
Saakashvili is leaving ? It must be a joke

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Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili has said he will not violate the Constitution by running for a third term. But Russia, Georgia's other neighbors and Georgians should postpone their celebrations.

First, Saakashvili's powers will expire only in 2013.

Second, he has made fantastic promises before only to break them, so this announcement could be another of his jokes. He could mean it when he said it, but the situation is changing so fast that nobody knows what will happen in 2013.

And third and last, the next president may grant Saakashvili immunity for his illegal actions, or Saakashvili may decide to stay for reasons of "political expediency."

This is probably why the Georgian opposition has not been assured by the president's promise, and said it would continue to insist on his early resignation. Unfortunately, the opposition cannot do much.

After the regime used force to disperse a dissident march in Tbilisi last year, closed the opposition media and threatened to physically do away with opponents, few Georgians are willing to suffer for the truth. The latest opposition demonstrations were small, although the number of Saakashvili's supporters has not increased after he lost the five-day war for South Ossetia.

The people have become apathetic, for obvious reasons. They still remember policemen using truncheons against them and are giving up the struggle.

The regime has been changed three times, once through a coup, another time in elections, and lastly in the romantic Revolution of Roses, moving from radical nationalist Gamsakhurdia to "Silver Fox" Shevardnadze to the all-smiles Misha.

But this has not improved the situation in the country.

Moreover, problems are growing. Poverty and corruption have not been eradicated, democracy has not taken root, and Georgia's foreign policy is still tied to Washington. And lastly, Georgia has lost Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

But who says the next president will be better? The new team will distribute high posts among friends and relatives and redirect the flow of funds into their own purses, but this will not improve life for the ordinary people. This is why they have become apathetic.

Saakashvili will not leave soon, unless the new U.S. administration decides to "spread" democracy to Georgia without him.

I think the White House and Western Europe have grown tired of Saakashvili's escapades, but there are few, if any, other candidates for his post.

Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, one of the more rational Georgian politicians of the past decade, died a suspicious death in a private flat in Tbilisi in February 2005, allegedly poisoned by gas from a faulty heater. Not surprisingly, all traces lead to Saakashvili, because Zhvania was a serious rival.

Another prominent Georgian politician, former parliament speaker Nino Burdzhanadze, has long joined the opposition and forced her husband to leave his state post in order to keep his hands clean. She is not active now, but is possibly waiting for her hour of glory.

Judging by the logic of the recent Georgian history, the next president should have been billionaire Badri Patarkatsishvili, a semi-criminal businessman, but he was found dead at his Surrey mansion in February 2008, aged 52, a month after running unsuccessfully for the Georgian presidency.

Another abhorrent aspirant could be Irakli Okruashvili, Saakashvili's former friend and his Defense Minister from December 2004 until his dismissal in November 2006, who has emigrated and lives abroad.

I am sorry for Georgians, whose country severed relations with Russia and headed for the New World, which it has allegedly conquered. But no one can live on U.S. hand-me-downs forever, and the current global crisis has affected even the world's richest countries, which are saving on everything and will definitely save on Georgia.

Georgia may try to join NATO, but its accession is hindered by the problem of borders and Saakashvili's unquenchable thirst for provocations, which the pragmatic Old Europe cannot accept or even understand.

In a word, Georgia wore black at the fifth anniversary of the Revolution of Roses. Only one high guest came to Tbilisi for the celebrations, Polish President Lech Kaczynski, the biggest Russia-hater in Europe.

Worse still, his visit was crowned with a scandal. Acting in violation of the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements on the settlement of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, Saakashvili invited Kaczynski to drive unattended but with a group of journalists to a South Ossetian roadblock. No wonder they were stopped there.

Not even Poles believed Saakashvili when he said Ossetians had shot at them. As Kaczynski said sarcastically, if they wanted to kill them, they would have done so, especially since they were shooting from a distance of only 30 meters.

Compared with the general euphoria five years ago, this is indeed a very sad jubilee.

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