Will Saakashvilli Remain Free?

The official representative of the Investigative Committee of Russia (ICR) Vladimir Markin said that it may file an international arrest warrant for ex-Georgian President, Mikhail Saakashvili, as well as former ministers David Kezerashvili and Vano Merabishvili, who headed the defense ministry and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, correspondingly. As Mr. Markin explained, this “previous leadership” of Georgia established a goal in 2008 of destroying Ossetians in South Ossetia.”

“It is precisely by their orders on August 7, 2008 that the targeted shelling of civilians and Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia began,” said Markin. According his words, within the context of the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the war in 2008, there is undisputable evidence as to the criminal plans of the Georgian leadership. In so much as the change in leadership in Georgia has led only to Saakashvilli’s resignation, from Russia’s perspective, they do not exclude the possibility of bringing him and other Georgian leaders to criminal justice through international organizations. This is by far the first time such conversations have occurred over the possibility of bringing the ex-Georgian President to trial. Moscow stated its intentions immediately after the conclusion of military activity in August, 2008. However, it was obvious that such an undertaking was futile. The situation dramatically changed for Saakashvilli, and not in a positive sense, after the defeat in parliamentary elections of the ruling “United National Movement” (UNM). His opponents from “Georgian Dream” (GM) built their election campaign on the premise of restoring justice. With this, it is necessary to understand, that former leaders are to answer for their crimes. And Mikhail Saakashvili is at the head of the line. And perhaps it is even probable that the newly elected authorities would keep the promises they made to the electorate. However, support from the West for the losing party placed unprecedented pressure on the new Georgian leadership. In such a situation it became obvious that Saakashvilli would not be brought to justice. Especially since that certain constitutional nuances of the judiciary system in Georgia remained under the influence of certain former authorities, “nationalists.”

As a result, from the leadership of UNM, only ex-Interior Minister, Vano Merabishvili, was brought to trail and convicted. Criminal proceedings have been initiated against others and are ongoing.

Defense Minister, David Kezerashvili, immediately after being defeated in elections fled abroad, but he was recently arrested in France. The story surrounding his arrest remains unclear. On the one hand, Tbilisi managed to include him on Interpol’s wanted list. But on the other hand, Paris refused to confirm information that Kezerashvili was arrested by Interpol; and French justice officials have their own questions for the ex-minister for suspicion of smuggling weapons in rather large quantities. At the same time French authorities have promised to deal with Tbilisi’s request to have Kezerashvili extradited back home to face accusations on abuse of power, smuggling and bootlegging alcohol and tax evasion etc. However, some of the charges that were filed in absentia have already been rejected by a Tbilisi Court. Kezerashvili himself continues to be in France under his own recognizance; but the main person of interest of the ICR is Mikhail Saakashvili. The former Georgian leader fled and took up lecturing at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in the United States. This occupation seems to have ended as soon as the Ukrainian crisis erupted. At any rate, Saakashvilli is seen more often in Kiev than he is seen in the United States. He stood at the podium on the Maidan and gave speeches. He has become an advisor to Klichko. They have made overtures to the fact that he be in line to receive a high ranking position in the Ukrainian government.
Within the interval, he has twice ignored the invitation of the Georgian Prosecutor’s Office to appear as a witness. He has also refused to answer questions via Skype. These calls by Georgian authorities Saakashvili uses to his own advantage, declaring to the entire world that the government of his native country continues to harass him and that he cannot return home, because as soon as he stepped on Georgian soil, he would be placed behind bars. This doesn’t correspond to reality though. The leading representatives of the Georgian state essentially gave him a pardon, declaring that Saakashvili would not face prosecution in the interests of Georgia becoming a democratic country. There was a stipulation, “if a particularly serious crime was not committed” sounded like justification to the electorate which had been promised the ex-president would be put on trial.

“The Georgian authorizes intentions to hold Saakashvili legally responsible, if such intentions ever existed, then it was only the first time. And then came Washington’s verdict, the former President was not to be touched, said the author and expert of Russian-Georgian relations, lawyer Konstantin Chikviladze. “Up until now, in Georgia, as well as Ukraine, if really they fall under the thumb of the United States, than anything different should not be expected.” According to Chikviladze, today in Georgia there are forces that will unconditionally and unreservedly fulfill all the instructions of Washington, as did the previous government; and therefore one should not expect “appropriate decisions in this regard.”

The attempt on the part of the ICR to file an international arrest warrant for Saakashvili is likely to be ineffective. That is, it is possible to declare intentions, but would it in actual fact lead to anything? The Ukrainian crisis has become the new “watershed” between Russia and the West. At the peak of the confrontation, there is no end in sight and the West will go along with Moscow’s reasoning, as friendly relations with the former Georgian president are not possible and at least the ICR could at least consider some course of action. Does the ICR not understand, and isn’t it obvious that the surge of interest in Saakashvili is connected to the sharp rise of anti-Russian rhetoric in Ukraine.

The last time Saakashvili was seen in Kiev was at the inauguration of Poroshenko; and he again remarked with a row of rather loud statements. First, he advised the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, to under no circumstance to concede to the activists in southeastern Ukraine. Secondly, he denied reports that he has taken a position in the Ukrainian government, not even in the role of an adviser, as he “likes to take decisions, not to give advice.” His third remark centered on the fact that Georgian authorities have warned that “Putin is preparing something in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region in order to undermine or prevent the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU.” Fourth, he said that if the Georgian authorities to turn to him with a proposal, he is prepared to defend its interests in the international arena, using his connections.

It was discussed with journalists after the inauguration that he had departed for Colorado at the request of one of the mothers of a Georgian cadets being trained in the U.S. Air Force Academy. The mother of the future pilot could not go to the solemn graduation ceremony and on Facebook commented that the only person who can succeed in Colorado is Mikhail Saakashvili. And the former president decided not to deny this woman’s expectations. “I canceled all my appointments in Ukraine in order to be present at your son’s ceremony,” he said wrote in Facebook.

For all the years of Saakashvili’s presidency, he preached of his own hyperactivity. For him, it was not difficult for one day to visit different parts of the country. But even with this in mind, the sudden departure to Colorado is perhaps too much, even for him. Informed sources, however, have suggested that he could just as quickly flee Ukraine if he were to suddenly face “threats” there.

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