

Georgian Dream Will Be Shattered

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Several weeks before Georgia's parliamentary elections on Oct. 1, the Russian army staged military exercises near Georgia's border. Fortunately, Russia's armed forces did not have to help the opposition win the vote. It won on its own. Just as fortunately, the Georgian opposition did not have to appeal to President Vladimir Putin to come crush the bloody tyrant, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Georgian people themselves handed a huge victory to the opposition, thereby accomplishing what Putin could never do in his 12 years in power.

In 2003, there was no electricity, heating or streetlights in most of Georgia. In Tbilisi, almost everyone had been mugged or had their car stolen — or knew someone who was a victim of these crimes.

The crime rate in Georgia is now the lowest in the world, and the level of confidence in the police force is one of the highest in the world. What's more, when asked: "Do you feel safe on the street at night?" more Georgians answer "yes" than respondents anywhere else in the world.

Under Saakashvili's rule, Georgia was transformed from a failed state run by mafia bosses and corrupt bureaucrats into a country with one of the most transparent government infrastructures in the world.

And it turns out that all of that meant nothing to Georgian voters. During the parliamentary vote, more than half of voters voted for an opposition that openly consists of the very same mafia bosses, Russian-Georgian businesspeople who made their fortunes in shady schemes in the 1990s, and all of the same criminal and political "nobility" from the era of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, whom Saakashvili replaced in 2003. They all grouped themselves into a coalition with the infantile name of the Georgian Dream.

What type of "dream" are they referring to? Lying on a couch all day and dreaming that someone will give you a washing machine — or better yet, an apartment? This is the lumpen's dream.

The Georgian experiment has now essentially ended, and it doesn't really matter who wins the presidential election in October 2013. If Saakashvili's party wins, it will try to retain its popularity by using the country's small federal budget to fund social programs catered to those who feel the government should give them a free ride. If the opposition wins, it will be the same scenario, only much worse.

In reform, as in war, each step is simple but exceedingly difficult to take. Georgian society as a whole benefited from Saakashvili's reforms, but the most powerful and richest segment of the population — the mafia bosses and corrupt officials — did not. By creating a transparent government and upholding the principle of equality, Saakashvili did not create a group of millionaires beholden to him who were ready to prove at all costs that their party and their leader were the best on Earth.

A transparent system of governance can be created in eight years, but that is apparently not enough time to educate voters to stand behind it.

Thus, Georgian voters did what Putin could not: They destroyed Georgia's future. In a poor country, universal suffrage and radical economic reforms are rarely a winning combination.

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