
Police Regime in Georgia and Georgians in Russia

Avtandil Kavtoradze (Georgia)
<http://en.fondsk.ru> - 20/8/2008

I am not a politician " I have dedicated most of my life to sport and to the art of photography. I may be wrong, therefore, but I want to tell what we, Georgians, have seen happen in our country after M. Saakashvili became President. He was propelled to presidency when the country was plagued by conflicts, unresolved problems with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and a deep socioeconomic crisis, and when the population had to survive without elementary living conditions. The difficulties resulted in intense migration from Georgia, mostly to Russia but also to other CIS countries.

Frankly speaking, the Rose Revolution bred hopes that things could yet be improved in Georgia and that the country led by its young President would evolve into a stable and peaceful democracy.

Clearly such expectations have not materialized. Moreover, very quickly Georgia run by Saakashvili with the help of his US advisers turned into a typical police state.

Here are just a few figures. The average monthly pay in today's Georgia is \$50-60, the subsistence level being \$15-20. At the same time, a Georgian army officer is paid \$1,500-\$3,000 and a policeman - \$500-\$600 a month. A Georgian soldier in Iraq is paid \$800 a month plus a \$20,000 bonus after 6 months of service in accord with a special Presidential decree. Not bad at all! But these people comprise a very limited category of the population whose loyalty is thus bought by the government which gives them " shall we say " highly specific tasks, while the general background is the socioeconomic crisis in the country.

The dilemma is either to make real efforts to improve the situation within Georgia or to divert the population's discontent towards its neighbors.

It is also an aspect of Saakashvili's domestic politics which manifested itself during the conflict with South Ossetia and Russia that a normal civic society failed to emerge in Georgia during Saakashvili's reign. I do not even mean opposition as it is practically nonexistent in Georgia. As far as I could learn from the official media, the country's opposition parties united around the President when the fighting erupted and thus earned his "deep gratitude".

I want people in Russia to be aware that many Georgians see things the way I do. However, in Georgia there are no mechanisms of expressing aversion to Saakashvili's politics. The social and political life in the country is fully subdued by the authority and the puppet opposition.

Imagine for a moment that all state borders stopped to exist. Believe me, under the circumstances most Georgians would immediately move to Russia for permanent residence.

Nevertheless, Russia shares to an extent the responsibility for what has happened in South Ossetia. Georgia braced for the war quite openly and its forces in the conflict zone were concentrated at the very Russian border. Provocative shellings of South Ossetia's territory took place regularly. Given all of the above, Russian politicians should have been more active bringing the attention of international organizations to the military preparations and appealing to the public opinion globally. Instead, Moscow reacted when the aggression had already become an accomplished fact. Nor was

Russia ready for the information war Saakashvili launched with the Western support during the conflict.

What has happened to the Georgian intelligentsia which remained totally silent at the time of the drama is a separate issue. It appears that its stance is exemplified by movie actor V. Kikabidze's refusal of the Friendship of Nations Order awarded to him on his 70th birthday by the Russian President

Many of the prominent figures from the Georgian cultural circuit have become owners of costly assets in both Russia and Georgia. They have close visible and invisible ties with the Tbilisi regime, fear what Saakashvili can undertake with respect to their relatives in Georgia, and, at the same time, accept money and privileges dispensed by the Georgian President. These people handle the financial flows which in many ways support the current political regime in Georgia.

Georgian state organizations work closely with the Georgian diaspora in Moscow. A couple years ago I went to a meeting of "Georgians in Russia" at which elections were held and a report on the past work was delivered. The gathering was attended by the Georgian Migration Minister who admitted that Georgia invested seriously in the Georgian community in Russia and expected to see the corresponding response in return. Recently we have seen what kind of response was required as the severe conflict was unfolding "silence is also a kind of a position.

<http://en.fondsk.ru/article.php?id=1566>
