The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Georgia Dream Makes Power Sharing Difficult

By Paul Rimple

February 10, 2013



When Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili conceded defeat in October's parliamentary elections, it was supposed to usher in a new era in the country's democratic development. We were so excited at the implications of a pluralistic parliament that somebody had actually coined the term "power sharing" without realizing that in Georgia, the term is an oxymoron. The moniker morphed into the fanciful "cohabitation" until Friday, when the world saw the fantasy for what it really is: a disgrace.

On Feb. 8, Saakashvili was scheduled to make his annual state-of-the-nation address in parliament, but the Georgian Dream, or GD, parliamentary majority usurped the president's constitutional function to speak from the chamber. For some crazy reason, the GD didn't want to let the president perform his duties until it had agreed on constitutional amendments that would limit presidential powers first.

"We respect the constitution, including the rights of the president, but at the same time we

respect ourselves as well," said GD parliamentary speaker Davit Usupashvili. In other words, "We are more important than the constitution."

A truculent Saakashvili decided to make his speech in the National Library instead. Hundreds of protesters, including many prisoners recently freed on a mass amnesty law, surrounded the building to prevent him from entering. Impotent police could not protect members of Saakashvili's party who unwisely attempted to enter the building. Fists flew, noses bled and Western diplomats witnessed the degradation of Georgian politics firsthand.

The GD isn't satisfied with a majority of seats in parliament. They want them all, and the United National Movement minority party is fighting tooth and nail to hold on to the remaining seats it has. Since October, 11 of their sitting party members have jumped ship, which Saakashvili asserts was the dirty work of Ivanishvili. Vano Merabishvili, the leader of the United National Movement and former prime minister, has said their major goal is to "seize the initiative" and weaken the new government, even by organizing protests.

Welcome to Georgian politics.

We had been waiting for Friday to happen since Oct. 1, and it's far from over. Instead of discussing how such a fiasco can be prevented again, the two sides are pointing their fingers at each other, screaming, "You're destroying the country!" This new era of democracy is beginning to look like 1991's new era. And we all know how that ended.

Paul Rimple is a journalist in Tbilisi.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/02/10/georgia-dream-makes-power-sharing-difficult-a21393