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Russia Dissolves Oldest Opposition Party

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PARNAS Party at a picket for free Internet in Yekaterinburg in 2019. **Ivan Abaturov (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Russia's Supreme Court has ordered the closure of the country's oldest liberal opposition party, the independent news website Mediazona reported Thursday.

The Party of People's Freedom (Parnas) is the second iteration of the Republican Party of Russia, which was originally formed in 1990 and advocated for human rights and federalism before it too was dissolved. Parnas' members have faced persecution and assassinations in recent years.

Parnas leader Mikhail Kasyanov, who served as President Vladimir Putin's first prime minister in 2000-04, fled Russia after criticizing the invasion of Ukraine in mid-2022.

According to Mediazona's report from the courtroom, Russia's Supreme Court sided with the Justice Ministry's request to liquidate Parnas.

The Justice Ministry argued that Parnas' number of offices had shrunk to less than half of Russia's regions, according to Mediazona.

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The court included the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories in its assessment, a move Parnas disputed "because they have no full-fledged executive authorities there."

Thursday's decision mirrors the 2007 Supreme Court ruling to dissolve Parnas' predecessor, the Republican Party of Russia.

Parnas was formed three years later by Kasyanov and prominent opposition figures including Boris Nemtsov, who was shot dead outside the Kremlin in 2015.

Parnas' other leading figures, Vladimir Kara-Murza and Ilya Yashin, are currently serving lengthy prison sentences on charges linked to their opposition to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and Russia's other liberal opposition party Yabloko have in previous years entertained — but ultimately turned down — joining forces with Parnas.

In its last major campaign for Russian parliament in 2016, Parnas received less than 1% of the vote and Kasyanov bowed out of the 2018 presidential campaign.

The latest Supreme Court decision has not entered into force and is subject to appeal.

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