Why is Saakashvili in Georgia Now?

Mikheil Saakashvili's theatrical return after eight years in exile and flight from Georgia, where he has been convicted twice for various criminal offences, has attracted increased attention not only in this Caucasus country. The very moment of his appearance in Georgia - on the eve of the local elections in which more than 40 political parties will participate, as well as the arrest of the politician and his transfer to the jail of Rustavi, located near the Georgian capital, has added zest to the event.

According to the Georgian prosecutor's office, law-enforcement agencies are investigating Saakashvili for illegally crossing the state border. Saakashvili is also known to have been convicted in absentia in the murder case of banker Sandro Grgvliani and the beating of MP Valeriy Gelashvili. He was sentenced to three years in prison in the first case and six in the second. Saakashvili is also a defendant in the cases of dispersing an opposition rally, pogroming Imedi TV and embezzling state budget funds. Mikheil (Mikheko) Saakashvili faces a total of nine years in prison for these convictions. But other criminal cases are still pending and have not been filed, so he may still receive more sentences.

Saakashvili is well known for his active involvement in the "color revolutions" in the former Soviet Union. He led Georgia from 2004 to 2013, at a time when the country had an ignominious "war with Russia" following Mikheko's attempts to carry out an armed provocation on the border with Russia at the behest of Washington. After his retirement, Saakashvili lived in Brooklyn for a while before turning to politics in Ukraine after Viktor Yanukovych was overthrown in 2014 and was by no means the only Georgian politician to hold senior positions in Kyiv with outright US sponsorship.
Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili issued a statement on October 01 regarding the detention of Mikheil Saakashvili and ruled out the possibility of pardoning him. She admitted that she would never forget the eyes of the people who had suffered during Saakashvili’s rule and “who waited for justice and did not live to see it today.” She recalled that she herself had fought the Saakashvili regime, which “trampled on human rights, free business and the law, and sacrificed human health and lives to maintain its power.”

Saakashvili’s return to Georgian soil - like much of his time in office - looked like “political theatre”, even The New York Times noted. In particular, the former president spent several days openly mocking the Georgian government, which is now controlled by his political opponents.

There is no doubt that Saakashvili was aware of his impending arrest. Therefore, the reasons behind his openly theatrical return to Georgia and his contemptuous and mocking attitude towards the current Georgian authorities are not difficult to guess, if we consider that Washington and the US intelligence agencies are behind all his actions, as well as his nomination to the post of the head of Georgia back in the day. They decided to play the “Mikheko card” and thus directly influence internal political events in the country during the election period.

This is confirmed by the accusations the Georgian authorities received the day before from the West who accuses them of “deviating from democracy and changing their foreign policy course.” The statements from Washington and Brussels hint at a revision of the attitude to Tbilisi, allegedly “changing its set of values”. This sudden aggravation in relations between Georgia and the US together with its Western allies is largely the result of the ruling Georgian Dream (GM) withdrawal from the Charles Michel Accord to end the domestic political crisis.

The US Embassy in Georgia stated that Washington is “very angry at the Georgian Dream, which has strayed from the principles of democracy.” As usual, a group of congressmen and senators from both major parties criticized the GD, interspersing their criticism with wishes and readiness to help Georgia return to democracy. Finally, European Parliament member Viola von Cramon, who arrived on a special mission to Tbilisi, announced that “the GD's decision benefited ... only the Kremlin.” As a clear pressure on the ruling GD party and an attempt to force it to pursue policies that favor the West, the European Union plans to consider suspending visa-free travel for Georgian citizens on 13 October.

In the meantime, the Saakashvili show continues to be played out publicly by the West. “We urge Georgian authorities to ensure that Mr Saakashvili is afforded fair treatment in accordance with Georgian law, and Georgia's international human rights commitments and obligations,” the US Department of State said.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba pledged “not to leave the former Odesa Governor to his fate,” clearly hinting at Kyiv's possible active participation in Washington's theatrics with Mikheil Saakashvili. Mikheko has already hastened to declare himself not an ordinary criminal in his homeland, but a political prisoner, and to make it more theatrical, he announced the start of a hunger strike. In doing so, he obviously counts on the support of the United States, which since 1991-1992 has firmly settled in Georgia, built a huge embassy in Tbilisi and feels very at home there. It was the US who brought up ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili, as well as many Georgian politicians. In addition, together with the Europeans, Washington has brought non-governmental organizations to Georgia, which have been trying to rule in this Caucasian country for a long time. Meanwhile, US Ambassador Kelly C. Degnan is imposing the US external administration on Georgia, trying to take control of internal forces in the country in “her iron hands” and establish close supervision over the activities of political movements that Washington assesses as undesirable.

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