The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Georgia's Democracy Needs More Fair Trials

By Paul Rimple

October 14, 2012



Former Georgian Prime Minister Nino Burjanadze has appeared from her lair to call on the incoming parliament to release those "political prisoners" authorities arrested in May, when she launched a ridiculous attempt to force President Mikheil Saakashvili from power. Burjanadze says prosecutors, judges and false witnesses should be punished, but she doesn't get it. We're supposed to be living in a different Georgia today. People must be tried first.

At least this is what Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose opposition coalition won the parliamentary elections on Oct. 1, promised when he pledged to bring democracy to Georgia.

Burjanadze was part of the team that established a state-controlled judicial system that collected money from defendants in plea-bargain arrangements. This basically turned into a policy of legalized extortion. People paid money to the state to avoid trial. At first, it was OK because the ruling party targeted people everybody accepted were corrupt. But when the system became institutionalized as a draconian zero-tolerance policy, it soon touched

virtually every Georgian in the country. Such a system cannot be dismantled overnight.

Many members of Ivanishvili's electorate are angry, like Burjanadze. They have their personal tallies of wrongs and expect to see the same kind of revenge the ruling party dished out on crooks in 2004 applied to them now. But Ivanishvili can't do this.

Everybody is closely watching whether he'll repeat the pattern of political retribution and renege on his word to refrain from a policy of revenge. He has, however, said controversial cases of Saakashvili's government would be tried and the guilty punished. That was enough to send Justice Minister Zurab Adeishvili packing. Deputy Defense Minister David Akhalaia and his brother, Interior Minister Bacho Akhalaia, are also missing in action, while Defense Minister Dmitry Shahskin is on an extended vacation in the U.S. Saakashvili has even issued a decree that government officials can use their diplomatic passports for one year if they are fired.

Ivanishvili is in a precarious situation. There are many people who think that democratic elections got Ivanishvili into power, so he should be their preferred autocrat. But these people are impatient and could turn against Ivanishvili just as quickly as they turned against Saakashvili. Ivanishvili hasn't yet clearly explained that the just society that Georgians demand means everybody is entitled to a fair trial and the democracy-in-the-making means he must work with some people his supporters would like to see imprisoned.

Paul Rimple is a journalist in Tbilisi.

Related articles:

- Don't Wait for a Ivanishvili Thaw With Russia
- Tbilisi's Soft Power of Wine, Smiles and Tourism
- New Georgian Cabinet Sees No Quick Fix for Russian Ties

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/10/14/georgias-democracy-needs-more-fair-trials-a18536