
The Russian Federal Assembly as a Producer of Legal Restrictions, 2012–2021

ABSTRACT This article discusses the role of the Russian Federal Assembly in legislating containment of the 2011/2012 domestic protests, the increased contentious politics that followed with the 2018 Navalny campaign, and the 2019 Golunov and Moscow City Council electoral demonstrations. It scrutinizes the evolution of restrictive legislation from 2012 to 2021 and finds that, after the protests of 2011/2012 the Federal Assembly has played an ever more important role in redesigning legislation that undercut the liberal framework of the 1993 Constitution. The study contributes to understanding the role of legislatures in post-Soviet patrimonial regimes; and it discusses how Russia's patrimonial legislatures respond to popular protest and contentious politics by restructuring societal expectations and enhancing the regime's coercive capacity, cementing it in personalized authoritarianism.

KEYWORDS patrimonial regimes, legislation, repression

In the first decade of the 2000s, M. Steven Fish argued that constitutional arrangements opting for weak legislatures would by design facilitate the rise of autocracies: “if, as of the year 2015, countries with weak legislatures (e.g. Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan) have become liberal or electoral democracies . . . my argument will be undermined” (Fish 2006, 196). Levitsky and Way (2010) downplayed the significance of constitutional design as a predictor of regime outcomes. They argued that high linkage (dense economic, governmental, technological, informational, and societal ties to the West) could be conducive to democratization even in super-presidential regimes (Levitsky and Way 2010, 43–44). In their view, Russia's Constitution was a classic framework for a competitive authoritarian regime with “unstable institutions,” but the authors argued that sufficient coercive and organizational power would enable such regimes to persevere, and that domestic factors, such as protests and dissent, and abrupt economic changes, could be buffered by balanced coercion and electoral manipulation.

By 2015, Russia had taken decisive steps toward a fully personalized authoritarian regime. Five years later, the design of the original constitution was altered by lifting term limitations on the incumbent presidency. With this, expectations for Russia's hybrid regime trajectory derived from the first decade of the 2000s were waning. The regime could still rely on targeted coercion of protests, had sufficient organizational power to fence out opposition, and secured electoral victories by ballot-stuffing and other means of manipulations. Moreover, international leverage remained limited, with some exceptions, for instance, the international investigations into the Bolotnaia demonstrations in 2013.



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This article seeks to refocus on one aspect of authoritarian regime trajectories—not constitutional design, but constitutional “adaptation,” or what Hale (2015) referred to as the “informal” effect of the constitutional design. In a patrimonial system a constitution can, if not impose institutionalized rules, then “structure expectations” in society and among elites as to predicting where the apex of power would be located. This seems relevant also to understanding the constitutional amendments introduced in 2020, which seemed like a swap of prerogatives to preserve the continuity of the regime.

The article provides a detailed discussion of legislative activities that have reshaped public policies; it suggests, with Hale (2015) that legislative agency plays no *significant* role for the regime as a whole: “The real stuff of politics in countries like Russia, Georgia, or Kazakhstan is not truly captured by topics like ‘participation,’ ‘parties and elections,’ ‘the judiciary,’ or ‘constitutional design’” (Hale 2015, 7). What matters are informal networks, hierarchies, and culturally derived expectations, in short, what societies and elites *expect* to be the case in the regulations of political power, disregarding what the design implies. To quote Hale at length:

Constitutions can sometimes have their most powerful effects not by being formally observed, but instead by influencing expectations regarding how informal (non-constitutional politics) is organized. . . . They can shape expectations of political elites as to who will *informally* (really) be the chief patron or patrons in the polity—even when the actual formalities of the constitution are regularly violated. (Hale 2015, 77)

The argument is that by 2020, informal “non-constitutional” politics had become formal “constitutional” policies by means of the gradual introduction of restrictive legislation. The Federal Assembly has played a core role in this process. Since 2011/2012, it has increasingly legislated Russia into a “besieged fortress” to preserve regime continuity and stability.

HYPOTHESES AND OUTLINE OF ARTICLE

This article hypothesizes that legislators conceive of electoral protests not as justified grievances, but as one of an “imperfect constitution.” Aligning with “expectations,” legislators thus serve to contain domestic pressures, and reframe these as “influences from abroad.” The article formulates the following hypotheses:

- a. Popular unrest, like that which took place in Russia in 2011/2012, and again in 2019/2021, involves instances where the framework of “expectations” cracks. While these protest events are not “cracks in the wall” (Gelman, 2015) or factors that cause elite splits, legislators have come to see them as anomalies that require certain legal adjustments, and as the result of assumed foreign interventions.
- b. When civic organizations and political challengers defy expectations, legislators respond by enhancing the state’s capacity for coercion. Coercion has, however, to be considered *legitimate*, in order not to undermine the reputation of the top executive and spur further protests.

The article argues that the Russian legislature has enjoyed certain autonomy in adopting restrictions, and that the amendments introduced reflect some familiar, broadly acknowledged features of Russian legislative activities—the poor quality of legal amendments (Schulmann 2014, 2015), the rapid speed of adoption of legislative bills (Waller 2021), and that most bills are adopted and signed by the Russian president (Noble 2019, 61–64). The legislature’s autonomy remains an open question. On the one hand, it would be an oversimplification to see the legislature as merely “rubber-stamping” executive decisions (Schulmann and Noble 2018); on the other hand, within the field of restrictive legislation, legislators have found a specific arena for public activity, and an opportunity to reorganize committee-structures that aligns with executive policies.

To be sure, the Federal Assembly has a formal mandate to reconstrue “constitutional rights.” The standing committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Organization was introduced in the fourth convocation of the Duma (2003–7) (Remington 2008), and it was used for some minor adjustments in the fifth convocation (2007–11). After 2011/2012, however, what seemed to be minor changes to legislative acts have evolved into a far more substantial repertoire of coercion. As a result, the liberal freedoms enshrined in the Constitution have eroded. Subsequently, after 2011/2012, the Russian legislature has preserved two primary functions; first, as an arena for a dominant party, it has provided the services needed for conducting large interagency bargains in the legislature; and second, it has also performed the major function of coercion and control over the electoral arena.

This departs from the role of the Federal Assembly prior to the electoral protests. From 2004 to 2011, legislative autonomy was found primarily in the realm of complex negotiations between various branches and economic lobbying interests, in which case the dominant party appeared as less unified (Remington 2008, 984). By reasserting control of the electoral arena, legislators could also shape and adjust expectations, while preserving some degree of electoral legitimacy. Since 2012, this “shaping of expectations” has led to increased public activity from legislators. However, with increasing electoral contestation, the Federation Council has also thrown its lot in to secure and protect the status and significance of the presidency; but the bicameral structure has not challenged presidential and executive authority, let alone initiated a significant restructuring of the distribution of powers.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY: LEGISLATIVE BILLS IN CONTEXT

The empirical data utilized for this study are drawn from the Duma’s database and divided into two cycles: that of the 2012–17 cycle of repressive legislation, and the constitutional amendments cycle of 2020–21. While the first cycle prepared the grounds for the 2018 elections, new waves of political protests emerged in 2019/2020. From 2017 to 2019, Interim Commissions on State Sovereignty (ICSSs) were created in both chambers.¹ These commissions reinforced cross-chamber coordination of restrictive legislation and made the two chambers a far more visible political force in the public debate.

1. The full name of these commissions was Interim Commissions for the Protection of State Sovereignty and the Prevention of Interference in the Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation.

The new legal concepts that were introduced fall under the competencies of the Federal Assembly, but branch interests from security agencies have been involved in broader discussions of large “bag” deals from the first cycle, like the Iarovaia package from 2016. In that case, the revised National Security Doctrine from December 2015 served as the major signal from the executive. Also, legislative acts regulating the national and transnational NGO sector, such as the Law on Foreign Agents (2012) and the Law on Undesirable Organizations (2015), are the products of clear executive signals and interagency processes with substantial executive participation (Flikke 2018). In the second cycle, legislative acts served the ultimate purpose of insulating the executive and the regime from external pressures and form a majority support for constitutional amendments.

The tables on first-cycle restrictive legislation build on the 43 legislative acts listed and organized by the International Federation for Human Rights (Fidh.org 2018). This list gives a condensed overview of restrictive legislation adopted in the period 2012–2017 and is primarily based on Russian-language media sources. Some related laws have been added to this list, as these were cross-referenced by the laws in the Fidh.org selection, but not included. The explanatory notes (*poiasnitel'nye zapiski*) serve as a source for interpreting the purpose of legislation. They are considered to be “an important institution in Russian constitutional law” (Maslov 2016), although they hardly contain any references to constitutional law, nor to other pieces of legislation, and are mostly used by deputies to secure attraction and attention and muster support from other MPs (Maslov 2016).

The expanded selection covers altogether 49 legislative acts, grouped into ten categories. These categories are derived from the Yabloko list of legislative acts that are considered non-constitutional (Dubrovina 2021; Yabloko.ru 2021) (Table 4). As for the second cycle, the Yabloko list of legislative acts is central to the analysis here (Dubrovina 2021; Yabloko.ru 2021). Many of the legal amendments and concepts included in this list were adopted in the first cycle (2012–17) but were reinforced in the 2020–21 cycle in cross-chamber legislative acts that substantially broadened their scope of application.

Formally, all legislators have powers to promote laws, and all legislative acts in the Sozd.duma.gov.ru database have base documents, specifying the legislator(s) behind the legal amendment. Laws can be promoted by deputy groups, by individual deputies, as cross-chamber initiatives, as executive initiatives, and finally, as initiatives from the ICSS of both chambers. These sites also identify the process of adoption, including amendments proposed by other deputies.

The significance of this agency is hard to determine. Once legislation is presented, bandwagon effects can arise; laws that are sponsored by all faction leaders and the Duma chairman are considered to be matters of institutional importance. Other pieces of legislation sponsored by publicly profiled politicians can be conceived as “political performances,” designed to boost individual deputy popularity (Petrov and Noble 2021, 140). However, many such single-deputy proposals from the first cycle have later been incorporated in larger packages, giving their authors notoriety and public exposure—such as the 2016 Iarovaia package.

This article provides evidence that over time, parliamentary coordination of restrictive legislative acts has improved. This is particularly relevant for interpreting the framework of the constitutional amendments of 2020–21. In the 2020–21 cycle, cross-chamber and ICSS initiatives have played a more important role. By the time of the 2018 presidential election, the ICSS of the Federation Council fueled further restrictions and lifted first-cycle legislation into new legal bills imposing new restrictions in the media sector, all while identifying certain “foreign powers” as intruders. In the first cycle, such intruders were transnational/national organizations and funds, whereas in the second, several legal bills were floated by the Federal Assembly that were meant to counteract US/EU sanctions (Zakonoproekt № 441399-7 2018, Zakonoproekt № 464757-7 2022 [2018]). One of these evolved into a legal bill introducing imprisonment for alleged “fake news” about the use of military force abroad (Zakonoproekt № 464757-7 2022 [2018]), while the other signaled broad sanctions against the US and any state supporting US sanctions (Zakonoproekt № 441399-7 2018).

FIRST CYCLE: RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION (2012–2017)

Did deputies conceive of electoral protests as a deviation from constitutional order? It seems clear that legislators faced a fundamental dilemma: Should they be attentive to popular demands, and should the broadening of political access be encouraged, or averted? Protecting regime sovereignty became a rallying call. The signal amendments that set off the spiral of restrictions were the amendments to the Law on Demonstrations (2012) and the Law on Foreign Agents (2012). Duma chairman Sergei Naryshkin—since 2016, head of the Foreign Intelligence Service—presided over the expedited adoption of restrictive sanctions introduced in the Law on Demonstrations in May/June 2012. That law sparked a partisan purge within the party Just Russia, with the exclusion of the most vocal deputies who sided with demonstrators against the amendments and organized a sit-down action in the Duma to prevent its passage (Tass.ru 2013). Together with the rapid adoption of the Law on Foreign Agents (2012), introduced in Dmitrii Medvedev’s lame-duck period, before Putin was officially reinstated, the Federal Assembly embarked on a larger cycle of restrictions (Tables 1 and 2).

In the following, the data are analyzed in three separate sections. First, I discuss the executive’s role in enhancing the powers of law enforcement agencies in combating extremism and defining the parameters of foreign media ownership. Second, I discuss and analyze the role of legislative and cross-chamber deputy groups in providing legal initiatives that effectively strengthened executive control over society by limiting access and voice for public dissent (public domain, NGO and media legislation)—including the coercive effect of emerging cross-chamber initiatives, which were also central in identifying potential sources of external influence, and designed to dampen the influence of normative pressures on the Russian legal corpus. Third, I discuss variations in the legal categories of these restrictions, especially the cocktail of legal categories within the sphere of “information technology and media,” and the differences between the constitutional rights category and the security and defense category.

TABLE 1. Legislative Initiatives (2012–2017)

Legal Category	Number of Laws	Cross-Chamber Initiative	Deputy		Government Initiative	Presidential Initiative	Regional Legislature
			Group Initiative (Duma)	Single Deputy Initiative			
Extremism	9	3	2		3	1	
Cultural perceptions/historical heritage	3	1	1				1
Transnational organizations and NGOs	10	4	5		1		
Electoral legislation	1					1	
Public domain legislation	4	1	2			1	
Instruments of repression	3	1*			2		
Information technology and media	13		9	2	2		
Empowering law enforcement structures	4	1			1	2	
Local administration	-						
Political system (balance of power)	1	1					
Other	1			1			
Sum	49	12	19	3	9	5	1

* Single deputy initiative (larovaia) turning into a cross-chamber sponsored law.

Executive Legal Initiatives: Law Enforcement and Combating Extremism

As shown in Table 1, the legal initiative has resided with deputy groups in the State Duma and the Federation Council. Altogether, 34 of 49 legislative acts emerged from these institutions (14 executive initiatives, plus 1 from a regional legislature). Presidential/governmental initiatives were of critical importance, however, as they empowered security and law enforcement structures and enhanced punishments for extremist activity. Three of four legislative acts in the category “empowering law enforcement structures” came from the executive; some of these proved critical in enhancing the powers and prerogatives of the Federal Security Service (FSB). To take some examples: a government

TABLE 2. Legislative Categories (2012–2017)

Legal Category	State Structure and Constitutional Rights	Security and Defense	Economic Development/ Social Policies	Other
Extremism	5	4		
Cultural perceptions/ historical heritage	3			
Transnational organizations and NGOs	9		1	
Electoral legislation	1			
Public domain legislation	4			
Instruments of repression	2	1		
Information technology and media		2	7	4
Empowering law enforcement structures		4		
Local administration				
Political system (balance of power)	1			
Other		1		
Sum	25	12	8	4

legislative act in 2013 empowered the FSB to play a primary role in information security, in addition to investigating economic crimes (Federal'nyi zakon № 361795-6 2013). Its powers were further enhanced by a presidential decree from 2017, elevating the FSB to a “federal branch of the executive” empowered to uncover cyberthreats and other threats to critical Russian infrastructure (Ukaz № 620 2017). Finally, the establishment of the National Guard in 2016, and the subsequent widening of its powers (Galeotti 2021), were regulated by presidential legislative acts and decrees (Zakonoproekt № 1037356-6 2016).

Executive initiatives within the sphere of combating extremism have de facto opened for stronger FSB involvement in cases with criminal liability. The 2012 legislative amendment to the Administrative Code introduced only minor fines and 15-day detention for displaying symbols associated with extremist groups (Federal'nyi zakon № 255-FZ 2012). These amendments were annulled by a presidential legal initiative from 2013, however, where changes were made to the Criminal Code (Zakonoproekt № 347667-6 2013). New wording was introduced in paragraph 205 of the Criminal Code, such as the “establishment of a terrorist community and participation in it,” punishable by between 3 and 20 years of imprisonment. The amendment was lobbied in the Duma under the supervision of a deputy to FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev, Iurii Gorbunov, who was appointed special representative of the president in internal negotiations of the legal draft

(Zakonoproekt № 347667-6 2013). A well-documented legal report from the NGO Memorial has identified this specific legislation as a central tool for the FSB in establishing political signal cases against alleged terrorist networks, some of which were established by FSB undercover agents to beef up alleged threats against Russia's constitutional system (Kostromina 2020). Moreover, other reports reveal increasing involvement of the FSB in investigating cases against Russian elites and cases of extremism (Aleksashenko et al. 2020).

Presidential prerogatives were also substantially strengthened. The first amendments under Medvedev were less restrictive; but, in a subsequent legal initiative, the government presented amendments that sharpened legal responsibilities for extremist activities (Federal'nyi zakon № 301629-6 2014 [2013]). This legal initiative modified Articles 280 and 282 by raising the maximum punishment for incitement to ethnic hatred from two to four years and upping the penalty for establishing extremist organizations to 300,000 rubles. Like the presidential initiative, it was aimed at “neutralizing the threat of destructive activities from religious organizations on the territory of the Russian Federation” (Federal'nyi zakon № 301629-6 2014 [2023]).

It should be noted that the original government project did not stipulate enhanced powers for the FSB. Instead, it appointed a deputy minister of the Ministry of Justice to launch the draft in the Duma. Moreover, the government had in 2011 launched a comprehensive legal draft that included a division of labor in combating extremism. In a separate section, the president was given the role of “defining and outlining the main direction of state policies in the field of combatting extremism,” and in “identifying the competent federal agencies of the executive power under his supervision to combat extremism” (Federal'nyi zakon № 588894-5 2014 [2011]). The same legal draft accorded a similar role to the government, however, suggesting that it should use local government administrations to map extremist activities. This draft stalled in the Duma, was relaunched until June 2013, and was finally passed in June 2014 (Federal'nyi zakon № 588894-5 2014 [2011]). Meanwhile, a presidential draft enhancing the powers of the FSB entered the Duma in September 2013, and was adopted *prior to* the final reading of the government legal proposal (Zakonoproekt № 347667-6 2013). Thus, the FSB had lobbied for the presidential draft and received the powers needed *before* the legal draft on the division of labor passed the legislature. This suggests that the overall timing of legislative amendments went in favor of the *siloviki* and the presidency.

The widening of FSB powers was accompanied by a de-liberalization of legislation adopted in the period 2009–11. While Medvedev in his 2008–12 presidential term had halted amendments to the Criminal Code that introduced the term “state treason,” this legislative act passed in 2012 (Federal'nyi zakon № 139314-5 2012 [2008]). Upon becoming prime minister, Medvedev stated that he had no reason to see these amendments as signs of “tightening of the screws” in the laws adopted in the public domain and NGO legislation, let alone the amendment in the Criminal Code defining acts of state treason (Interfax.ru 2012). However, it seems clear that he backpedaled on earlier promises. The government also initiated amendments to the legislation on media (limiting foreign ownership), and investments in Russian strategic industries (Federal'nyi zakon № 255707-6 2014 [2013]).

Not only did the Federal Assembly pass these executive decisions, it also actively promoted separate amendments that enhanced the FSB's powers. The two chambers pitched in with a cross-chamber initiative in 2015, allowing the FSB to bear and employ arms; and FSB forces were not to be held liable for any damage to public or private property in cases where arms were used (Zakonoproekt № 830561-6).² This amendment also gave the security services *carte blanche* to conduct unannounced raids on private homes and to collect biometric data (Fidh.org 2018). Also in December 2015, the two chambers launched the legislative amendment that allowed the Constitutional Court to disregard rulings from international courts considered to be in disharmony with national legislative acts (Zakonoproekt № 931766-6 2015). In sum, these amendments have made the legislation more of a utility tool for repression. Softer repressive mechanisms, such as criminal prosecution for extremist statements, have been used to various degrees, but charges of extremist activity have more readily been raised in signal cases, such as the case against the Foundation for Battling Corruption (FBK), and the student organization DOXA.

The Legislature: Regime Gatekeeping

The 2011/2012 protests set off the Federal Assembly on a cycle of restrictions designed to pacify protests. Some of the early amendments were controversial, especially those concerning the Law on Demonstrations. The Duma treated several proposed amendments to the Law on Demonstrations in the period 2011–14: only two were adopted, while seven bills fell. Liberals lamented lack of contact with the new electorate, and others were concerned about the rights of their core electorate, such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). Liberals were ousted from the Duma, however, and the CPRF supported new restrictions. In 2014, the Duma adopted the “Dadin amendment” to the Law on Demonstrations, which introduced changes in the Criminal Code paragraph 212.1 for repeated administrative violations of the routines for applying for and holding public mass meetings (Zakonoproekt № 485729-6 2014). The amendment introduced a maximum punishment for such violations of five years’ imprisonment. Legislators in the Federation Council offered only minor alterations—such as Senator Andrei Klishas’s amendment that restricted the holding of public meetings and demonstrations to the hours from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. (Zakonoproekt № 493976-6 2014).

Whatever disagreements there were over the right to demonstrate, these faded away with the launching of other signal laws. The 2012 Foreign Agent Law proved particularly productive in attracting legislative support. Initially, it was at first sponsored by only six deputies; then, on July 6, 239 deputies joined—including a Federation Council member, Andrei Klimov, who later initiated the ad hoc ICSS in the Federation Council (Zakonoproekt № 1165649-7 2012). Another bandwagon was the Law of Scoundrels—or the Anti-Magnitskii Law (2012)—which originated as a Duma chairman initiative (Naryshkin) sponsored by all faction leaders and attracted massive sponsorship in both chambers (400 in Duma, 142 in Federation Council). This legislation came to

2. This legal amendment was sponsored by prominent legislators Irina Iarovaia and Viktor Ozerov.

serve almost as a test of loyalty and a legislative “whip,” aligning all deputies against alleged US interference in Russian domestic affairs (Zakonoproekt № 186614-6 2012).

With the signal laws in place, the stage was set for new interpretations of “political activity” and “extremism.” These fused in the 2016 Iarovaia package, whereby all amendments were categorized as security and defense. The package, sponsored by Iarovaia and Ozerov, had as primary reference security concerns raised in the amendments made to the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation in December 2015. The package proposed lowering the minimum age for extremist and terrorist crimes to 14 years (Zakonoproekt № 1039101-6 2016); it criminalized failure to report terrorist crimes or plans; raised the punishment for alleged incitement to hatred from maximum four years to between two and five years; toughened penalties for “justification of terrorism” in online media by raising the maximum sentence from five to seven years’ imprisonment; and set life imprisonment for terrorist acts outside the Russian Federation that harmed Russians abroad (Berg 2016). However, more controversial parts of the package, such as the withdrawal of citizenship from persons who had committed terrorist acts, failed to pass (Zakonoproekt № 1039101 2016).

Notably, also the Iarovaia package empowered the FSB and the presidential administration. The FSB was granted the right to demand encryption keys from messenger services and internet providers upon request. As for the presidency, the package established routines for establishing “regional counter-terrorist committees” to oversee preventive counter-terrorist operations in Russia’s regions (Zakonoproekt № 1039149-6 2016). This marked a departure from the government proposal of 2011 (adopted in 2014), which involved a division of labor whereby the government would implement and coordinate counter-terrorist work at the regional level, also by interacting with regional legislative and self-governance structures (Federal’nyi zakon № 588894-5 2014 [2011]). With the adoption of the package, the presidential administration was given carte blanche to form separate counter-terrorist structures that would overrule regional legislation and executive bodies.

In parallel, lawmakers continued to upgrade signal laws. The bandwagon set in motion by the Law on Foreign Agents (2012) produced substantial amendments in the Criminal Code. In an amendment that defined “malicious evasion” (*zlostnoe ukhlonenie*) as the “refusal to register,” heads of NGOs that refused to provide documentation on funding could risk “obligatory social work” or imprisonment up to two years (paragraph 331.1 CC) (Zakonoproekt № 102766-6 2012). Several minor amendments were added, mostly by smaller deputy groups. Among these, the Andrei Lugovoi (LDPR) Act from 2014 stands out—this legislation authorized the Ministry of Justice to register any NGO that resisted voluntary registration (Zakonoproekt № 508677-6 2014).

The term “political activity” that tied signal laws to the Iarovaia package was not included in the original proposal, but in a 2016 amendment presented alongside the Iarovaia package and sponsored by Aleksandr Sidiakin. In this draft, legislators gave a broad definition of “political activity.” “Political activity” was to be understood as public activities within “state-building and constitutional order,” “the federal structure of the Russian Federation,” “sovereignty and territorial integrity,” “law enforcement,” “state and national security,” “defense,” “foreign policy,” “national socioeconomic and economic development,” “functions

of the political system,” “local government and state agencies,” and “legal regulations of citizens’ freedoms and rights”—with the explicit aim of “influencing the planning and implementation of state policies” within these fields (Zakonoproekt № 1000884-6 2016). Thus, the law disallowed all constructive feedback on state policies. NGOs were also deprived of voice: any NGO participation in public discussions, street rallies, and public meetings, and, also, activities connected to federal and local elections, would be termed “political activity”—this alongside public petitions, public addresses to local authorities, and distribution of material on the internet and in social media (Zakonoproekt № 1000884-6 2016). A final addition identified “the inclusion of minor-aged (*nesovershennoletnie*) in such activities” as “political” (Zakonoproekt № 1000884-6 2016).

Categories: Legislation within State Structure and Constitutional Rights

Table 2 shows the range of legal categories used in classifying restrictive legislation. In the time span analyzed, restrictive legal acts shifted from the category of social policies and state structure and constitutional rights³ to the category of security and defense. There were some legislative acts in this category before the revised security doctrine of Russia was adopted in December 2015, but with the launch of the Iarovaia package in spring 2016, there was a noticeable shift.

As is clear from Table 2, most legislative acts from this period were categorized as legislation pertaining to “state structure and constitutional rights.” The most frequent definition of “state-building” involves enhancing the effectiveness of governance, major reorganization of federal and regional structures, and securing the “political and personal rights of citizens.” Of all the legal amendments listed, 25 are categorized as “state structure and constitutional rights,” or “constitutional order”—even though they, by all legal standards, restricted public freedoms, and partially also reduced the constitutional enshrined values of freedom of speech and assembly. Clearly, considerations of safeguarding sovereignty dominated. Restrictions were meant as security measures—not as enabling broader political participation, nor secure citizen’s constitutional rights. Moreover, as 12 of the 49 legislative acts were categorized as “security and defense,” it seems that legislators were increasingly more fixated on security measures, and that these were grounded in fears of external involvement in Russian society and state-building. Indeed, all major legal amendments in the 2016 Iarovaia package belong to this category.

At the same time, legislators seemed uncertain how to contain the impact of social media. In 2012, some legislation that restricted internet postings was categorized as “social policy,” and legal acts were initiated by deputies in the Duma Committee for Childhood and Family Affairs. For instance, the Law on Blacklisting Websites (2012) originated from this committee: it empowered the government to take measures to block sites that distributed pornography, drug-related material, and information that encouraged suicide (Zakonoproekt № 89417-6 2012). A shift came in 2013, when the Lugovoi initiative in 2013 introduced a new category called “the use of informational resources” (*ispol'zovanie informatsionnykh*

3. Remington (2008) refers to this committee, established in 2003, as “the committee for constitutional legislation and state organization.”

resursov). This amendment empowered the Prosecutor's Office to instruct the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) to block sites, without prior court hearings (Zakonoproekt № 380323-6 2013). The law also banned sites posting "calls for mass riots, implementation of extremist activity, incitement to international and/or interreligious strife, and/or participation in unsanctioned mass demonstrations" (Zakonoproekt № 380323-6 2013). Site-blocking of social media became an acute issue; in 2014, Iarovaia and Lugovoi, both members of the Duma Committee on Security, introduced a new bill obliging internet providers to store user information for six months and provide unlimited access to the FSB or any other prosecuting agency on Russian territory (Zakonoproekt № 428884-6 2014). This legal draft was the first amendment to the Law on Communication and the Law on Information Technologies and Protection of Information in the category "security and defense."

Later, legislators also coupled together legal terms derived from the Law on Undesirable Organizations (2015), an amendment to the signal law known as the Dima Iakovlev Law (2012) but bearing the far longer name "On Measures against Persons That Are Guilty of Violating the Rights of Russian Citizens" (Zakonoproekt № 186614-6 2012). This law had, under the guise of protecting orphaned children, empowered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to collect and present information on identifiable individuals who would be declared *personae non gratae* in Russia, or, more precisely, US citizens who allegedly had committed such acts. Persons in this category were also banned from leading organizations in Russia or adopting Russian children (Zakonoproekt № 186614-6 2012). Then, with the adoption of the Law on Undesirable Organizations (2015), the child protection measures in the original legal act were altered. In the explanatory memorandum accompanying the amendment, the following justification was given:

Countering the penetration of these organizations [terrorist and extremist organizations] into the territory of the Russian Federation, blocking their attempts to influence the social and political institutions of Russian society should be considered as one of the priority areas of activity of state authorities aimed at protecting the foundations of the constitutional order, morality, the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens, national interests of the Russian Federation, defence capability and security of the state and public order. (Zakonoproekt № 662902-6 2015 [2014])

In other words, by 2015, the signal child-protection law known as the Dima Iakovlev Law (2012) had become a legislative act banning certain foreign and transnational organizations as potentially dangerous to Russia's constitutional order. The 2017 amendments to the Law on Media (1996) went one step further. This legal act, framed as an addition to the Dima Iakovlev Law, empowered the Prosecutor's Office to order Roskomnadzor to block the internet sites of such organizations in Russia (Zakonoproekt № 275060-7 2017). According to the explanatory note:

Resources of this kind are used to prepare the distribution of material that are directed at discrediting the domestic and foreign policies of the Russian Federation with the aim of formulating a negative public opinion and thus destabilize the situation in the country. This legal initiative is justified by the complex procedures for blocking

internet-resources belonging to foreign and international non-governmental organizations that are recognized as undesirable in the territory of the Russian Federation. (Zakonoproekt № 275060 2017)

By 2017, legal concepts had traveled from one legal category to the other, reappearing as grand concepts for protecting what the Law of Undesirable Organizations (2015) identified as “the foundations of the constitutional order, morality, the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens” (Zakonoproekt № 662902-6 2015 [2014]). Instead of protecting these rights, however, the 2012–17 restrictive legislative cycle served to justify the central tenets of Putin’s return to power—the conservative turn, with the “spiritual moral values” of the elite (Østbø 2016). Such references seemed increasingly to be reflected in legislation, and subsequently also to enhance the status of the legislature within this particular legislative activity.

The ICSSs: Gatekeeping the Regime

The legislative spree of 2012–17 seemed to prepare the ground for a controllable reelection of Vladimir Putin in 2018. But innovative legislation also opened career possibilities for legislators who sought a central role in coordinating larger legislative packages. This task was taken up by the ICSSs set up in 2017 and 2019 for “the protection of threats against Russian sovereignty.” The chairman of the ICSS of the Federation Council, Andrei Klimov, had endorsed several of the cross-chamber legislative acts in this cycle; he also launched a legislative investigative organ with vested powers for identifying alleged informational threats to the Russian Federation. The Duma ICSS was established after the protest summer of 2019 under the chairmanship of Vasilii Piskarev, a United Russia deputy and head of the Duma’s Committee on Security.⁴ Protest events prompted the Duma chairman, Viacheslav Volodin, to react to “signs of foreign intervention,” and Duma deputies were hastily called back from holidays to adopt measures framed as a “mirror response” to US claims of Russian intervention in the 2016 US presidential elections. MPs were mandated to investigate possible foreign intervention in the Moscow City Council elections (Chernykh and Sergeeva 2019).

The expansion of permanent committee structures has been a central prerequisite to secure United Russia dominance in the legislature (Remington 2008), but the new ICSSs profited themselves partially as hubs for the *coordination* of legislation, and partially as an “investigative agency” empowered to reveal alleged foreign interventions. Moreover, they were cross-partisan and had a high public profile. The ICSS of the Federation Council immediately set to work at a rapid pace, holding four sessions, four working group meetings, and two roundtables to fortify its mandate (Council.gov.ru 2017). Already by September 2017, it had involved some 30 experts and had established a working group to identify activities that interfered with domestic policies, including

4. Piskarev entered the Duma on the United Russia ticket in 2016, after having served as a deputy to the head of the Investigative Committee, Aleksandr Bastykin. As Schulmann (2015, 60) notes, “security agencies and law-enforcement bodies, the General Prosecutor’s Office and the Investigative Committee have no right of legislative initiative,” but Piskarev maintained his ties.

“decisions that had been taken by the Council of Europe and in its immediate surroundings’ (Council.gov.ru 2017). The ICSS stated:

The foreign activity around the Council of Europe’s treatment of the so-called “Kirovles-case” is readily attaining a more evident character of being an illegal pressure on Russian authorities and society; it also involves disinforming the world community with the aim of exercising direct influence on the preparations to and conduct of presidential elections in Russia in 2018. (Council.gov.ru 2017)

What the ICSS lamented was Russian press coverage, however, especially Rbc.ru’s reference to statements from the European Court of Human Rights from 2016, when the Council had made a statement in favor of Navalny in the Kirovles case (Rbc.ru 2017). The ICSS clearly drew on earlier legislation to create grounds for its activity;⁵ from 2017 onward, this ad hoc institution produced new policy documents outlining various legal proposals that built on the first cycle of restrictions. Subsequently, it mandated itself to facilitate interdepartmental dialogue, all while coordinating former and future legal amendments from both chambers. Table 3 is based on media sources and reports from the ICSSs. It is divided into recommendations, legal draft proposals, and laws adopted in the period preceding the report.

Among major recommendations was the introduction of the “foreign agent” term in the Law on Media. With this amendment, the Ministry of Justice included the Russian-language Voice of America and Radio Free Europe on the list, alongside Russian-owned media like Sibir.realii, Kavkaz.realii, and Krym.realii (Grobman and Nikiforov 2017). Already by April 2018, however, the ICSS had expanded the list, following what it termed “observations of the conduct of the presidential campaign,” and included the Russian-language Meduza.io and Ekho.Kavkaz. Formally, Klimov stated, these media had “allowed for electoral propaganda on the ‘day of silence’ [the day before the elections], and had broken the principle of equal coverage of all presidential candidates” (Novayagazeta.ru 2018). In style, the reports of the ICSS far exceeded whatever mandate it had and resembled poorly grounded attempts at grandstanding. For instance, the presentation of the 2018 report was a mediated performance, in which Klimov repeated claims of foreign intervention, while seeking a broader mandate for parliamentary investigations. In an hour-long presentation, he claimed that there was irrevocable evidence of “massive interference”:

The evidenced interference is a major component in a systematic and direct activity aimed at containing Russia by means of altering the fundament of the country’s foreign and domestic policies, and the composition of our state’s institutions of power. This campaign started long before 2014, and its major source is Washington. (Council.gov.ru 2018a)

The ICSS also identified what it termed “hostile sociological surveys” aimed at identifying “weak spots” in the Russian political system.

5. One detail is of interest: in the 2018 report on alleged interference in the 2018 elections, the committee backdated what it termed “foreign activity” of meddling in Russian domestic politics to 2015, the year when the Law on Undesirable Organizations was adopted.

TABLE 3. Legal Proposals from the Federation Council Ad Hoc Committee on Sovereignty (2017–2020)

Annual Report (Year)	Recommendations	Legal Draft Proposals	Laws Adopted
2017	<p>Introduce a clear legal term for “intrusion in domestic affairs” in federal legislation.</p> <p>Empower the Federation Council to investigate foreign intrusion by adopting a document defining the aims, principles, and mandate for such investigations.</p>	<p>Amend electoral laws to ban any candidate with dual citizenship.</p> <p>Prohibit people without Russian citizenship from taking part in electoral campaigning, candidate consulting, sociological survey studies of electoral preferences, or organizational work in campaign staffs.</p>	<p>Amendments to the Law on Critical Infrastructure—enhancing state control over critical informational infrastructure (Internet) (isolation of Runet).</p> <p>Amendments to the Law on Communication, prohibiting the distribution of SIM cards without licenses; and the provision of communication services to unidentified users.</p>
	<p>Prohibit the use of any campaign material printed outside the borders of Russia.</p>	<p>Amendments to the Law on Information and Informational Technologies, and the Law on Media, allowing authorities to bypass courts and block information from providers that are considered illegal in Russia, and term any legal entity in a foreign country a “foreign agent media.”</p>	

(continued)

TABLE 3. (continued)

Annual Report (Year)	Legal Draft Proposals	Laws Adopted
2018*	<p>Introduce a clear legal term for "intrusion in domestic affairs" in the Law on Security to prevent "political opponents" to "hide behind terms like the freedom of information."</p> <p>Prohibit the use of any campaign material produced abroad in Russian electoral campaigns.</p> <p>Prevent foreign observers from collecting "confidential information."</p> <p>Introduce and legally codify the term "undesired activities" alongside the terms "undesirable organizations."</p>	<p>Amend the Law on Parliamentary Investigations and Hearings (FZ-196) to include a broader mandate and powers to investigate foreign interference. (The report stated that the Federation Council did not have such a mandate.)</p> <p>Amend the Law on Elections to ban any participation from people with dual citizenship from serving advisory functions in campaigns.</p> <p>Amend the Criminal Codex to enhance punishments for any individual without Russian citizenship who takes part in electoral campaigning, candidate consulting, sociological survey studies of electoral preferences, or organizational work on campaign staffs.</p>

Sources: Council.gov.ru, 2017, 2018.

* The annual report from the Committee in 2018 was dedicated to alleged intervention in the presidential elections of 2018.

With the aim of elaborating adequate programmes [of influence] and subprogrammes for organizational propaganda, multiple sociological and similar studies were conducted on Russian territory in the period of 2016–2017 to ascertain the weak spots in the system, and the protest potential at the federal level, as well as in Russia’s regions. (Council.gov.ru 2018a)

The ICSSs had substantial influence upon numerous legislative acts in the 2020–21 cycle. In November 2020, when Navalny’s FBK had been listed as a foreign agent, the ICSS of the Federation Council added a further application for the Law on Foreign Agents (2012/2014); the proposal was launched as yet another legal amendment concerning “improper candidates” (*negodnye kandidaty*) and stipulated that any presidential candidate who was acting on behalf of “foreign powers” should be termed a “foreign agent” while campaigning (Veretennikova and Galanina 2020). It had allegedly spent three years discussing this project—but that assertion bordered on the absurd, since it merely stipulated introducing the term “foreign agent” in the legislation on presidential elections. Klimov explained: “We do not prohibit their participation in the elections, but we would like to make it clear for the voter who they are voting for” (Veretennikova and Galanina 2020).

The ICSS of the Federation Council has also been the major lobbyist behind the changes to the Law on Education (2021), which stipulates that the state is to license all educational activities in Russia, from public seminars to workshops and internet webinars. The Russian academic community signed a petition to stop this law, but it was forcefully promoted by the chairpersons of both ad hoc committees, and was signed by Putin on April 5, 2021 (Duma.gov.ru and Council.gov.ru 2021). Klimov, after having seen the law signed, stated that the academicians opposing it were “unconsciously aiding foreign powers in their attempts to undermine Russian sovereignty,” and that the absence of regulation of such activity “creates a foundation for unrestricted propagandistic activities from the part of anti-Russian forces, and under the guise of educational activities” (Kostarnova and Chernykh 2021).

CONSTITUTIONAL BARGAINS: RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION (2020–2021)

The ICSSs would provide both chambers with a powerful agency, and they also improved cross-chamber legislative coordination. As the 2018 elections approached, new initiatives were launched, alongside restrictions in media and technology. A special legislative practice emerged—concepts like the “foreign agent” made their way into new laws, undermining their liberal content. As the Yabloko legal expert, Elena Dubrovina, wrote: “These new restrictions inscribe themselves in the newly established traditions of the authorities (*vlast’*) to adopt multiple amendments for the sake of one of them” (Dubrovina 2021, 58). The legal amendments adopted in this short period built on the restrictive legislative cycle from 2012 to 2017, while incorporating new cross-chamber legal amendments from both ICSSs in the Federal Assembly. More important, however, were legislative acts that served to empower law enforcement agencies, and further amendments to the Law on Media and the Criminal Code. Table 4 provides an overview of 97 legal amendments, all launched in the fervent legislative period from 2020 to 2021. In an accompanying note, the Yabloko party claimed that the bulk of these ran contrary to the principles of a democratic state

structure, the supremacy of law, the principle of popular power and pluralism, the supremacy of international law, and regional self-government—all enshrined in the 1993 Constitution (Yabloko.ru 2021).

In the original data from May 2021 (Dubrovina 2021), there were 40 projects that were in the process of being adopted. As of February 2022, a total of 5 had been rejected, and 23 adopted, and by April 2024, a total of 86 were adopted. Compared to the cycle 2012–17, the executive had become more active, sponsoring 42 of the 97 legal acts. Nineteen of the drafts presented by the president were constitutional amendments and part of the package presented by Putin in the Federal Assembly address on January 15, 2020; government legislative acts were distributed across several categories. Also, the ad hoc committees on sovereignty had succeeded in co-sponsoring eight legal initiatives, mainly in the sphere of strengthening liability for alleged encroachments on Russian sovereignty, and the electoral system.

A juggernaut of cross-chamber restrictive legal initiatives was set in motion. Liability for a wider set of “extremist” violations was intensified; all three legal acts adopted in this category were sponsored by both chambers and overseen by the head of the constitutional amendment process, Krasnoïarsk senator Andrei Klishas. Amendments introduced a new category of extremist activity—calls for disuniting Russia, or active separatism—and fines were set for publicizing such calls (Zakonoproekt № 989291-7 2020, Zakonoproekt № 985175-7 2020). This involved amendments to paragraph 13.15 in the Administrative Code, containing fines for “the misuse of the freedom of mass media” (Dubrovina 2021). Also, new legal amendments were added in the category “cultural-historical heritage.” Several of them were supervised by Irina Iarovaia: an amendment criminalizing “public desecration” of the military symbols of Russia; “public insults of the honor of veterans” from the Second World War; and the distribution of “knowingly false information” about the activities of the USSR in the Second World War, raising fines for such violations to between 3 and 5 million rubles (Zakonoproekt № 1050733-7 2021). Similar legal terms were introduced to the Criminal Code paragraph 354.1 on the rehabilitation of Nazism—here with a maximum punishment of three to five years’ forced labor or imprisonment (Zakonoproekt № 1050812-7 2021). Other amendments introduced changes to the Law on Education, introducing the term “educational activities” outside the framework of existing educational programmes, banning activities that spread “false information” about cultural, religious, historical, or national traditions of the peoples of Russia (Zakonoproekt № 1057895-7 2021). Obviously, this paragraph would serve to censor public lectures and debates, and it was adopted against protests from the academic community.

Criminal liability for violations of the Law on Foreign Agents and Undesirable Organizations (Dima Iakovlev) was strengthened further. Six of ten amendments were sponsored by both chambers; five of these were drafted by the ICSSs. A law from December 2020 introduced amendments to five legal acts, including the Law on Media and the Law on State Secrets (Zakonoproekt № 1057914-7 2020). Unlike earlier amendments, this legal act was placed in the category “security and defense” and introduced the term “physical foreign agent and individual” into the Law on State Secrets.

A July 2021 amendment to the Criminal Code reinforced criminal liability also for “undesirable organizations” by subjecting any volunteer taking part in the work of such an

TABLE 4. Restrictive Legislation and Constitutional Amendments (2020–2021)

Legal Category	Number of		Cross-Chamber Initiative	Deputy Group Initiative (Duma)	Ad hoc Committee Initiative	Government Initiative	Single Deputy Initiative	Presidential Initiative	Other
	Laws	Adopted*							
Extremism	4	4	3			1			
Cultural perceptions/historical heritage	7	5	2	1	1		3		
Transnational organizations and NGOs	10	10	1	1	5	2	1		
Electoral legislation	12	10	1	7	2	1		1	
Public domain legislation	4	4		1			3		
Instruments of repression	6	5		1		3	2		
Information technology and media	8	7		3		3	2		
Law enforcement structures	15	13	3	6		5		1	
Local administration	5	3				4			1
Political system (balance of power)	21	20	1				1	19	
Federal structure	5	5	3			2			
Sum	97	86	14	20	8	21	12	21	1

Sources: Council.gov.ru (2017, 2018b); O vnesenii izmenenii v otdel'nye zakonodatel'nye akty RF (v chasti utochneniia prav i obiazannostei sub'ektov vypolniaushchikh funktsii inostrannogo agenta) [On amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation (in terms of clarifying the rights and obligations of entities performing the functions of a foreign agent)] (2021).
 * Original data as of June 2021, but updated by author in April 2024.

organization to fines ranging from 300,000 to 500,000 rubles, and leaders of such organizations—regardless of their citizenship—would risk up to five years of forced labor or between two and six years’ imprisonment (Zakonoproekt № 1165661-7 2012). Notably, the 2020–21 cycle also saw deep-ranging changes to the Law on Elections. Building on the restrictions introduced in the NGO sector, the legislature imported several concepts into electoral legislation: one amendment floated by the Duma ICSS prohibited any former member of an extremist organization (in the preceding three years before the adoption of the law) to run as candidate to the Duma; this applied not only to active members, but also to financial contributors, volunteers, and associates (Zakonoproekt № 1165649-7 2021).

Government legislation provided full immunity to police forces for actions conducted during demonstrations, and granted unhindered police access to private flats and public transport upon request (Federal'nyi zakon № 955380-7 2021). State protection measures, including immunity for participation in state-initiated anti-terrorist operations, were extended to members of the National Guard (Rosgvardiia) (Zakonoproekt № 1090156-7 2021), a legal amendment that built on the rapid presidential establishment of this unit in 2016 (Zakonoproekt № 1037356-6 2016); similar protective measures were extended to civilians in the armed forces and special services who had taken part in anti-terrorist operations initiated by the state, or who intended to do so (Federal'nyi zakon № 1075003-7 2021).

Finally, the government also launched two legal amendments granting amnesty to servicemen who had unwillingly been involved in affairs of corruption: this involved first a correction to what was termed “improvement of measures of responsibility for corruption offenses,” whereby the term “release of officials from liability for non-compliance with anti-corruption prohibitions and restrictions in cases where these violations are considered independent of the violator” was introduced (Federal'nyi zakon № 1078992-7 2020 [adopted in 2023]), and subsequent changes to the Labour Code (Federal'nyi zakon № 1078988-7 2020 [adopted in 2023]). An additional two amendments provided expanded immunity to executive elites: first, the amendment to the law on Civil Service, the “Patrushev amendment,” which abolished the age limit for state servicemen—three months before Patrushev turned 70 (Zakonoproekt № 1099092-7 2021), and a cross-chamber legal project sponsored by Klishas, extending full immunity to the president for any violation of Russian law prior to, during, and after time in office (Zakonoproekt № 1049598-7 2020; Meduza.io 2020).

The dense patchwork of restrictions effectively shielded the system from outside interference, by prohibiting almost anything that might affect regime stability. Moreover, the constitutional amendments of 2020 enhanced the status of senators, and secured full immunity for the president and his closest circle. The specific purpose of these changes was to cement the personalized rule of Russia’s president. It seems reasonable to assume, however, not only that presidential powers were enhanced, but also that some preparations were made to preserve the incumbent’s heritage. The amendments did involve a separate project called “Sirius,” a legislative act designed to create a specific version of the Skolkovo (“Russian Silicon Valley”) project at the site of the 2014 Olympic village. This legislation channeled substantial government investments in infrastructure, science, and social support (Federal'nyi zakon № 1115645-7 2021), including amendments to the

tax system for this entity (Federal'nyi zakon № III64II-7 2021). A 68-page cross-chamber legal initiative outlined this territory as an investment park for scientific innovation, a place for “self-realization and development of talents, implementation of the priorities of the scientific and technological development of the Russian Federation” (Zakonoproekt № IO5I7I8-7 2020).⁶

CONCLUSIONS

This article has argued that Russia’s legislature has played a specific role in designing legislation that coerces contentious politics and insulates a personalized authoritarian regime from external and domestic pressures. The article has traced legislative amendments over time and demonstrated how restrictive legislative changes have evolved into effective tools of repression. Legislators have seen domestic protests as a product of foreign influence, rather than an expression of Russian grievances. As a result, citizens’ constitutional rights are victimized in a cocktail of securitization and safeguarding the regime against external influence.

These changes may stem from a larger set of systemic dysfunctionalities. The undermining of constitutional rights may be a feature throughout the establishment of a resource-demanding dominant party system (Dawisha 2014), and also a consequence of a hybrid regime’s increasing reliance on coercion to shape expectations in society. Moreover, individual legislators may have different motivations to engage in repression, such as public visibility, serving former networks, or personal career opportunities. What the article seeks to evidence, however, is that these processes have gained in salience since 2012; on the one hand, the Federal Assembly performs functions that insulate the regime and protects it; on the other, the legislature has also been a driver in imposing new restrictions. This is not to suggest that the Federal Assembly plays an autonomous role in the balance of power. Rather, it has served the purpose of designing expectations, and reducing the effects of contestation of power. While such a function may be common to authoritarian regimes, the circumstances and processes leading up to the 2020 constitutional revision in Russia are complex and gradual. In redesigning legislation, legislators seek to preserve at least a scaffolding of “legality,” which in this case has been framed as the “state-building and the constitutional rights of citizens.” The result of this legislative spree is, however, that the last remnants of constitutionally enshrined freedoms and rights have been taken off the table. ■

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6. Media reports have indicated that the Sirius project emerged as a proposal from Putin, and the official media have framed it not as “a closed elite club of selected individuals, but as an open national platform for the work with talents, where the most up-to-date technological devices and competence will be concentrated” (Rg.ru 2020).

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