

Unconstitutional Revenge Commission - a Stepping Stone Towards One-Party Dictatorship

As Georgia moves into the autumn of 2025, a new phase of political repression is taking shape. Arrests, prosecutions, and public trials of those accused of organizing the so-called “peaceful revolution” of October 4 are imminent. Court proceedings against non-governmental organizations are also underway, with the clear prospect of closures and criminal charges against their leaders. Yet these measures, severe as they are, may soon be overshadowed by what now appears to be the government’s next objective: the formal prohibition of opposition political parties. Initially [announced](#) by Irakli Kobakhidze in November 2024 and reiterated by other Georgian Dream (GD) officials, this initiative represents a critical escalation in the erosion of political pluralism, signaling a deliberate move toward a one-party political order. This could even lead to Georgia’s expulsion from

the Council of Europe. As the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) [noted](#) in its resolution 2624, “banning of the democratic opposition would effectively establish a one-party dictatorship in Georgia, which would be incompatible with Council of Europe membership.”

To construct a semblance of legal justification for the establishment of this one-man, one-party dictatorship strategy, the ruling party [created](#) a parliamentary commission to investigate and study “the Activities of the Regime in Power in 2003–2012, its Political Officials, and Current and Former Officeholders, and Affiliated Political Parties from 2003 to the Present” (hereinafter – the Tsulukiani Commission).

This commission was initially tasked with reviewing alleged abuses committed by the United Na-



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tional Movement (UNM) between 2003 and 2012. In practice, however, its scope was quickly [widened](#) to include developments up to 2024 and to scrutinize what it labelled the activities of the “destructive opposition.” All major opposition factions (except for Giorgi Gakharia - *For Georgia* party) refused to participate in this politically motivated theatrics, citing the illegitimacy of the commission and Parliament, which were convened after the flawed Parliamentary elections of October 2024. The proceedings of the investigative commission, nonetheless, continued for six months, resulting in a [450-page report](#) now positioned as the principal basis for banning political parties and criminalizing dissent.

The commission also achieved another corollary goal – current and former political leaders who refused to participate in the hearings were [sentenced](#) and are serving time in jail until early 2026. Arrested leaders include Nika Melia and Nika Gvaramia, leaders of the *Akhali* party, part of the *Coalition for Change*; Zurab Japaridze, the leader of the *Girchi-More Freedom* party, also a member of the *Coalition for Change*; Giorgi Vashadze, leader of the *Strategy the Builder* political party; Givi Targamadze, former chairman of the defense and security committee; Irakli Okruashvili, former defense minister. Two other leaders, Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, the leaders of *Lelo – Strong Georgia*, were sentenced but have been [pardoned](#) by the Georgian Dream in exchange for their participation in local elections.

Parliamentary investigative commissions, when constituted in accordance with democratic norms, are legitimate oversight instruments. They are designed to illuminate matters that the executive might otherwise conceal and to strengthen institutional accountability. Their credibility depends on balance, inclusion, and adherence to factual inquiry rather than political convenience. The Tsulukiani Commission met none of these criteria. It was conceived as an instrument of political retali-

ation, aimed at delegitimizing the post-Rose Revolution era and preparing the legal foundation for the suppression of the government’s opponents. The body was partisan in composition, unconstitutional in procedure, and uninterested in the substantive verification of evidence.

The commission’s creation followed soon after Bidzina Ivanishvili’s April 2024 public [declaration of intent](#) to bring the “collective UNM” to justice. The commission’s work, rather than focusing on specific cases, expanded into an attempt to reinterpret two decades of Georgia’s political history as a continuous criminal conspiracy. The breadth of its mandate was excessive: in six months, it purported to review more than sixty thematic areas and over two hundred incidents, spanning from the early 2000s to the present. The exercise could not possibly meet even the most minimal standards of investigative thoroughness.

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The result was a [political document](#) presented as a report of parliamentary oversight. In substance, it functions as a manifesto for the ruling party’s campaign to consolidate power and eliminate remaining pockets of opposition. It is a sort of “Mein Kampf” for Bidzina Ivanishvili. The Tsulukiani Commission never investigated wrongdoing; it might have revisited the case, in which some, or many, former UNM leaders did wrong, but those cases had either already been investigated or were long forgotten. What the Tsulukiani Commission

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J'accuse — de tout!

Unlike Émile Zola, who accused the French government of conspiracy over the Dreyfus Affair in 4,500 words, Tsulukiani produced a 450-page indictment that accused the United National Movement of virtually every conceivable political, criminal, and moral offense. The report is sweeping in scope, denouncing the UNM, its years in power from 2004 to 2012, and its allies in civil society, media, and opposition parties since 2012. It presents the former ruling party as the architect of a violent and corrupt system, responsible for state-sponsored torture, political repression, and the monopolization of information and business. It claims that under UNM governance, systemic torture and inhumane treatment became state policy as part of the “zero tolerance” campaign, implicating senior officials, including President Mikheil Saakashvili. The report further alleges that the UNM operated a vast surveillance network, collecting compromising material on public figures to intimidate and control dissent, and that its leadership engaged in widespread racketeering, coercing business owners, and transferring assets for personal enrichment.

Particular attention is devoted to the media sector, which the commission depicts as having been transformed into a propaganda instrument fully subordinate to the executive. In this narrative, the once diverse and competitive Georgian media landscape is recast as a state-controlled system of manipulation, used to silence criticism and amplify official narratives. The report also revisits the 2008 war, contending that the UNM government provoked the conflict with Russia through reckless decisions and politically motivated military operations, resulting in defeat and territorial loss. The portrayal is designed to shift responsibility for the war's outcome from Moscow to Tbilisi and to asso-

ciate the former government with national humiliation and failure.

Beyond the UNM's period in power, the commission extended its accusations into the following decade, asserting that the UNM-led opposition, its successor parties, and civil society organizations have continued to act as instruments of subversion. It portrayed these groups as part of a coordinated effort, allegedly supported by foreign actors, to destabilize the country and obstruct its progress. NGOs and universities received particular attention, accused of serving as operational centers for Western-funded conspiracies, later also augmented by propaganda outlets, like *Imedi* and *POSTV*. Higher Education Institutions such as the University of Georgia (UG), Ilia State University, International Black Sea University, Free University of Tbilisi/Agricultural University of Georgia, and Caucasus University were described in the reports as shelters for former officials and sites of ideological indoctrination.

The resulting document thus functions less as an investigation than as a political manifesto: a comprehensive attempt to criminalize the legacy of Georgia's democratic period and to legitimize the ruling party's campaign against opposition, independent institutions, and the memory of political pluralism itself.

The report culminates in the claim that the United National Movement and its affiliated structures constitute an ongoing threat to Georgia's sovereignty and security and are an impediment to the normal development of the country. On this basis, Georgian Dream proposes that the Constitutional Court consider banning the party and its related organizations from participating in politics altogether. The resulting document thus functions less as an investigation than as a political mani-

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For Hitler, "*Mein Kampf*" was used to demonize Jews and blame them for all wrongdoings. For Ivanishvili, that force, which is responsible for all historic and current problems in Georgia, is a collective United National Movement, or "*natsebi*". The similarity is quite telling.

An Unconstitutional Commission

Responding substantively to every accusation contained in the Tsulukiani Commission report would be impossible, given both its sheer volume and its lack of methodological rigor. It is also not the task of this journal to respond to such documents, which should be left to the political parties "implicated" in the report. What we can and must address, however, are the fundamental procedural violations and constitutional breaches that defined the commission's formation and work. These structural flaws alone render its findings politically and legally void.

Article 42 of the Georgian Constitution stipulates that "the representation of opposition factions in temporary commissions shall not be less than half of the total number of commission members." The purpose of this provision is clear: to guarantee political balance, preserve independence, and prevent investigative bodies from becoming partisan instruments. The Tsulukiani Commission ignored this requirement entirely. Georgian Dream [appointed](#) eight of its ten members, including three drawn from nominally opposition factions—*People's Power* and the *European Socialists*—whose representatives were elected from the ruling party's list and have consistently voted with the ma-

jority. The remaining two seats, allocated to Giorgi Gakharia's For Georgia party, were left vacant due to that party's boycott. As a result, the commission operated without a single genuine opposition member, making any claim to pluralism or impartiality unsustainable.

Equally telling was the appointment of Thea Tsulukiani as chairperson. By established parliamentary practice, investigative commissions are typically chaired by opposition members to signal independence and credibility. In this case, leadership was given to one of the most partisan figures in Georgian politics, a long-time loyalist of Bidzina Ivanishvili known for confrontational rhetoric and overt hostility toward opposition parties, independent media, and civil society organizations. Her presence as chairperson predetermined the tone, focus, and conclusions of the inquiry.

The structure of the commission thus violated not only constitutional provisions but also the fundamental logic of parliamentary oversight. The opposition quota exists precisely to prevent the governing party from investigating itself or weaponizing such mechanisms against its rivals. By filling opposition-designated seats with loyalists, Georgian Dream eliminated the procedural safeguards that define legitimate inquiry. The result was a body that mirrored the ruling party's political objectives, used parliamentary formality to simulate legality, and produced findings devoid of institutional credibility.

The Commission for Rewriting the History of the Russian Invasion

The Tsulukiani Commission report reiterated one of Georgian Dream's most persistent narratives: that Georgia [initiated](#) the August 2008 war, allegedly driven by the political ambitions of the United National Movement and influenced by ex-

ternal actors. This framing mirrors Russia's own justification for its aggression and occupation, while disregarding the established body of evidence demonstrating that the war was planned and provoked by Moscow. The commission provides no new intelligence, documentation, or corroborated material to substantiate its claims. It directly contradicts the findings of the parliamentary temporary commission established shortly after the conflict, which examined the causes and consequences of the war in detail and produced a comprehensive [report](#) showing that Russia had long prepared and executed its invasion of Georgia. Tsulukiani attempted to escape by inviting a former chair of the commission, but the interview failed to corroborate her claims, nor could it refute the findings of the 2008 report.

The methods used by the Tsulukiani Commission further undermine its credibility. Testimonies from former military officials, including Generals Zaza Gogava and Mamuka Kurashvili, were quoted selectively and taken out of context, sometimes contradicting the witnesses' own statements made during the hearings. References to international court decisions and documents were similarly distorted, stripped of their original meaning, and presented as confirmation of conclusions that those same institutions never reached. Evidence pointing to Russian premeditation and escalation, much of which had already been submitted by Georgia to international courts, was ignored or not mentioned. The commission's questioning of witnesses openly pursued one goal: to extract statements that would suggest Georgia's leaders, and hence Georgia, started the war.

In her rhetoric during the commission sessions and media, Thea Tsulukiani personally [restated](#) the ruling party's position that, since 2004, the Saakashvili government had taken "damaging steps" against Georgia's territorial integrity through "militaristic" policies in the Tskhinvali region and Kodori gorge. She argued on the record that by August 2008, the Georgian army had been

led into war by politicians "distant from military affairs," who, expecting foreign support and disregarding commanders' advice, had "attacked the city of Tskhinvali," resulting, as she put it, in a "three-day war, defeat, occupation, and heavy losses." It is not incidental that in the last few years, Russian history textbooks also switched from a narrative of a five-day war to a three-day war in August 2008. The Tsulukiani Commission also accused the UNM government of ignoring warnings of escalation in late July 2008 and failing to evacuate civilians, citing the PACE Resolution 1633 as supposed proof that Georgia had "admitted to shelling Tskhinvali" and "accused its own army of war crimes."

This interpretation of Resolution 1633 is both [inaccurate and politically motivated](#). Adopted by PACE in October 2008, the [resolution](#) does not assign blame to Georgia for starting the war. On the contrary, it calls for an independent international investigation into the conflict's origins and recognizes that both sides offered conflicting accounts of its outbreak. More importantly, the resolution explicitly identifies Russia as the aggressor and occupying power, condemns its recognition of the so-called independence of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, and denounces the ethnic cleansing of Georgians from occupied territories. It emphasizes that while hostilities formally began on 7 August 2008, they were preceded by Russian provocations, military build-up, and the failure of Russian "peacekeepers" to prevent violence. Fourteen of fifteen Russian delegates voted against the resolution, underscoring Moscow's hostility to its content.

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Georgian Dream's repeated claim that the UNM government "admitted" to starting the war by supporting Resolution 1633 is therefore false and damaging. It undermines Georgia's diplomatic and legal position in international forums and weakens the credibility of the country's long-standing argument that it was a victim of Russian aggression. The resolution remains one of the first international legal documents to acknowledge Russia's occupation and ethnic cleansing in Georgia. By transforming this milestone into a domestic propaganda tool, this time through the Tsulukiani Commission report, the ruling party not only distorts historical reality but also erodes the legitimacy of Georgia's case before the international community.

The Commission of Bias

The Tsulukiani Commission's report is saturated with one-sided narratives and selective interpretation of facts. Its treatment of the *Rustavi 2* case is emblematic. The document briefly mentions the 2004 sale of the television company to businessman Kibar Khalvashi, an affiliate of the Georgian Dream, but omits the politically charged circumstances surrounding that transaction. There is no mention of how *Rustavi 2* was sold by the founders—Erosi Kintsmarishvili, David Dvali, and Jarji Akimidze—nor reference to the public disputes that followed Kintsmarishvili's still-unexplained questionable suicide. However, the commission then delves into exhaustive detail, recounting how Khalvashi was stripped of *Rustavi 2* and how he managed to regain control of it. Obviously, the commission completely omits the political implications and the role of Khalvashi's lawyer and first post-takeover director, the current Justice Minister, Paata Salia, who, incidentally, was also a member of the Tsulukiani Commission before assuming the top executive job. This pattern of omission and biased emphasis exposes the commission's intent: to reconstruct the history of independent media through the prism of Georgian Dream's political interests.

Over fifty pages of the report are devoted to the topic of media freedom. Yet the section reads as a re-statement of government talking points rather than an investigation. It discusses outlets such as *Imedi*, *Iberia*, *TV 202*, *Mze*, *Objektiv 2*, *Evrika*, *Presa.ge*, and *ITV.ge* but excludes any engagement with their representatives or editors, or those who attempted or succeeded in silencing them. The commission relies almost entirely on newspaper clippings, partisan commentary, and secondary sources instead of conducting primary research. The main sources of the findings are the Ombudsman's reports from 2003 to 2012, authored at the time by Sozar Subari—himself a current member of the commission—and are quoted extensively, allowing him to authenticate his own political claims from a decade earlier.

The section on the judiciary reveals a similar double standard. The report condemns the UNM era for undermining judicial independence, citing as evidence that only 51 criminal acquittals were issued in 2006. While such a statistic indeed reflects a serious imbalance, the analysis stops there. It offers no discussion of judicial corruption or political interference after 2012 and omits any mention of figures such as Levan Murusidze and Mikheil Chinchaladze—judges whose names have become synonymous with the compromised judiciary now serving the Georgian Dream. The only reference to judges appears in the final pages, where the report lists those sanctioned by the international community in 2024–2025, presenting these sanctions as attacks on Georgia's sovereignty and judiciary independence, rather than as reflections of systemic dysfunction dating back to the UNM times.

The contradictions between the commission's claims and reality are starkly illustrated by the [recently published](#) video recording of the former Supreme Court judge Besarion Alavidze, now in exile. In a testimony recorded in 2022 and released in October 2025, Alavidze described the inner workings of judicial capture during the first ten years of GD rule, naming Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Murusidze—

Chinchaladze network as direct sources of pressure on judges. He recounted episodes of coercion, bribery attempts, and threats of prosecution, including being locked in his chambers, forced into a hospital under the pretext of surgery, and driven to consider suicide as an act of protest. His testimony connected political interference to key cases, including the Rustavi 2 ownership dispute and litigation involving the Badri Patarkatsishvili family, who own the *Imedi* TV. He also named judges Valeri Tsertsvadze, Vasil Roinishvili, and Mzia Todua (a long-time employee and manager at Ivanishvili's Cartu Bank) as enforcers of political directives, recounting how Todua personally intervened to transfer the Rustavi 2 case to the Grand Chamber "if we all want to survive." Even former court chair Nino Gvenetadze, initially resistant, was eventually compelled to comply and then played a crucial role in advancing the political interests of the Georgian Dream leadership.

The Tsulukiani Commission report devotes significant attention to the banking sector, targeting TBC Bank and its former executives, Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, as well as the Bank of Georgia, accusing them of corruption and political collusion, which often resulted in the takeover of certain businesses by individuals aligned with the UNM. None of the individuals or institutions implicated were invited to testify, except for Khazaradze and Japaridze, who were political targets in 2025. No other lower-ranking or management representatives of these banks were asked to provide their account of the story. The same pattern recurs in the case of internet provider Caucasus Online, whose representatives testified about a state-orchestrated hostile takeover by Silknet, while key actors such as Silknet owner Giorgi Ramishvili (now in cahoots with the Georgian Dream) were never called to answer to these allegations. The absence of counter-arguments or verification reflects the commission's flawed method - collecting evidence that supports a predetermined narrative and ignoring what contradicts it. Also, not bothering to invite those who are now close to the Georgian Dream.

The report's section on education is particularly revealing. It reads as a blacklist of universities and academics accused of political disloyalty. The University of Georgia is described as an institution created by the mother of Mikheil Saakashvili through a fraudulent purchase of the Georgian Technical University (GTU) building. This allegation, though never substantiated, is based entirely on the narrative of the current rector of the GTU. Nobody from the University of Georgia was summoned or asked the question, and the publicly available [information](#) about the baselessness of this claim was never cited in the report. Moreover, this attack on UG was [further amplified](#) by propaganda media, which alleged that UG was serving as the base for "terrorists" and "revolutionary cadres," allegedly laundering Western funds—a claim reinforced by State Security Chief Mamuka Mdinardze, who [asserted](#), without evidence, that U.S. grants were being funneled through a Thai bank. The U.S. State Department [publicly refuted](#) this accusation on October 8.

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Similar allegations were leveled against the Free University of Tbilisi and Agricultural University of Georgia, which were presented as improperly "gifted" to Kakha Bendukidze, a former minister in the UNM cabinet; however, no administrators or faculty members were heard. Even the Caucasus University was targeted, its president accused of financial misconduct without an opportunity for a response. This selective approach by the commission shows that it never intended to investigate wrongdoings but wanted to revive old cases and controversies, many of which had already been adjudicated in the courts. Some individuals had served their sentences, while others had been acquitted; yet, their

names were reintroduced into the public sphere to evoke anger and reinforce the ruling party's narrative. Cases such as the Sandro Girgvliani and Buta Robakidze murders were selectively revisited, not to uncover new evidence but to weaponize memory.

The choice of witnesses further exposes the commission's intent. None of the senior UNM figures now abroad or inactive were called. In the meantime, attention focused on current opposition leaders such as Zurab Japaridze and Giorgi Vashadze, who were summoned despite having no relevant role during the UNM period. Japaridze never held public office under the Saakashvili government, and Vashadze's portfolio as Minister of Justice was limited to the civil registry and public service halls—institutions that Georgian Dream itself later celebrated. Their inclusion, followed by selective prosecution for noncompliance, reveals the true purpose of the commission: not to establish facts, but to silence today's political opponents.

The Commission of Russian Conspiracy Theories

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itical conspiracy by "foreign powers" to create an anti-Russian bloc across the post-Soviet space.

The report draws heavily on the Kremlin's rhetorical playbook. It describes color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan as premeditated operations following a "pre-established template" imposed by external actors during election periods. According to this account, the revolutions' architects used Western-funded NGOs and independent media to fabricate expectations of electoral fraud, mobilize public unrest, and ultimately engineer regime change. In the Georgian case, the 2003 Rose Revolution is presented as a textbook example of this foreign-designed "technology of revolution."

To construct this argument, the report selectively cites both Western and Russian scholars—such as John Mearsheimer, Richard Sakwa, and Mark Beissinger—out of context, using their analyses of Western influence and geopolitical competition as "proof" of foreign orchestration. It references the 2008 publication *The Role of Civil Society in the Rose Revolution* as an authoritative source, claiming that NGOs like ISFED, GYLA, and the Liberty Institute, alongside USAID, NDI, IRI, the Soros Foundation, and Cordaid, were not merely donors or civic actors but direct organizers and financiers of regime change. The youth movement Kmara is portrayed as the local executor of a Serbian-inspired revolutionary model, allegedly trained and funded through George Soros's Open Society Institute and coordinated with Western embassies.

The commission merged factual events, such as U.S. diplomatic engagement, NGO activity, and *Rustavi 2's* political reporting, into a conspiratorial narrative. It argues that the media, particularly *Rustavi 2*, played a central role in "radicalizing public opinion" and preparing the psychological environment for revolution by promoting Mikheil Saakashvili as a youthful national savior while discrediting the aging Shevardnadze government. According to this view, NGOs and media did not serve as accountabil-

ity mechanisms but as instruments of manipulation and subversion. This is exactly what Kremlin propaganda claims.

The report's chronology of events from late 2003 to early 2004 reconstructs the Rose Revolution as a scripted foreign operation. It suggests that "exit polls," parallel vote tabulations, and Western criticism of electoral irregularities were part of a coordinated effort between Georgian civil society, U.S. officials, and Western media to delegitimize Shevardnadze's victory and provoke unrest. Even diplomatic visits by senior American officials are framed as evidence of interference rather than engagement.

In its concluding sections, the report explicitly rebrands the Rose Revolution as a coup d'état and Saakashvili's presidency as the product of foreign manipulation. It extends the narrative to later years, arguing that the same "revolutionary networks," composed of former UNM officials, NGOs, and academics, continue to pursue Western interests in Georgia and abroad, including in Ukraine. By listing individual names and professional affiliations in Georgian universities and think tanks, the report effectively constructs a blacklist of supposed agents of "foreign-controlled subversion."

Throughout the document, the vocabulary of sovereignty is twisted into a tool of isolation. "National independence" is equated with protection from Western influence, while "foreign coordination" becomes the universal explanation for all criticism, protest, and dissent. The logic of this narrative mirrors Russian state propaganda in its structure and intent. It divides the world into two camps: the "sovereign" state defending its culture and the "foreign agents" undermining it from within. By transferring this framework into Georgian political discourse, the ruling party has effectively imported Russia's language of siege and self-victimization.

The Commission of Ultimate Revenge

The likely trajectory of events from now on runs through a familiar sequence: the ruling party will treat the commission's findings as the evidentiary basis for a constitutional appeal; the appeal will be lodged with the Constitutional Court; the Court's opinion will then be used to reclassify the political forces named in the report. Once a high court endorses the narrative that certain parties, movements, or individuals have acted "against the constitutional order," the legal framework for banning the political parties will be created. That will be the decisive pivot, the transformation of contested political judgments into a formal legal bar on participation in Georgia's political affairs.

What follows from such a pivot is not only the rhetorical delegitimization of opponents but the construction of administrative instruments to operationalize that delegitimization. The anticipated sequence of implementation would include judicial declarations or administrative determinations that the named organizations are extremist or unconstitutional; formal outlawing of those parties; withdrawal of their rights to register and to appear on ballots; and a cascade of secondary measures intended to disable the social and professional platforms of their leaders and cadres. Outlawing a political association is one thing; preventing the people associated with it from political life is another, and it requires systems of blacklists, internal sanctions, and criminal or administrative prohibitions that reach into everyday functions.

Practical implementation, therefore, implies the creation and publication of extremist registers, the imposition of travel bans and asset freezes, the denial of eligibility for public office, the suspension of funding, and legislative or executive measures that criminalize organized support or media coverage

for outlawed groups. Beyond those conventional instruments, implementation could seek to marginalize individuals more broadly: restrictions on employment in state institutions and public-facing professions, limitations on participation in educational activities, curbs on media work and public speech, and formal prohibitions on organizing or training. These measures would not merely prevent parties from contesting elections; they would seek to remove entire networks of people from the civic sphere, interrupt the transmission of organizational memory, and make political reconstitution both legally and practically costly. And let's not forget - these restrictions will concern several thousand, if not more, persons.

The legal mechanics are only half of the story. Administrative practice will matter: who compiles the lists, by what evidentiary standard, with what appeals process, and which institutions are empowered to enforce the prohibitions. Enforcement

inevitably requires coercive backstops, including criminal investigations, policing of assemblies, selective prosecutions, administrative controls over registration and employment, and monitoring and surveillance of the activities of such individuals. The translation of a court ruling into everyday reality depends on bureaucratic instruments, on loyal officials willing to execute politically charged orders, and on judiciaries and enforcement agencies prepared to treat political exclusion as a public-order necessity. That combination of judicial imprimatur and administrative reach is what converts a legal label into social isolation.

This is when the analogy to a Russian playbook becomes undeniable. The pattern of delegitimizing an entire political current through a mix of legal labeling, administrative exclusion, and societal marginalization tracks closely with tactics used by the Kremlin ■