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Protesters Beating a Dead Horse in Georgian Streets

By Paul Rimple

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Thousands of people did not gather in front of the Presidential Palace in Tbilisi a week ago to demand Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's resignation, as some loose-cannon media sources reported. There were, however, hundreds of people crammed on a narrow, old street, which is great for the cameras. But they can't frame the other 1.5 million people in Tbilisi who were not protesting.

The organizers of these protests represent fringe groups that lost their relevance long ago. They are not elected members of government. Their supporters have little understanding of democracy, recall the good old days of the Soviet Union and will actively protest against Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili.

One of the leaders, Temur Shashiashvili, was a governor of the Imereti region during Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency. He proposed naming an Imeretian mountain after Arnold Schwarzenegger — until the Rose Revolution deposed him and upset his plans. He was next

seen leading a handful of supporters to protest the transfer of the statue of King David from the center of Tbilisi to greet arrivals across town. He said it was an insult to have the horse's hindquarters pointing toward the city center.

It's not that these protesters aren't raising a legitimate issue. To remedy his blunder of crushing street protests in November 2007, Saakashvili resigned and was re-elected in snap elections in January 2008. Technically, his five-year term has expired, but the constitution stipulates that presidential elections should be held in October this year. Immediately after his victory in the October 2012 parliamentary elections, Ivanishvili said Saakashvili should resign, then backtracked and stated that he should remain in office until October. Nevertheless, a bevy of bunglers have taken this constitutional glitch to the streets. But it's ridiculous. Saakashvili is a lame-duck president whose party lost the parliamentary elections. What is there to protest?

Georgian political mentality is largely infantile. These people are much more concerned about jobs than unseating Saakashvili. Their leaders are sucking up to Ivanishvili by exploiting this discontent and whipping up anti-Saakashvili hysteria, the only thing they really know how to do. The concept of organizing supporters into working committees that hammer out ways to improve their communities is completely alien.

These protests are actually undermining Ivanishvili by promoting a constant state of agitation. It certainly doesn't help when the media see several hundred people on a street and call it "a nation against Saakashvili."

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