kandinsky Prize, in Yekaterinburg.

This all really kicked off two and a half years ago at the Venice Biennale. Out of the endless formalistic and near-decorative works at the Venetian Arsenal, Irina Korina's art stood out as being sharp, daring and on the verge of shtick.

But I'm especially thankful to Irina for having saved the exhibition of Komar and Melamid in Moscow. The exhibition was destined for failure, as the majority of their work is in American museums that didn't agree to send them to the Moscow exhibition. But there are no new works by the duo that could have been used, as both of the Sots Art artists have been working independently for years.

But Irina Korina, who the museum invited to design the exhibition, saved it. She essentially became the third artist of the exhibition. Only Korina, only hardcore.

Marat Gelman is an art collector and critic based in Montenegro.

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