Deep Russia:

SANCTIONS FOR THE POOR

What Russians discussed on "VKontakte" and on "Telegram" from 28 September to 4 October

Period	28 September - 4 October 2026
Platforms	VKontakte, Telegram (regional communities)





Key Findings

On 22 September 2026, the Council of the European Union decided not to extend the personal sanctions against Russian billionaires Alisher Usmanov and Mikhail Fridman.

The lifting of sanctions from the Russian billionaires went practically unnoticed and did not prompt broad public discussion. Isolated reports appeared in Krasnodar Krai, in Leningrad, Vologda, Lipetsk, Samara, Ulyanovsk, Sverdlovsk and Novosibirsk Oblasts, and in the Temporarily Occupied certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The news was of secondary importance, was limited to a brief summary of the information and drew no comments. Indirect mentions unconnected to this event occurred in Bashkortostan and Khabarovsk Krai.

Audience reaction was sporadic and predominantly skeptical. People voiced distrust of the reasons for lifting the sanctions on Usmanov, suggesting that he might have paid for such a decision. They were outraged at the unequal application of sanctions, since they were lifted for billionaires while students were denied study visas because of sanctions.

The death of an anti-plague institute employee caused alarm because of contradictory reports about its causes. People discussed why one cause was named at first and then another, and whom to believe at all in such a situation. They tried to understand whether an accident could have occurred, how staff should have acted in such a case and why there might be so many contact persons. The news was often perceived as yet another danger on top of the war, the pandemic and other crises. Hence the abundance of black humor, references to the "Middle Ages" and a general feeling that bad events are piling up on one another. News of possible quarantine measures revived the old dispute over masks and restrictions. Some called for tighter safety measures, while others were skeptical of them.

Overall, what struck people most was the absence of a clear explanation of what had happened. It was the differing versions in the publications that became the main source of anxiety and distrust.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks remained one of the most widespread topics and were covered in more than 70 regions. In the comments, habituation to the constant alert signals is increasingly noticeable. However, the public continues to ask where to take shelter, why notifications sometimes arrive late and how far official data correspond to what they see for themselves.

1. SANCTIONS FOR THE POOR

The lifting of European Union sanctions on Fridman and Usmanov

On 22 September 2026, the Council of the European Union decided not to extend the personal sanctions against Russian billionaires Alisher Usmanov and Mikhail Fridman.

The decision was the result of a difficult compromise among European Union countries. France pushed for Usmanov's removal, while Slovakia and Luxembourg supported lifting the restrictions on Fridman. The French position was linked to negotiations on the release of French citizens in Azerbaijan, and Luxembourg's — to Fridman's arbitration claim of approximately $16 billion. Latvia opposed the decision but ultimately abstained, which allowed it to be adopted.

Dmitry Peskov, spokesman for the President of the Russian Federation, commented on the European states' proposals to remove Usmanov and Fridman from the list, calling the sanctions illegal and saying that they should be lifted from other Russian businessmen as well.

RBC, citing Bloomberg, reported that at least two businessmen will study this experience in order to get sanctions lifted for themselves.

Reactions in the regions

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Audience reaction was sporadic and predominantly skeptical. People voiced distrust of the reasons for lifting the sanctions on Usmanov, suggesting that he might have paid for such a decision. In places, people were outraged at the unequal application of sanctions, since they were lifted for billionaires while students were denied study visas because of sanctions.

Yekaterinburg

"And what were the sanctions lifted from usmanov for? Paid off the enemy or something, let's put it that way" — September 26 at 5:57

2. The week in Russian regional "VKontakte" and "Telegram"

Top discussions on Telegram and VKontakte

1. *The death of an anti-plague institute employee and the contradictory versions*

The death of an anti-plague institute employee caused alarm because of contradictory reports about its causes. At first a version about a laboratory accident circulated; later there was talk of pneumonia. As of 4 October, Rospotrebnadzor was reporting pneumonia of unidentified origin, so there are no grounds to speak of a confirmed outbreak.

People discussed why one cause was named at first and then another, and whom to believe at all in such a situation. They tried to understand whether an accident could have occurred, how staff should have acted in such a case and why there might be so many contact persons.

The news was often perceived as yet another danger on top of the war, the pandemic and other crises. Hence the abundance of black humor, references to the "Middle Ages" and a general feeling that bad events are piling up on one another.

Reports of possible quarantine measures revived the old dispute over masks and restrictions. Some called for tighter safety measures, while others were skeptical of them.

Irkutsk Oblast

"The authorities urged people not to panic, not to stock up 🤣👍Irkutsk airport is operating as normal ... everything is going to plan .... The head of the institute must be held criminally liable. No record-keeping, no surveillance cameras ... On September 25 she broke a test tube - on the 29th she was hospitalized !!!! Anyone even remotely close to medicine knows: something happened - report it - self-isolate !!!!" — October 3 at 14:21, ♡22

"Lyubov, apparently there are too many of us in Russia, or we have been sold off to clear the Russian lands for other nations, it is genocide, nothing less." — October 3 at 14:55, ♡8

Irkutsk Oblast

"Half the country knows about the plague in Shelekhov, while the local kept media won't call things by their names 🤡" — October 3 at 8:12, ♡21

Buryatia

"First plague was confirmed and now it's pneumonia, somehow very strange" — October 4 at 18:09, ♡16

2. Indexation of utility tariffs from 1 October

The increase in utility tariffs from 1 October provoked a predominantly negative reaction. It was seen as an unpopular decision that had been put off until the voting was over, and in the comments people sarcastically "thanked" "United Russia". They compared the new bills with their wages and pensions and wrote that incomes simply cannot keep up with utility costs. Pensioners, winter bills and the ever greater burden on the family budget were mentioned especially often.

Separately, people asked what exactly they are having to pay more for. They mentioned old pipes, problems with water and the poor quality of services, and doubted that anything would really improve after the indexation. Less often, the growth in payments was linked to military spending and the overall burden of the war on the budget.

Omsk
"Once again the damned NATO is raising tariffs for our domestic housing and communal services" — October 1 at 9:55, ♡133

Kemerovo Oblast
"They have gone completely nuts over there !!! Why don't they go to hell with their tariff !!!" — September 30 at 5:57, ♡73

"Chistye, most likely we will be scraping by on our last crumbs, while they are all living in clover over there, that's how it is, everyone puts up with it, nobody does anything 🥱" — September 30 at 6:59, ♡40

Lipetsk
"How are pensioners supposed to survive? How do we go on living at all?" — October 2 at 12:44, ♡6

3. Men's poverty as a cause of divorce

A publication about men's poverty as one of the causes of divorce became a widely discussed topic, raising questions about money, relationships and expectations of a partner. People spoke about inflated material demands placed on men and the expectation that it is they who must provide an expensive standard of living. Others stressed that relationships should be built on joint effort, where both partners can work, earn and solve financial problems together. The view was also voiced that love and normal relationships should not depend on income level alone. At the same time, many disagreed with the very reduction of the topic to "poverty". Commenters wrote that the cause of divorce may be not a lack of money but an unwillingness to work, addictions, infidelity or general problems in the relationship.

4. Mortgages and housing affordability

People discussed mortgage affordability rankings, reports about family benefits and lending terms, and lists of changes from 1 October. The new terms of the family mortgage were discussed above all in terms of people's own ability to buy housing. Many compared

the required income and down payment with their own wages and wrote that even a subsidized mortgage remains out of reach for them or means debt for many years. People discussed whom exactly the family mortgage should help, what the childless and families with one child or an already older child are supposed to do, and criticized the linking of benefits to the number of children. The view was also voiced that it is large families who should receive more support.

Tatarstan

"So it turns out housing is unaffordable. What birth rate can we even talk about. Especially for young families, and not only them" — October 1 at 20:41, ♡30

Some of the reactions were again connected with the elections. People said that after the voting the promises had turned into new expenses and tougher terms, and reproached "United Russia".

5. Decree on increasing the authorized strength of the Russian troops

Many perceived the increase in the size of the army as a possible hint at a new call-up or mobilization, expressing distrust of the explanations about "bringing units up to strength" and concern about military spending against the backdrop of rising tariffs and low incomes. People demanded that not only ordinary citizens take part in the war, but also the children of deputies and members of the elite.

People discussed the confusion surrounding the figure itself, trying to understand how many in the new authorized strength are actual military personnel and how many are civilian and support staff.

There were also arguments in support of enlarging the army. People stressed that expanding the authorized strength does not necessarily mean a new mobilization, and supported it as a decision necessary for strengthening defense and deterring threats, although this position was not dominant.

6. Reduction of oncology funding in the draft budget

The possible reduction in funding for cancer care provoked above all fear for patients who cannot wait for treatment, and such changes were perceived as a threat to those who are already in a vulnerable position.

Many commenters compared spending on medicine with other budget priorities. They mentioned the war, internet blocking and other state expenditures and asked why money is found for those while there is constantly less for medicine.

Separately, grievances were addressed to officials and "United Russia". People proposed cutting not medical programs but officials' salaries, and also spoke about inequality, where, in users' view, the necessary treatment would always be found for the representatives of the authorities themselves. They recalled the earlier "optimization" of medicine and generally doubted how effectively the funds are being spent.

7. Bill on banning ideologies opposed to traditional values

The very concept of "traditional values" raised the most questions. The public did not understand what specifically would fall under it and feared that, because of the vague wording, almost anything could be banned. People quipped in the comments that by this logic one could gradually arrive at a "ban on everything". Commenters mentioned corruption, property abroad, divorces and the private lives of officials and asked how far they themselves live up to the values they propose to protect by law.

8. Fuel crisis

The situation with petrol differs depending on the region and even on the specific filling station. In Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, the population was urged to use public transport more often and to follow the "even–odd" system, while in occupied Sevastopol QR codes, a 20-liter limit and set sales hours were in effect.

In the comments, people talked most about queues, restrictions and unequal access to fuel. Some suspected an artificial restriction of sales or privileges for officials, while others explained the disruptions by the ordinary operation of filling stations and the need to take delivery of a new batch of fuel. There were also users who saw no shortage at all in their city. Separately, people discussed whether petrol of lower environmental classes would become cheaper and whether the lower declared quality would affect cars.

Kaluga Oblast

"Everyone has filled up with 92-octane, now the queue is at the car repair shop😂😂😂" — October 2 at 21:15, ♡12

9. Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks, missile threats and sirens

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks remained one of the most widespread topics and were covered in more than 70 regions. In the comments, habituation to the constant alert signals is increasingly noticeable. However, the public continues to ask where to take shelter, why notifications sometimes arrive late and how far official data correspond to what they see for themselves.

After reports of damage and people wounded, there are demands for clear assistance to those affected and complaints about the protracted restoration of buildings.

There are also expressions of thanks to air defense, accusations against Ukraine and calls to end the war.

Rostov

"Pay your taxes, pay your utility bills, and after that go fuck yourselves any way you like, the state owes you nothing." — September 29 at 12:29, ♡181

Irony in Volgograd

"Stop making things up, no missiles are exploding tonight, it is the sound of applause from joyful Volgograd residents thanking the united russia party and Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin personally ✊" — October 2 at 2:05, ♡22

Belgorod

"How much blood has been spilled, how much human grief, how many of our boys and civilians have died, children guilty of nothing. All because of someone's greed for profit. so much grief on Kursk soil" — October 4 at 7:15, ♡14

Kursk

"A dictator came to power in an oil-rich country, plundered the treasury, handed out its riches to his friends and left the people in poverty. He abolished elections, shut down independent media, jailed dissenters and poisoned his main rival.
When his approval rating fell, he attacked a neighboring country, promising to win in three days. The war lasted six years, there were two mobilizations, and millions of young people left the country.
In the end the dictator lost the war and was shot.
The country was called Paraguay." — October 4 at 18:07, ♡43

Perm Krai

"Oh, how sick I am of all this!" — October 2 at 5:19, ♡53

Methodology

What this project is. Systematic monitoring of sentiment in Russian regions — with a focus on critical and negative posts as an indicator of what irritates, frightens or outrages people. The conclusions rest on two parallel sources from monitoring regional VKontakte groups and Telegram.

VKontakte and Telegram. Automated data collection in regional Russian communities on VKontakte (536 groups) and Telegram (428 channels) — regional news channels, local public groups, oblast media, local "chat bots" with audiences ranging from several thousand to hundreds of thousands of subscribers. Coverage — all Russian regions and the occupied territories of Ukraine. Observations by regional analysts were additionally used.

Quotes in the report text are given verbatim.